



THE  
COLLECTED  
POEMS  
OF  
W. B.  
YEATS

EDITED BY RICHARD J. FINNERAN  
REVISED SECOND EDITION





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W. B. YEATS

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SCRIBNER PAPERBACK POETRY



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# P R E F A C E

## *to the Second Edition*

This edition supersedes *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition*, first published in 1989. Some minor corrections and additions were made in reprintings of that edition, but the present text offers more substantial changes. Most of these derive from James Pethica's study of the manuscripts of [*Last Poems*] for his forthcoming edition in the Cornell Yeats series. In particular, his discovery that a holograph version of the final stanza of part III of "Three Songs to the One Burden" almost surely postdates the final corrected typescript has resulted in several changes to the text. I have also accepted his arguments that the revisions to "John Kinsella's Lament for Mrs. Mary Moore" for a projected new series of *Broadsides* were not intended for the text of the poem to be included in [*Last Poems*] and that certain typescripts of "Cuchulain Comforted" and "The Black Tower" are probably posthumous.

An attentive reader of the Cornell Yeats edition will notice several places where the archival material offers alternative readings to those provided here, such as the possibility that "The soul's perfection is from peace;" should be added between lines 55-56 of "Under Ben Bulben." As I argued in *Editing Yeats's Poems: A Reconsideration* (1990) and my chapter in *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, ed. George Bornstein (1991), the notion of a "final" or "definitive" text of Yeats's poems is fundamentally illusory. This is especially true for those works which were not published in his lifetime. Among the many problems one might

mention is the difficulty of distinguishing between the hands of Yeats and of his wife, as well as our further uncertainty about the date and authority of revisions in his wife's hand. An electronic edition of the poetry in progress, edited by myself and several others, will be able to present both the alternative texts and the manuscript materials from which they derive.

I am of course indebted to James Pethica for numerous discussions about the textual problems in [*Last Poems*]; and to my collaborators on the electronic edition, particularly George Bornstein and William H. O'Donnell, for continued advice. I am also grateful to Scott Moyers of Scribner for his care in seeing this edition through the press.

*Mandeville, Louisiana*  
*January 29, 1996*

R.J.F.

## PREFACE

This edition is essentially a reconstruction of the expanded version of *The Collected Poems* (1933) which as of June 22, 1937, Yeats had planned to publish "in about two years' time." To the 1933 volume have been added the poems published in the section "Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems" in *A Full Moon in March*, 1935 (except "Three Songs to the Same Tune," later revised as "Three Marching Songs"); the poems from *New Poems*, 1938; and the poems included on a manuscript table of contents for a volume of poetry and plays Yeats had projected during the last few weeks of his life (published posthumously as *Last Poems and Two Plays*, 1939). The notes from the *Collected Poems* and the music from *New Poems* have been included as appendices. The only comment from the Preface to *A Full Moon in March* relevant to the poetry is quoted in the editor's Explanatory Notes. *Last Poems and Two Plays* did not offer any ancillary materials.

The texts in this volume are taken from the revised edition of *The Poems* (1989) in the Macmillan Collected Works of W. B. Yeats (Volume I). The textual policy for both editions has been to present the final versions of the poems authorized by Yeats. The copy-texts therefore consist of printed editions (some with corrections by Yeats), manuscripts, typescripts, and corrected proofs. Emendation has been held to a minimum. For example, there has been virtually no attempt to regularize Yeats's unorthodox punctuation, nor has the spelling of Gaelic names been corrected or made uniform unless Yeats himself established a standard spelling (as with "Cuchulain" or "Oisín"). Readers interested in these matters will find a list of the copy-texts and a



tabular presentation of all emendations in *The Poems*, as well as a fuller discussion in the editor's *Editing Yeats's Poems: A Reconsideration* (1990).

The Explanatory Notes attempt to elucidate all *direct* allusions in the poems. Attention is directed to the headnote, which explains the principles of annotation.

Any project of this scope is of course the work not only of one individual but of various hands. I should first like to thank Anne Yeats and Michael B. Yeats, not only for authorizing me to undertake this project but also for giving me free access to their collections of Yeats's books and manuscripts, without which its completion would have been quite impossible.

Of the many scholars who contributed to this edition, my greatest debt by far is to Brendan O Hehir, who not only provided me with much of the information on Irish materials in the Notes but also saved me from numerous errors. His combination of precise knowledge and generosity in sharing it is a rare virtue. I should also like to give special thanks to George Bornstein, whose advice on many matters I have valued, as I have his friendship. And I thank John Glusman and Robert Kimzey of Macmillan, New York, for their support of this project and their patience, and John Woodside for his careful attention to the proofs.

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For the financial support which enabled me to undertake my editing of Yeats's poems, I am most grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies; the American Philosophical Society; the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery; the Graduate Council on Research, Tulane University; and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

I would like to dedicate this edition to Richard and Catherine, my constant joy.

*Mandeville, Louisiana*  
*September 21, 1988*

R.J.F.



# LYRICAL



Crossways

1889

*'The stars are threshed, and the souls are threshed from their husks.'*

**WILLIAM BLAKE**

**TO  
A. E.**





## Crossways

### I *The Song of the Happy Shepherd*

The woods of Arcady are dead,  
And over is their antique joy;  
Of old the world on dreaming fed;  
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;  
Yet still she turns her restless head:  
But O, sick children of the world,  
Of all the many changing things  
In dreary dancing past us whirled,  
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,  
Words alone are certain good.

10

Where are now the warring kings,  
Word be-mockers? – By the Rood  
Where are now the warring kings?  
An idle word is now their glory,  
By the stammering schoolboy said,  
Reading some entangled story:  
The kings of the old time are dead;  
The wandering earth herself may be  
Only a sudden flaming word,  
In clanging space a moment heard,  
Troubling the endless reverie.

20

Then nowise worship dusty deeds,  
Nor seek, for this is also sooth,  
To hunger fiercely after truth,  
Lest all thy toiling only breeds  
New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth  
Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,  
No learning from the starry men,

Who follow with the optic glass  
 The whirling ways of stars that pass – 30  
 Seek, then, for this is also sooth,  
 No word of theirs – the cold star-bane  
 Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,  
 And dead is all their human truth.  
 Go gather by the humming sea  
 Some twisted, echo-harboured shell,  
 And to its lips thy story tell,  
 And they thy comforters will be,  
 Rewarding in melodious guile  
 Thy fretful words a little while, 40  
 Till they shall singing fade in ruth  
 And die a pearly brotherhood;  
 For words alone are certain good:  
 Sing, then, for this is also sooth.

I must be gone: there is a grave  
 Where daffodil and lily wave,  
 And I would please the hapless faun,  
 Buried under the sleepy ground,  
 With mirthful songs before the dawn.  
 His shouting days with mirth were crowned; 50  
 And still I dream he treads the lawn,  
 Walking ghostly in the dew,  
 Pierced by my glad singing through,  
 My songs of old earth's dreamy youth:  
 But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!  
 For fair are poppies on the brow:  
 Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.

## 2 *The Sad Shepherd*

There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,  
 And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,  
 Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming  
 And humming sands, where windy surges wend:

And he called loudly to the stars to bend  
 From their pale thrones and comfort him, but they  
 Among themselves laugh on and sing away:  
 And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend  
 Cried out, *Dim sea, hear my most piteous story!*  
 The sea swept on and cried her old cry still, 10  
 Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill.  
 He fled the persecution of her glory  
 And, in a far-off, gentle valley stopping,  
 Cried all his story to the dewdrops glistening.  
 But naught they heard, for they are always listening,  
 The dewdrops, for the sound of their own dropping.  
 And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend  
 Sought once again the shore, and found a shell,  
 And thought, *I will my heavy story tell*  
*Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send* 20  
*Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;*  
*And my own tale again for me shall sing,*  
*And my own whispering words be comforting,*  
*And lo! my ancient burden may depart.*  
 Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;  
 But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone  
 Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan  
 Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.

### 3 *The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes*

'What do you make so fair and bright?'

'I make the cloak of Sorrow:  
 O lovely to see in all men's sight  
 Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,  
 In all men's sight.'

'What do you build with sails for flight?'

'I build a boat for Sorrow:  
 O swift on the seas all day and night

Saileth the rover Sorrow,  
All day and night.'

10

'What do you weave with wool so white?'

'I weave the shoes of Sorrow:  
Soundless shall be the footfall light  
In all men's ears of Sorrow,  
Sudden and light.'

#### 4 *Anashuya and Vijaya*

*A little Indian temple in the Golden Age. Around it a garden; around that the forest. Anashuya, the young priestess, kneeling within the temple.*

*Anashuya.* Send peace on all the lands and flickering  
corn. —

O, may tranquillity walk by his elbow  
When wandering in the forest, if he love  
No other. — Hear, and may the indolent flocks  
Be plentiful. — And if he love another,  
May panthers end him. — Hear, and load our king  
With wisdom hour by hour. — May we two stand,  
When we are dead, beyond the setting suns,  
A little from the other shades apart,  
With mingling hair, and play upon one lute.

10

*Vijaya* [*entering and throwing a lily at her*]. Hail! hail, my  
Anashuya.

*Anashuya.* No: be still.  
I, priestess of this temple, offer up  
Prayers for the land.

*Vijaya.* I will wait here, Amrita.

*Anashuya.* By mighty Brahma's ever-rustling robe,  
Who is Amrita? Sorrow of all sorrows!  
Another fills your mind.

Vijaya. My mother's name.

Anashuya [*sings, coming out of the temple*].

*A sad, sad thought went by me slowly:*

*Sigh, O you little stars! O sigh and shake your blue apparel!*

*The sad, sad thought has gone from me now wholly:*

*Sing, O you little stars! O sing and raise your rapturous* 20  
*carol*

*To mighty Brahma, he who made you many as the sands,  
And laid you on the gates of evening with his quiet hands.*

*[Sits down on the steps of the temple.]*

Vijaya, I have brought my evening rice;

The sun has laid his chin on the grey wood,

Weary, with all his poppies gathered round him.

Vijaya. The hour when Kama, full of sleepy laughter,  
Rises, and showers abroad his fragrant arrows,  
Piercing the twilight with their murmuring barbs.

Anashuya. See how the sacred old flamingoes come,

Painting with shadow all the marble steps: 30

Aged and wise, they seek their wonted perches

Within the temple, devious walking, made

To wander by their melancholy minds.

Yon tall one eyes my supper; chase him away,

Far, far away. I named him after you.

He is a famous fisher; hour by hour

He ruffles with his bill the minnowed streams.

Ah! there he snaps my rice. I told you so.

Now cuff him off. He's off! A kiss for you,

Because you saved my rice. Have you no thanks? 40

Vijaya [*sings*]. *Sing you of her, O first few stars,*

*Whom Brahma, touching with his finger, praises, for you hold*

*The van of wandering quiet; ere you be too calm and old,*

*Sing, turning in your cars,*

*Sing, till you raise your hands and sigh, and from your  
car-heads peer,*

*With all your whirling hair, and drop many an azure tear.*

Anashuya. What know the pilots of the stars of tears?

*Vijaya.* Their faces are all worn, and in their eyes  
 Flashes the fire of sadness, for they see  
 The icicles that famish all the North, 50  
 Where men lie frozen in the glimmering snow;  
 And in the flaming forests cower the lion  
 And lioness, with all their whimpering cubs;  
 And, ever pacing on the verge of things,  
 The phantom, Beauty, in a mist of tears;  
 While we alone have round us woven woods,  
 And feel the softness of each other's hand,  
 Amrita, while –

*Anashuya* [*going away from him*].

Ah me! you love another,

[*Bursting into tears.*]

And may some sudden dreadful ill befall her!

*Vijaya.* I loved another; now I love no other. 60

Among the mouldering of ancient woods  
 You live, and on the village border she,  
 With her old father the blind wood-cutter;  
 I saw her standing in her door but now.

*Anashuya.* *Vijaya,* swear to love her never more.

*Vijaya.* Ay, ay.

*Anashuya.* Swear by the parents of the gods,  
 Dread oath, who dwell on sacred Himalay,  
 On the far Golden Peak; enormous shapes,  
 Who still were old when the great sea was young;  
 On their vast faces mystery and dreams; 70  
 Their hair along the mountains rolled and filled  
 From year to year by the unnumbered nests  
 Of aweless birds, and round their stirless feet  
 The joyous flocks of deer and antelope,  
 Who never hear the unforgiving hound.  
 Swear!

*Vijaya.* By the parents of the gods, I swear.

*Anashuya [sings]. I have forgiven, O new star!*

*Maybe you have not heard of us, you have come forth so newly,  
You hunter of the fields afar!*

*Ah, you will know my loved one by his hunter's arrows truly, 80  
Shoot on him shafts of quietness, that he may ever keep  
A lonely laughter, and may kiss his hands to me in sleep.*

Farewell, Vijaya. Nay, no word, no word;  
I, priestess of this temple, offer up  
Prayers for the land.

[Vijaya goes.]

O Brahma, guard in sleep

The merry lambs and the complacent kine,  
The flies below the leaves, and the young mice  
In the tree roots, and all the sacred flocks  
Of red flamingoes; and my love, Vijaya;  
And may no restless fay with fidget finger 90  
Trouble his sleeping: give him dreams of me.

## 5 *The Indian upon God*

I passed along the water's edge below the humid trees,  
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round my knees,  
My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs; and saw the moorfowl pace  
All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them cease to chase  
Each other round in circles, and heard the eldest speak:  
*Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak  
Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.*

*The rains are from His dripping wing, the moonbeams from His eye.*

I passed a little further on and heard a lotus talk:

*Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk, 10  
For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide  
Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.*

A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised his eyes  
Brimful of starlight, and he said: *The Stamper of the Skies,  
He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray, could He  
Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like me?*



I passed a little further on and heard a peacock say:  
*Who made the grass and made the worms and made my feathers gay,  
 He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night  
 His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light.* 20

## 6 *The Indian to his Love*

The island dreams under the dawn  
 And great boughs drop tranquillity;  
 The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,  
 A parrot sways upon a tree,  
 Raging at his own image in the enamelled sea.

Here we will moor our lonely ship  
 And wander ever with woven hands,  
 Murmuring softly lip to lip,  
 Along the grass, along the sands,  
 Murmuring how far away are the unquiet lands: 10

How we alone of mortals are  
 Hid under quiet boughs apart,  
 While our love grows an Indian star,  
 A meteor of the burning heart,  
 One with the tide that gleams, the wings that gleam  
 and dart,

The heavy boughs, the burnished dove  
 That moans and sighs a hundred days:  
 How when we die our shades will rove,  
 When eve has hushed the feathered ways,  
 With vapoury footsole by the water's drowsy blaze. 20

## 7 *The Falling of the Leaves*

Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,  
 And over the mice in the barley sheaves;  
 Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,  
 And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,  
 And weary and worn are our sad souls now;  
 Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,  
 With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

## 8 *Ephemera*

'Your eyes that once were never weary of mine  
 Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,  
 Because our love is waning.'

And then she:

'Although our love is waning, let us stand  
 By the lone border of the lake once more,  
 Together in that hour of gentleness  
 When the poor tired child, Passion, falls asleep:  
 How far away the stars seem, and how far  
 Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!'

Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,  
 While slowly he whose hand held hers replied:  
 'Passion has often worn our wandering hearts.'

10

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves  
 Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once  
 A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;  
 Autumn was over him: and now they stood  
 On the lone border of the lake once more:  
 Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves  
 Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,  
 In bosom and hair.

20

'Ah, do not mourn,' he said,  
 'That we are tired, for other loves await us;  
 Hate on and love through unrepining hours.  
 Before us lies eternity; our souls  
 Are love, and a continual farewell.'

## 9 *The Madness of King Goll*

I sat on cushioned otter-skin:  
 My word was law from Ith to Emain,  
 And shook at Invar Amargin  
 The hearts of the world-troubling seamen,  
 And drove tumult and war away  
 From girl and boy and man and beast;  
 The fields grew fatter day by day,  
 The wild fowl of the air increased;  
 And every ancient Ollave said,  
 While he bent down his fading head, 10  
 'He drives away the Northern cold.'  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech  
 leaves old.*

I sat and mused and drank sweet wine;  
 A herdsman came from inland valleys,  
 Crying, the pirates drove his swine  
 To fill their dark-beaked hollow galleys.  
 I called my battle-breaking men  
 And my loud brazen battle-cars  
 From rolling vale and rivery glen;  
 And under the blinking of the stars 20  
 Fell on the pirates by the deep,  
 And hurled them in the gulph of sleep:  
 These hands won many a torque of gold.  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech  
 leaves old.*

But slowly, as I shouting slew  
 And trampled in the bubbling mire,  
 In my most secret spirit grew  
 A whirling and a wandering fire:  
 I stood: keen stars above me shone,  
 Around me shone keen eyes of men: 30  
 I laughed aloud and hurried on

By rocky shore and rushy fen;  
 I laughed because birds fluttered by,  
 And starlight gleamed, and clouds flew high,  
 And rushes waved and waters rolled.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech  
 leaves old.*

And now I wander in the woods  
 When summer gluts the golden bees,  
 Or in autumnal solitudes  
 Arise the leopard-coloured trees; 40  
 Or when along the wintry strands  
 The cormorants shiver on their rocks;  
 I wander on, and wave my hands,  
 And sing, and shake my heavy locks.  
 The grey wolf knows me; by one ear  
 I lead along the woodland deer;  
 The hares run by me growing bold.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech  
 leaves old.*

I came upon a little town  
 That slumbered in the harvest moon, 50  
 And passed a-tiptoe up and down,  
 Murmuring, to a fitful tune,  
 How I have followed, night and day,  
 A tramping of tremendous feet,  
 And saw where this old tympan lay  
 Deserted on a doorway seat,  
 And bore it to the woods with me;  
 Of some inhuman misery  
 Our married voices wildly trolled.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the  
 beech leaves old.* 60

I sang how, when day's toil is done,  
 Orchil shakes out her long dark hair  
 That hides away the dying sun  
 And sheds faint odours through the air:

When my hand passed from wire to wire  
 It quenched, with sound like falling dew,  
 The whirling and the wandering fire;  
 But lift a mournful ulalu,  
 For the kind wires are torn and still,  
 And I must wander wood and hill 70  
 Through summer's heat and winter's cold.  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech  
 leaves old.*

## 10 *The Stolen Child*

Where dips the rocky highland  
 Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
 There lies a leafy island  
 Where flapping herons wake  
 The drowsy water-rats;  
 There we've hid our faery vats,  
 Full of berries  
 And of reddest stolen cherries.  
*Come away, O human child!*  
*To the waters and the wild 10*  
*With a faery, hand in hand,*  
*For the world's more full of weeping than you can  
 understand.*

Where the wave of moonlight glosses  
 The dim grey sands with light,  
 Far off by furthest Rosses  
 We foot it all the night,  
 Weaving olden dances,  
 Mingling hands and mingling glances  
 Till the moon has taken flight;  
 To and fro we leap 20  
 And chase the frothy bubbles,  
 While the world is full of troubles  
 And is anxious in its sleep.

*Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can  
understand.*

Where the wandering water gushes  
From the hills above Glen-Car,  
In pools among the rushes 30  
That scarce could bathe a star,  
We seek for slumbering trout  
And whispering in their ears  
Give them unquiet dreams;  
Leaning softly out  
From ferns that drop their tears  
Over the young streams.

*Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand, 40  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can  
understand.*

Away with us he's going,  
The solemn-eyed:  
He'll hear no more the lowing  
Of the calves on the warm hillside  
Or the kettle on the hob  
Sing peace into his breast,  
Or see the brown mice bob  
Round and round the oatmeal-chest. 50  
*For he comes, the human child,  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
From a world more full of weeping than he can  
understand.*

## 11 *To an Isle in the Water*

Shy one, shy one,  
 Shy one of my heart,  
 She moves in the firelight  
 Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,  
 And lays them in a row.  
 To an isle in the water  
 With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,  
 And lights the curtained room,  
 Shy in the doorway  
 And shy in the gloom;

10

And shy as a rabbit,  
 Helpful and shy.  
 To an isle in the water  
 With her would I fly.

## 12 *Down by the Salley Gardens*

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;  
 She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.  
 She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;  
 But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,  
 And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.  
 She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;  
 But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

### 13 *The Meditation of the Old Fisherman*

You waves, though you dance by my feet like children at  
 play,  
 Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and  
 you dart;  
 In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves  
 were more gay,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.*

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;  
 My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart  
 That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.*

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when his  
 oar  
 Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and 10  
 apart,  
 Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.*

### 14 *The Ballad of Father O'Hart*

Good Father John O'Hart  
 In penal days rode out  
 To a shoneen who had free lands  
 And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands;  
 Sleiveens were all his race;  
 And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,  
 And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,  
 And Father John went down;



And he wore small holes in his shoes,  
And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,  
Whom the devils have by the hair,  
From the wives, and the cats, and the children,  
To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages  
As he went up and down;  
And he said with a smile, 'Have peace now';  
And he went his way with a frown.

20

But if when anyone died  
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,  
He bade them give over their keening;  
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John,  
When, weeping score by score,  
People came into Coloony;  
For he'd died at ninety-four.

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

30

The young birds and old birds  
Came flying, heavy and sad;  
Keening in from Tiraragh,  
Keening from Ballinafad;

Keening from Inishmurray,  
Nor stayed for bite or sup;  
This way were all reproved  
Who dig old customs up.

40

15 *The Ballad of Moll Magee*

Come round me, little childer;  
 There, don't fling stones at me  
 Because I mutter as I go;  
 But pity Moll Magee.

My man was a poor fisher  
 With shore lines in the say;  
 My work was saltin' herrings  
 The whole of the long day.

And sometimes from the saltin' shed  
 I scarce could drag my feet, 10  
 Under the blessed moonlight,  
 Along the pebbly street.

I'd always been but weakly,  
 And my baby was just born;  
 A neighbour minded her by day,  
 I minded her till morn.

I lay upon my baby;  
 Ye little childer dear,  
 I looked on my cold baby  
 When the morn grew frosty and clear. 20

A weary woman sleeps so hard!  
 My man grew red and pale,  
 And gave me money, and bade me go  
 To my own place, Kinsale.

He drove me out and shut the door,  
 And gave his curse to me;  
 I went away in silence,  
 No neighbour could I see.

The windows and the doors were shut,  
 One star shone faint and green, 30

The little straws were turnin' round  
Across the bare boreen.

I went away in silence:  
Beyond old Martin's byre  
I saw a kindly neighbour  
Blowin' her mornin' fire.

She drew from me my story –  
My money's all used up,  
And still, with pityin', scornin' eye,  
She gives me bite and sup. 40

She says my man will surely come,  
And fetch me home agin;  
But always, as I'm movin' round,  
Without doors or within,

Pilin' the wood or pilin' the turf,  
Or goin' to the well,  
I'm thinkin' of my baby  
And keenin' to mysel'.

And sometimes I am sure she knows  
When, openin' wide His door, 50  
God lights the stars, His candles,  
And looks upon the poor.

So now, ye little childer,  
Ye won't fling stones at me;  
But gather with your shinin' looks  
And pity Moll Magee.

## 16 *The Ballad of the Foxhunter*

'Lay me in a cushioned chair;  
Carry me, ye four,  
With cushions here and cushions there,  
To see the world once more.

'To stable and to kennel go;  
 Bring what is there to bring;  
 Lead my Lollard to and fro,  
 Or gently in a ring.

'Put the chair upon the grass:  
 Bring Rody and his hounds,  
 That I may contented pass  
 From these earthly bounds.'

10

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,  
 His old eyes cloud with dreams;  
 The sun upon all things that grow  
 Falls in sleepy streams.

Brown Lollard treads upon the lawn,  
 And to the armchair goes,  
 And now the old man's dreams are gone,  
 He smooths the long brown nose.

20

And now moves many a pleasant tongue  
 Upon his wasted hands,  
 For leading aged hounds and young  
 The huntsman near him stands.

'Huntsman Rody, blow the horn,  
 Make the hills reply.'  
 The huntsman loosens on the morn  
 A gay wandering cry.

Fire is in the old man's eyes,  
 His fingers move and sway,  
 And when the wandering music dies  
 They hear him feebly say,

30

'Huntsman Rody, blow the horn,  
 Make the hills reply.'  
 'I cannot blow upon my horn,  
 I can but weep and sigh.'

Servants round his cushioned place  
 Are with new sorrow wrung;

Hounds are gazing on his face,  
Aged hounds and young.

40

One blind hound only lies apart  
On the sun-smitten grass;  
He holds deep commune with his heart:  
The moments pass and pass;

The blind hound with a mournful din  
Lifts slow his wintry head;  
The servants bear the body in;  
The hounds wail for the dead.

The Rose  
1893

*'Sero te amavi, Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova! Sero te amavi.'*

**S. AUGUSTINE**

TO  
LIONEL JOHNSON





## The Rose

### 17 *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time*

*Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!  
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:  
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;  
The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,  
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;  
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old  
In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,  
Sing in their high and lonely melody.  
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,  
I find under the boughs of love and hate,  
In all poor foolish things that live a day,  
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.*

10

*Come near, come near, come near – Ah, leave me still  
A little space for the rose-breath to fill!  
Lest I no more hear common things that crave;  
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,  
The field-mouse running by me in the grass,  
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;  
But seek alone to hear the strange things said  
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,  
And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.  
Come near; I would, before my time to go,  
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:  
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.*

20

## 18 *Fergus and the Druid*

*Fergus.* This whole day have I followed in the rocks,  
 And you have changed and flowed from shape to  
 shape,  
 First as a raven on whose ancient wings  
 Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed  
 A weasel moving on from stone to stone,  
 And now at last you wear a human shape,  
 A thin grey man half lost in gathering night.

*Druid.* What would you, king of the proud Red Branch  
 kings?

*Fergus.* This would I say, most wise of living souls:  
 Young subtle Conchubar sat close by me 10  
 When I gave judgment, and his words were wise,  
 And what to me was burden without end,  
 To him seemed easy, so I laid the crown  
 Upon his head to cast away my sorrow.

*Druid.* What would you, king of the proud Red Branch  
 kings?

*Fergus.* A king and proud! and that is my despair.  
 I feast amid my people on the hill,  
 And pace the woods, and drive my chariot-wheels  
 In the white border of the murmuring sea;  
 And still I feel the crown upon my head. 20

*Druid.* What would you, Fergus?

*Fergus.* Be no more a king  
 But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

*Druid.* Look on my thin grey hair and hollow cheeks  
 And on these hands that may not lift the sword,  
 This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.  
 No woman's loved me, no man sought my help.

*Fergus.* A king is but a foolish labourer  
Who wastes his blood to be another's dream.

*Druid.* Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams;  
Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round. 30

*Fergus.* I see my life go drifting like a river  
From change to change; I have been many things –  
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light  
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,  
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,  
A king sitting upon a chair of gold –  
And all these things were wonderful and great;  
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all.  
Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow  
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured thing! 40

## 19 *Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea*

A man came slowly from the setting sun,  
To Emer, raddling raiment in her dun,  
And said, 'I am that swineherd whom you bid  
Go watch the road between the wood and tide,  
But now I have no need to watch it more.'

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,  
And raising arms all raddled with the dye,  
Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

That swineherd stared upon her face and said,  
'No man alive, no man among the dead, 10  
Has won the gold his cars of battle bring.'

'But if your master comes home triumphing  
Why must you blench and shake from foot to crown?'

Thereon he shook the more and cast him down  
Upon the web-heaped floor, and cried his word:  
'With him is one sweet-throated like a bird.'

'You dare me to my face,' and thereupon  
 She smote with raddled fist, and where her son  
 Herded the cattle came with stumbling feet,  
 And cried with angry voice, 'It is not meet  
 To idle life away, a common herd.'

20

'I have long waited, mother, for that word:  
 But wherefore now?'

'There is a man to die;  
 You have the heaviest arm under the sky.'

'Whether under its daylight or its stars  
 My father stands amid his battle-cars.'

'But you have grown to be the taller man.'

'Yet somewhere under starlight or the sun  
 My father stands.'

'Aged, worn out with wars  
 On foot, on horseback or in battle-cars.'

30

'I only ask what way my journey lies,  
 For He who made you bitter made you wise.'

'The Red Branch camp in a great company  
 Between wood's rim and the horses of the sea.  
 Go there, and light a camp-fire at wood's rim;  
 But tell your name and lineage to him  
 Whose blade compels, and wait till they have found  
 Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.'

Among those feasting men Cuchulain dwelt,  
 And his young sweetheart close beside him knelt,  
 Stared on the mournful wonder of his eyes,  
 Even as Spring upon the ancient skies,  
 And pondered on the glory of his days;  
 And all around the harp-string told his praise,  
 And Conchubar, the Red Branch king of kings,  
 With his own fingers touched the brazen strings.

40

At last Cuchulain spake, 'Some man has made  
 His evening fire amid the leafy shade.  
 I have often heard him singing to and fro,  
 I have often heard the sweet sound of his bow.  
 Seek out what man he is.'

50

One went and came.  
 'He bade me let all know he gives his name  
 At the sword-point, and waits till we have found  
 Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.'

Cuchulain cried, 'I am the only man  
 Of all this host so bound from childhood on.'

After short fighting in the leafy shade,  
 He spake to the young man, 'Is there no maid  
 Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you round,  
 Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,  
 That you have come and dared me to my face?'

60

'The dooms of men are in God's hidden place.'  
 'Your head a while seemed like a woman's head  
 That I loved once.'

Again the fighting sped,  
 But now the war-rage in Cuchulain woke,  
 And through that new blade's guard the old blade  
 broke,  
 And pierced him.

'Speak before your breath is done.'

'Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain's son.'

'I put you from your pain. I can no more.'

While day its burden on to evening bore,  
 With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed;  
 Then Conchubar sent that sweet-throated maid,  
 And she, to win him, his grey hair caressed;  
 In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.  
 Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,  
 Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,

70

Spake thus: 'Cuchulain will dwell there and brood  
 For three days more in dreadful quietude,  
 And then arise, and raving slay us all.  
 Chaunt in his ear delusions magical,  
 That he may fight the horses of the sea.'  
 The Druids took them to their mystery,  
 And chaunted for three days.

80

Cuchulain stirred,  
 Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard  
 The cars of battle and his own name cried;  
 And fought with the invulnerable tide.

## 20 *The Rose of the World*

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?  
 For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,  
 Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
 Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
 And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:  
 Amid men's souls, that waver and give place  
 Like the pale waters in their wintry race,  
 Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
 Lives on this lonely face.

10

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:  
 Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
 Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;  
 He made the world to be a grassy road  
 Before her wandering feet.

## 21 *The Rose of Peace*

If Michael, leader of God's host  
 When Heaven and Hell are met,

Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post  
He would his deeds forget.

Brooding no more upon God's wars  
In his divine homestead,  
He would go weave out of the stars  
A chaplet for your head.

And all folk seeing him bow down,  
And white stars tell your praise,  
Would come at last to God's great town,  
Led on by gentle ways;

10

And God would bid His warfare cease,  
Saying all things were well;  
And softly make a rosy peace,  
A peace of Heaven with Hell.

## 22 *The Rose of Battle*

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!  
The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled  
Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,  
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care;  
While hushed from fear, or loud with hope, a band  
With blown, spray-dabbled hair gather at hand.

*Turn if you may from battles never done,  
I call, as they go by me one by one,  
Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,  
For him who hears love sing and never cease,  
Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:  
But gather all for whom no love hath made  
A woven silence, or but came to cast  
A song into the air, and singing passed  
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you  
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew,  
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,  
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,*

10



*Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips,  
 And wage God's battles in the long grey ships. 20  
 The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,  
 To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;  
 God's bell has claimed them by the little cry  
 Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.*

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!  
 You, too, have come where the dim tides are hurled  
 Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring  
 The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing.  
 Beauty grown sad with its eternity  
 Made you of us, and of the dim grey sea. 30  
 Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and wait,  
 For God has bid them share an equal fate;  
 And when at last, defeated in His wars,  
 They have gone down under the same white stars,  
 We shall no longer hear the little cry  
 Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

## 23 *A Faery Song*

*Sung by the people of Faery over Diarmuid and Grania, in their bridal  
 sleep under a Cromlech.*

We who are old, old and gay,  
 O so old!  
 Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
 If all were told:

Give to these children, new from the world,  
 Silence and love;  
 And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,  
 And the stars above:

Give to these children, new from the world,  
 Rest far from men.

Is anything better, anything better?  
Tell us it then:

Us who are old, old and gay,  
O so old!  
Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
If all were told.

## 24 *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping  
slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket  
sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore; 10  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

## 25 *A Cradle Song*

The angels are stooping  
Above your bed;  
They weary of trooping  
With the whimpering dead.

God's laughing in Heaven  
To see you so good;  
The Sailing Seven  
Are gay with His mood.

I sigh that kiss you,  
 For I must own  
 That I shall miss you  
 When you have grown.

10

## 26 *The Pity of Love*

A pity beyond all telling  
 Is hid in the heart of love:  
 The folk who are buying and selling,  
 The clouds on their journey above,  
 The cold wet winds ever blowing,  
 And the shadowy hazel grove  
 Where mouse-grey waters are flowing,  
 Threaten the head that I love.

## 27 *The Sorrow of Love*

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
 The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
 And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
 Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
 And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
 Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
 And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
 A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
 And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
 Could but compose man's image and his cry.

10

28 *When You are Old*

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
 And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
 And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
 Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
 And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
 But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
 And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
 Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
 And paced upon the mountains overhead  
 And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

10

29 *The White Birds*

I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam  
 of the sea!

We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee;  
 And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the rim  
 of the sky,

Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may not  
 die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily  
 and rose;

Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor  
 that goes,

Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall  
 of the dew:

For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering  
 foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan  
 shore,  
 Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come 10  
 near us no more;  
 Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the flames would  
 we be,  
 Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam  
 of the sea!

### 30 *A Dream of Death*

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place  
 Near no accustomed hand;  
 And they had nailed the boards above her face,  
 The peasants of that land,  
 Wondering to lay her in that solitude,  
 And raised above her mound  
 A cross they had made out of two bits of wood,  
 And planted cypress round;  
 And left her to the indifferent stars above  
 Until I carved these words: 10  
*She was more beautiful than thy first love,  
 But now lies under boards.*

### 31 *The Countess Cathleen in Paradise*

All the heavy days are over;  
 Leave the body's coloured pride  
 Underneath the grass and clover,  
 With the feet laid side by side.  
 Bathed in flaming founts of duty  
 She'll not ask a haughty dress;  
 Carry all that mournful beauty  
 To the scented oaken press.

Did the kiss of Mother Mary  
 Put that music in her face?  
 Yet she goes with footstep wary,  
 Full of earth's old timid grace.

10

'Mong the feet of angels seven  
 What a dancer, glimmering!  
 All the heavens bow down to Heaven,  
 Flame to flame and wing to wing.

### 32 *Who goes with Fergus?*

Who will go drive with Fergus now,  
 And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,  
 And dance upon the level shore?  
 Young man, lift up your russet brow,  
 And lift your tender eyelids, maid,  
 And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood  
 Upon love's bitter mystery;  
 For Fergus rules the brazen cars,  
 And rules the shadows of the wood,  
 And the white breast of the dim sea  
 And all dishevelled wandering stars.

10

### 33 *The Man who dreamed of Faeryland*

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;  
 His heart hung all upon a silken dress,  
 And he had known at last some tenderness,  
 Before earth took him to her stony care;  
 But when a man poured fish into a pile,  
 It seemed they raised their little silver heads,  
 And sang what gold morning or evening sheds  
 Upon a woven world-forgotten isle

Where people love beside the ravelled seas;  
 That Time can never mar a lover's vows 10  
 Under that woven changeless roof of boughs:  
 The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lissadell;  
 His mind ran all on money cares and fears,  
 And he had known at last some prudent years  
 Before they heaped his grave under the hill;  
 But while he passed before a plashy place,  
 A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth  
 Sang that somewhere to north or west or south 20  
 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race  
 Under the golden or the silver skies;  
 That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot  
 It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit:  
 And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,  
 He mused upon his mockers: without fail  
 His sudden vengeance were a country tale,  
 When earthy night had drunk his body in;  
 But one small knot-grass growing by the pool  
 Sang where – unnecessary cruel voice – 30  
 Old silence bids its chosen race rejoice,  
 Whatever ravelled waters rise and fall  
 Or stormy silver fret the gold of day,  
 And midnight there enfold them like a fleece  
 And lover there by lover be at peace.  
 The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall;  
 And might have known at last unhaunted sleep  
 Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,  
 Now that the earth had taken man and all: 40  
 Did not the worms that spired about his bones  
 Proclaim with that unwearied, reedy cry  
 That God has laid His fingers on the sky,  
 That from those fingers glittering summer runs

Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.  
 Why should those lovers that no lovers miss  
 Dream, until God burn Nature with a kiss?  
 The man has found no comfort in the grave.

### 34 *The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists*

There was a green branch hung with many a bell  
 When her own people ruled this tragic Eire;  
 And from its murmuring greenness, calm of Faery,  
 A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,  
 And turned the farmer's memory from his cattle,  
 And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle:  
 And all grew friendly for a little while.

Ah, Exiles wandering over lands and seas,  
 And planning, plotting always that some morrow      10  
 May set a stone upon ancestral Sorrow!  
 I also bear a bell-branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tore and tossed  
 Until the sap of summer had grown weary!  
 I tore it from the barren boughs of Eire,  
 That country where a man can be so crossed;

Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed  
 That he's a loveless man: gay bells bring laughter  
 That shakes a mouldering cobweb from the rafter;  
 And yet the saddest chimes are best enjoyed.      20

Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories  
 Of half-forgotten innocent old places:  
 We and our bitterness have left no traces  
 On Munster grass and Connemara skies.



### 35 *The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner*

Although I shelter from the rain  
Under a broken tree,  
My chair was nearest to the fire  
In every company  
That talked of love or politics,  
Ere Time transfigured me.

Though lads are making pikes again  
For some conspiracy,  
And crazy rascals rage their fill  
At human tyranny;  
My contemplations are of Time  
That has transfigured me.

10

There's not a woman turns her face  
Upon a broken tree,  
And yet the beauties that I loved  
Are in my memory;  
I spit into the face of Time  
That has transfigured me.

### 36 *The Ballad of Father Gilligan*

The old priest Peter Gilligan  
Was weary night and day;  
For half his flock were in their beds,  
Or under green sods lay.

Once, while he nodded on a chair,  
At the moth-hour of eve,  
Another poor man sent for him,  
And he began to grieve.

'I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,  
For people die and die';  
And after cried he, 'God forgive!  
My body spake, not I!'

10

He knelt, and leaning on the chair  
He prayed and fell asleep;  
And the moth-hour went from the fields,  
And stars began to peep.

They slowly into millions grew,  
And leaves shook in the wind;  
And God covered the world with shade,  
And whispered to mankind.

20

Upon the time of sparrow-chirp  
When the moths came once more,  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
Stood upright on the floor.

'Mavrone, mavrone! the man has died  
While I slept on the chair';  
He roused his horse out of its sleep,  
And rode with little care.

He rode now as he never rode,  
By rocky lane and fen;  
The sick man's wife opened the door:  
'Father! you come again!'

30

'And is the poor man dead?' he cried.  
'He died an hour ago.'  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
In grief swayed to and fro.

'When you were gone, he turned and died  
As merry as a bird.'  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
He knelt him at that word.

40

'He Who hath made the night of stars  
 For souls who tire and bleed,  
 Sent one of His great angels down  
 To help me in my need.

'He Who is wrapped in purple robes,  
 With planets in His care,  
 Had pity on the least of things  
 Asleep upon a chair.'

### 37 *The Two Trees*

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,  
 The holy tree is growing there;  
 From joy the holy branches start,  
 And all the trembling flowers they bear.  
 The changing colours of its fruit  
 Have dowered the stars with merry light;  
 The surety of its hidden root  
 Has planted quiet in the night;  
 The shaking of its leafy head  
 Has given the waves their melody, 10  
 And made my lips and music wed,  
 Murmuring a wizard song for thee.  
 There the Loves a circle go,  
 The flaming circle of our days,  
 Gyring, spiring to and fro  
 In those great ignorant leafy ways;  
 Remembering all that shaken hair  
 And how the wingèd sandals dart,  
 Thine eyes grow full of tender care:  
 Beloved, gaze in thine own heart. 20

Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
 The demons, with their subtle guile,  
 Lift up before us when they pass,  
 Or only gaze a little while;  
 For there a fatal image grows

That the stormy night receives,  
 Roots half hidden under snows,  
 Broken boughs and blackened leaves.  
 For all things turn to barrenness  
 In the dim glass the demons hold, 30  
 The glass of outer weariness,  
 Made when God slept in times of old.  
 There, through the broken branches, go  
 The ravens of unresting thought;  
 Flying, crying, to and fro,  
 Cruel claw and hungry throat,  
 Or else they stand and sniff the wind,  
 And shake their ragged wings; alas!  
 Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:  
 Gaze no more in the bitter glass. 40

### 38 *To Some I have Talked with by the Fire*

While I wrought out these fitful Danaan rhymes,  
 My heart would brim with dreams about the times  
 When we bent down above the fading coals  
 And talked of the dark folk who live in souls  
 Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;  
 And of the wayward twilight companies  
 Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,  
 Because their blossoming dreams have never bent  
 Under the fruit of evil and of good:  
 And of the embattled flaming multitude 10  
 Who rise, wing above wing, flame above flame,  
 And, like a storm, cry the Ineffable Name,  
 And with the clashing of their sword-blades make  
 A rapturous music, till the morning break  
 And the white hush end all but the loud beat  
 Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet.

39 *To Ireland in the Coming Times*

*Know, that I would accounted be  
 True brother of a company  
 That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
 Ballad and story, rann and song;  
 Nor be I any less of them,  
 Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
 Of her, whose history began  
 Before God made the angelic clan,  
 Trails all about the written page.  
 When Time began to rant and rage* 10  
*The measure of her flying feet  
 Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;  
 And Time bade all his candles flare  
 To light a measure here and there;  
 And may the thoughts of Ireland brood  
 Upon a measured quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one  
 With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
 Because, to him who ponders well,  
 My rhymes more than their rhyming tell* 20  
*Of things discovered in the deep,  
 Where only body's laid asleep.  
 For the elemental creatures go  
 About my table to and fro,  
 That hurry from unmeasured mind  
 To rant and rage in flood and wind;  
 Yet he who treads in measured ways  
 May surely barter gaze for gaze.  
 Man ever journeys on with them  
 After the red-rose-bordered hem.* 30  
*Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,  
 A Druid land, a Druid tune!*

*While still I may, I write for you  
The love I lived, the dream I knew.  
From our birthday, until we die,  
Is but the winking of an eye;  
And we, our singing and our love,  
What measurer Time has lit above,  
And all benighted things that go  
About my table to and fro,  
Are passing on to where may be,  
In truth's consuming ecstasy,  
No place for love and dream at all;  
For God goes by with white footfall.  
I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you, in the dim coming times,  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*



**The Wind Among the Reeds**  
**1899**





# The Wind Among the Reeds

## 40 *The Hosting of the Sidhe*

The host is riding from Knocknarea  
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;  
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*  
*Empty your heart of its mortal dream.*  
*The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,*  
*Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,*  
*Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a gleam,*  
*Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;*  
*And if any gaze on our rushing band,*  
*We come between him and the deed of his hand,*  
*We come between him and the hope of his heart.*  
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,  
And where is there hope or deed as fair?  
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling *Away, come away.*

10

## 41 *The Everlasting Voices*

O sweet everlasting Voices, be still;  
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold  
And bid them wander obeying your will,  
Flame under flame, till Time be no more;  
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,  
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,  
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?  
O sweet everlasting Voices, be still.

42 *The Moods*

Time drops in decay,  
Like a candle burnt out,  
And the mountains and woods  
Have their day, have their day;  
What one in the rout  
Of the fire-born moods  
Has fallen away?

43 *The Lover tells of the  
Rose in his Heart*

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,  
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering  
cart,  
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry  
mould,  
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of  
my heart.  
The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be  
told;  
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,  
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a  
casket of gold  
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the  
deeps of my heart.

44 *The Host of the Air*

O'Driscoll drove with a song  
The wild duck and the drake

From the tall and the tufted reeds  
Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark  
At the coming of night-tide,  
And dreamed of the long dim hair  
Of Bridget his bride.

He heard while he sang and dreamed  
A piper piping away, 10  
And never was piping so sad,  
And never was piping so gay.

And he saw young men and young girls  
Who danced on a level place,  
And Bridget his bride among them,  
With a sad and a gay face.

The dancers crowded about him  
And many a sweet thing said,  
And a young man brought him red wine  
And a young girl white bread. 20

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve  
Away from the merry bands,  
To old men playing at cards  
With a twinkling of ancient hands.

The bread and the wine had a doom,  
For these were the host of the air;  
He sat and played in a dream  
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men  
And thought not of evil chance, 30  
Until one bore Bridget his bride  
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,  
The handsomest young man there,  
And his neck and his breast and his arms  
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

O'Driscoll scattered the cards  
 And out of his dream awoke:  
 Old men and young men and young girls  
 Were gone like a drifting smoke;

40

But he heard high up in the air  
 A piper piping away,  
 And never was piping so sad,  
 And never was piping so gay.

### 45 *The Fish*

Although you hide in the ebb and flow  
 Of the pale tide when the moon has set,  
 The people of coming days will know  
 About the casting out of my net,  
 And how you have leaped times out of mind  
 Over the little silver cords,  
 And think that you were hard and unkind,  
 And blame you with many bitter words.

### 46 *The Unappeasable Host*

The Danaan children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,  
 And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,  
 For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies,  
 With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold:  
 I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,  
 And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.  
 Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;  
 Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West;  
 Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat  
 The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering 10  
 ghost;  
 O heart the winds have shaken, the unappeasable host  
 Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's feet.

47 *Into the Twilight*

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,  
 Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;  
 Laugh, heart, again in the grey twilight,  
 Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,  
 Dew ever shining and twilight grey;  
 Though hope fall from you and love decay,  
 Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:  
 For there the mystical brotherhood  
 Of sun and moon and hollow and wood  
 And river and stream work out their will;

10

And God stands winding His lonely horn,  
 And time and the world are ever in flight;  
 And love is less kind than the grey twilight,  
 And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

48 *The Song of Wandering Aengus*

I went out to the hazel wood,  
 Because a fire was in my head,  
 And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
 And hooked a berry to a thread;  
 And when white moths were on the wing,  
 And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
 I dropped the berry in a stream  
 And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
 I went to blow the fire aflame,  
 But something rustled on the floor,  
 And some one called me by my name:

10

It had become a glimmering girl  
 With apple blossom in her hair  
 Who called me by my name and ran  
 And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
 Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
 I will find out where she has gone,  
 And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
 And walk among long dappled grass,  
 And pluck till time and times are done  
 The silver apples of the moon,  
 The golden apples of the sun.

20

## 49 *The Song of the Old Mother*

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow  
 Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;  
 And then I must scrub and bake and sweep  
 Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;  
 And the young lie long and dream in their bed  
 Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,  
 And their day goes over in idleness,  
 And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:  
 While I must work because I am old,  
 And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

10

## 50 *The Heart of the Woman*

O what to me the little room  
 That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;  
 He bade me out into the gloom,  
 And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother's care,  
 The house where I was safe and warm;

The shadowy blossom of my hair  
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,  
I am no more with life and death,  
My heart upon his warm heart lies,  
My breath is mixed into his breath.

10

## 51 *The Lover mourns for the Loss of Love*

Pale brows, still hands and dim hair,  
I had a beautiful friend  
And dreamed that the old despair  
Would end in love in the end:  
She looked in my heart one day  
And saw your image was there;  
She has gone weeping away.

## 52 *He mourns for the Change that has come upon Him and his Beloved, and longs for the End of the World*

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns?  
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;  
I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of Thorns,  
For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear  
Under my feet that they follow you night and day.  
A man with a hazel wand came without sound;  
He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;  
And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;  
And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.  
I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the 10  
West



And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky  
 And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.

### 53 *He bids his Beloved be at Peace*

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,  
 Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering white;  
 The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,  
 The East her hidden joy before the morning break,  
 The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,  
 The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire:  
 O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,  
 The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay:  
 Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat  
 Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,                    10  
 Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,  
 And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.

### 54 *He reproves the Curlew*

O curlew, cry no more in the air,  
 Or only to the water in the West;  
 Because your crying brings to my mind  
 Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair  
 That was shaken out over my breast:  
 There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

### 55 *He remembers forgotten Beauty*

When my arms wrap you round I press  
 My heart upon the loveliness  
 That has long faded from the world;  
 The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled  
 In shadowy pools, when armies fled;  
 The love-tales wrought with silken thread

By dreaming ladies upon cloth  
 That has made fat the murderous moth;  
 The roses that of old time were  
 Woven by ladies in their hair, 10  
 The dew-cold lilies ladies bore  
 Through many a sacred corridor  
 Where such grey clouds of incense rose  
 That only God's eyes did not close:  
 For that pale breast and lingering hand  
 Come from a more dream-heavy land,  
 A more dream-heavy hour than this;  
 And when you sigh from kiss to kiss  
 I hear white Beauty sighing, too,  
 For hours when all must fade like dew, 20  
 But flame on flame, and deep on deep,  
 Throne over throne where in half sleep,  
 Their swords upon their iron knees,  
 Brood her high lonely mysteries.

## 56 *A Poet to his Beloved*

I bring you with reverent hands  
 The books of my numberless dreams,  
 White woman that passion has worn  
 As the tide wears the dove-grey sands,  
 And with heart more old than the horn  
 That is brimmed from the pale fire of time:  
 White woman with numberless dreams,  
 I bring you my passionate rhyme.

## 57 *He gives his Beloved certain Rhymes*

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,  
 And bind up every wandering tress;  
 I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:  
 It worked at them, day out, day in,

Building a sorrowful loveliness  
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,  
And bind up your long hair and sigh;  
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;  
And candle-like foam on the dim sand, 10  
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,  
Live but to light your passing feet.

## 58 *To his Heart, bidding it have no Fear*

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;  
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:  
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,  
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,  
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood  
Cover over and hide, for he has no part  
With the lonely, majestic multitude.*

## 59 *The Cap and Bells*

The jester walked in the garden:  
The garden had fallen still;  
He bade his soul rise upward  
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,  
When owls began to call:  
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking  
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;  
She rose in her pale night-gown; 10  
She drew in the heavy casement  
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,  
When the owls called out no more;  
In a red and quivering garment  
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming  
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;  
But she took up her fan from the table  
And waved it off on the air.

20

'I have cap and bells,' he pondered,  
'I will send them to her and die';  
And when the morning whitened  
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,  
Under a cloud of her hair,  
And her red lips sang them a love-song  
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,  
And the heart and the soul came through,  
To her right hand came the red one,  
To her left hand came the blue.

30

They set up a noise like crickets,  
A chattering wise and sweet,  
And her hair was a folded flower  
And the quiet of love in her feet.

## 60 *The Valley of the Black Pig*

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears  
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,  
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries  
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.

We who still labour by the cromlech on the shore,  
 The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,  
 Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,  
 Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

## 61 *The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his Many Moods*

If this importunate heart trouble your peace  
 With words lighter than air,  
 Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;  
 Crumple the rose in your hair;  
 And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say,  
 'O Hearts of wind-blown flame!

O Winds, older than changing of night and day,  
 That murmuring and longing came  
 From marble cities loud with tabors of old  
 In dove-grey faery lands; 10

From battle-banners, fold upon purple fold,  
 Queens wrought with glimmering hands;  
 That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn face  
 Above the wandering tide;

And lingered in the hidden desolate place  
 Where the last Phoenix died,

And wrapped the flames above his holy head;  
 And still murmur and long:

O Piteous Hearts, changing till change be dead  
 In a tumultuous song'; 20

And cover the pale blossoms of your breast  
 With your dim heavy hair,

And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest  
 The odorous twilight there.

62 *He tells of a Valley full of Lovers*

I dreamed that I stood in a valley, and amid sighs,  
 For happy lovers passed two by two where I stood;  
 And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood  
 With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes:  
 I cried in my dream, *O women, bid the young men lay  
 Their heads on your knees, and drown their eyes with your hair,  
 Or remembering hers they will find no other face fair  
 Till all the valleys of the world have been withered away.*

63 *He tells of the Perfect Beauty*

O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes,  
 The poets labouring all their days  
 To build a perfect beauty in rhyme  
 Are overthrown by a woman's gaze  
 And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:  
 And therefore my heart will bow, when dew  
 Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,  
 Before the unlabouring stars and you.

64 *He hears the Cry of the Sedge*

I wander by the edge  
 Of this desolate lake  
 Where wind cries in the sedge:  
*Until the axle break  
 That keeps the stars in their round,  
 And hands hurl in the deep  
 The banners of East and West,  
 And the girdle of light is unbound,  
 Your breast will not lie by the breast  
 Of your beloved in sleep.*

## 65 *He thinks of Those who have spoken Evil of his Beloved*

Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair,  
 And dream about the great and their pride;  
 They have spoken against you everywhere,  
 But weigh this song with the great and their pride;  
 I made it out of a mouthful of air,  
 Their children's children shall say they have lied.

## 66 *The Blessed*

Cumhal called out, bending his head,  
 Till Dathi came and stood,  
 With a blink in his eyes, at the cave-mouth,  
 Between the wind and the wood.

And Cumhal said, bending his knees,  
 'I have come by the windy way  
 To gather the half of your blessedness  
 And learn to pray when you pray.

'I can bring you salmon out of the streams  
 And heron out of the skies.'

10

But Dathi folded his hands and smiled  
 With the secrets of God in his eyes.

And Cumhal saw like a drifting smoke  
 All manner of blessed souls,  
 Women and children, young men with books,  
 And old men with croziers and stoles.

'Praise God and God's Mother,' Dathi said,  
 'For God and God's Mother have sent  
 The blessedest souls that walk in the world  
 To fill your heart with content.'

20

'And which is the blessedest,' Cumhal said,  
 'Where all are comely and good?  
 Is it these that with golden thuribles  
 Are singing about the wood?'

'My eyes are blinking,' Dathi said,  
 'With the secrets of God half blind,  
 But I can see where the wind goes  
 And follow the way of the wind;

'And blessedness goes where the wind goes,  
 And when it is gone we are dead;  
 I see the blessedest soul in the world  
 And he nods a drunken head.

30

'O blessedness comes in the night and the day  
 And whither the wise heart knows;  
 And one has seen in the redness of wine  
 The Incorruptible Rose,

'That drowsily drops faint leaves on him  
 And the sweetness of desire,  
 While time and the world are ebbing away  
 In twilights of dew and of fire.'

40

## 67 *The Secret Rose*

Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose,  
 Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those  
 Who sought thee in the Holy Sepulchre,  
 Or in the wine-vat, dwell beyond the stir  
 And tumult of defeated dreams; and deep  
 Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep  
 Men have named beauty. Thy great leaves enfold  
 The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold  
 Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes  
 Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder rise  
 In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;  
 Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him

10



Who met Fand walking among flaming dew  
 By a grey shore where the wind never blew,  
 And lost the world and Emer for a kiss;  
 And him who drove the gods out of their liss,  
 And till a hundred morns had flowered red  
 Feasted, and wept the barrows of his dead;  
 And the proud dreaming king who flung the crown  
 And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown 20  
 Dwelt among wine-stained wanderers in deep woods;  
 And him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,  
 And sought through lands and islands numberless years,  
 Until he found, with laughter and with tears,  
 A woman of so shining loveliness  
 That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,  
 A little stolen tress. I, too, await  
 The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.  
 When shall the stars be blown about the sky,  
 Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die? 30  
 Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,  
 Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

## 68 *Maid Quiet*

Where has Maid Quiet gone to,  
 Nodding her russet hood?  
 The winds that awakened the stars  
 Are blowing through my blood.  
 O how could I be so calm  
 When she rose up to depart?  
 Now words that called up the lightning  
 Are hurtling through my heart.

## 69 *The Travail of Passion*

When the flaming lute-thronged angelic door is wide;  
 When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay;

Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the way  
Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,  
The vinegar-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kedron stream;  
We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,  
That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,  
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.

70 *The Lover pleads with his Friend for  
Old Friends*

Though you are in your shining days,  
Voices among the crowd  
And new friends busy with your praise,  
Be not unkind or proud,  
But think about old friends the most:  
Time's bitter flood will rise,  
Your beauty perish and be lost  
For all eyes but these eyes.

71 *The Lover speaks to the Hearers of his  
Songs in Coming Days*

O women, kneeling by your altar-rails long hence,  
When songs I wove for my beloved hide the prayer,  
And smoke from this dead heart drifts through the violet air  
And covers away the smoke of myrrh and frankincense;  
Bend down and pray for all that sin I wove in song,  
Till the Attorney for Lost Souls cry her sweet cry,  
And call to my beloved and me: 'No longer fly  
Amid the hovering, piteous, penitential throng.'

## 72 *The Poet pleads with the Elemental Powers*

The Powers whose name and shape no living creature knows  
 Have pulled the Immortal Rose;  
 And though the Seven Lights bowed in their dance and wept,  
 The Polar Dragon slept,  
 His heavy rings uncoiled from glimmering deep to deep:  
 When will he wake from sleep?

Great Powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire,  
 With your harmonious choir  
 Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,  
 That my old care may cease; 10  
 Unfold your flaming wings and cover out of sight  
 The nets of day and night.

Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no longer be  
 Like the pale cup of the sea,  
 When winds have gathered and sun and moon burned dim  
 Above its cloudy rim;  
 But let a gentle silence wrought with music flow  
 Whither her footsteps go.

## 73 *He wishes his Beloved were Dead*

Were you but lying cold and dead,  
 And lights were paling out of the West,  
 You would come hither, and bend your head,  
 And I would lay my head on your breast;  
 And you would murmur tender words,  
 Forgiving me, because you were dead:  
 Nor would you rise and hasten away,  
 Though you have the will of the wild birds,

But know your hair was bound and wound  
 About the stars and moon and sun:  
 O would, beloved, that you lay  
 Under the dock-leaves in the ground,  
 While lights were paling one by one.

10

## 74 *He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
 Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
 The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
 Of night and light and the half-light,  
 I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

## 75 *He thinks of his Past Greatness when a Part of the Constellations of Heaven*

I have drunk ale from the Country of the Young  
 And weep because I know all things now:  
 I have been a hazel-tree, and they hung  
 The Pilot Star and the Crooked Plough  
 Among my leaves in times out of mind:  
 I became a rush that horses tread:  
 I became a man, a hater of the wind,  
 Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that his head  
 May not lie on the breast nor his lips on the hair  
 Of the woman that he loves, until he dies.  
 O beast of the wilderness, bird of the air,  
 Must I endure your amorous cries?

10

## 76 *The Fiddler of Dooney*

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,  
 Folk dance like a wave of the sea;  
 My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,  
 My brother in Mocharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:  
 They read in their books of prayer;  
 I read in my book of songs  
 I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time  
 To Peter sitting in state, 10  
 He will smile on the three old spirits,  
 But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,  
 Save by an evil chance,  
 And the merry love the fiddle,  
 And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,  
 They will all come up to me,  
 With 'Here is the fiddler of Dooney!' 20  
 And dance like a wave of the sea.

# In the Seven Woods

1904



## In the Seven Woods

### 77 *In the Seven Woods*

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods  
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees  
Hum in the lime-tree flowers; and put away  
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness  
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile  
Tara uprooted, and new commonness  
Upon the throne and crying about the streets  
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,  
Because it is alone of all things happy.  
I am contented, for I know that Quiet  
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart  
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,  
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs  
A cloudy quiver over Pairc-na-lee.

10

*August 1902*

### 78 *The Arrow*

I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,  
Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.  
There's no man may look upon her, no man,  
As when newly grown to be a woman,  
Tall and noble but with face and bosom  
Delicate in colour as apple blossom.  
This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason  
I could weep that the old is out of season.



## 79 *The Folly of being Comforted*

One that is ever kind said yesterday:  
 'Your well-belovèd's hair has threads of grey,  
 And little shadows come about her eyes;  
 Time can but make it easier to be wise  
 Though now it seems impossible, and so  
 All that you need is patience.'

Heart cries, 'No,  
 I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain.  
 Time can but make her beauty over again:  
 Because of that great nobleness of hers  
 The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs, 10  
 Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways  
 When all the wild summer was in her gaze.'

O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,  
 You'd know the folly of being comforted.

## 80 *Old Memory*

O thought, fly to her when the end of day  
 Awakens an old memory, and say,  
 'Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,  
 It might call up a new age, calling to mind  
 The queens that were imagined long ago,  
 Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough  
 Through the long years of youth, and who would have  
 thought  
 It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,  
 And that dear words meant nothing?' But enough,  
 For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love; 10  
 Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said  
 That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

81 *Never give all the Heart*

Never give all the heart, for love  
 Will hardly seem worth thinking of  
 To passionate women if it seem  
 Certain, and they never dream  
 That it fades out from kiss to kiss;  
 For everything that's lovely is  
 But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.  
 O never give the heart outright,  
 For they, for all smooth lips can say,  
 Have given their hearts up to the play. 10  
 And who could play it well enough  
 If deaf and dumb and blind with love?  
 He that made this knows all the cost,  
 For he gave all his heart and lost.

82 *The Withering of the Boughs*

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds:  
 'Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,  
 I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,  
 For the roads are unending, and there is no place to my  
 mind.'

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,  
 And I fell asleep upon lonely Eichtge of streams.  
*No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;  
 The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.*

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take  
 Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles 10  
 of wool,  
 And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;  
 I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind  
 Wind and unwind dancing when the light grows cool

On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams.  
*No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;*  
*The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.*

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round  
 Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they fly.  
 A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound  
 Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so 20  
 blind

With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by;  
 I know, and the curlew and peewit on Ectge of streams.  
*No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;*  
*The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.*

### 83 *Adam's Curse*

We sat together at one summer's end,  
 That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,  
 And you and I, and talked of poetry.  
 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.  
 Better go down upon your marrow-bones  
 And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones  
 Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;  
 For to articulate sweet sounds together 10  
 Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
 Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
 Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
 The martyrs call the world.'

And thereupon  
 That beautiful mild woman for whose sake  
 There's many a one shall find out all heartache  
 On finding that her voice is sweet and low  
 Replied, 'To be born woman is to know –  
 Although they do not talk of it at school –  
 That we must labour to be beautiful.' 20

I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing  
 Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.  
 There have been lovers who thought love should be  
 So much compounded of high courtesy  
 That they would sigh and quote with learned looks  
 Precedents out of beautiful old books;  
 Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;  
 We saw the last embers of daylight die,  
 And in the trembling blue-green of the sky 30  
 A moon, worn as if it had been a shell  
 Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell  
 About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:  
 That you were beautiful, and that I strove  
 To love you in the old high way of love;  
 That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown  
 As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

## 84 *Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland*

The old brown thorn-trees break in two high over  
 Cummen Strand,  
 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.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea,  
 And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can  
 say.

Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat;  
 But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet  
 Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,  
 For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;  
 Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;  
 But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood  
 Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

## 85 *The Old Men admiring Themselves in the Water*

I heard the old, old men say,  
 'Everything alters,  
 And one by one we drop away.'  
 They had hands like claws, and their knees  
 Were twisted like the old thorn-trees  
 By the waters.  
 I heard the old, old men say,  
 'All that's beautiful drifts away  
 Like the waters.'

## 86 *Under the Moon*

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde,  
 Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,  
 Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while;  
 Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind;  
 Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart:  
 Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's  
 Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived ones,  
 Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates  
 apart,  
 And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn,  
 To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier. 10  
 Therein are many queens like Branwen and Guinevere;  
 And Niamh and Laban and Fand, who could change to an  
 otter or fawn,

And the wood-woman, whose lover was changed to a blue-eyed hawk;  
 And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun, or shore,  
 Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,  
 I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear their mournful talk.

Because of something told under the famished horn  
 Of the hunter's moon, that hung between the night and the day,  
 To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,  
 Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne. 20

## 87 *The Ragged Wood*

O hurry where by water among the trees  
 The delicate-stepping stag and his lady sigh,  
 When they have but looked upon their images –  
 Would none had ever loved but you and I!

Or have you heard that sliding silver-shoed  
 Pale silver-proud queen-woman of the sky,  
 When the sun looked out of his golden hood? –  
 O that none ever loved but you and I!

O hurry to the ragged wood, for there  
 I will drive all those lovers out and cry – 10  
 O my share of the world, O yellow hair!  
 No one has ever loved but you and I.

## 88 *O do not Love Too Long*

Sweetheart, do not love too long:  
 I loved long and long,  
 And grew to be out of fashion  
 Like an old song.

All through the years of our youth  
 Neither could have known  
 Their own thought from the other's,  
 We were so much at one.

But O, in a minute she changed –  
 O do not love too long,  
 Or you will grow out of fashion  
 Like an old song.

10

## 89 *The Players ask for a Blessing on the Psalteries and on Themselves*

*Three Voices [together].* Hurry to bless the hands that play,  
 The mouths that speak, the notes and strings,  
 O masters of the glittering town!  
 O! lay the shrilly trumpet down,  
 Though drunken with the flags that sway  
 Over the ramparts and the towers,  
 And with the waving of your wings.

*First Voice.* Maybe they linger by the way.  
 One gathers up his purple gown;  
 One leans and mutters by the wall –  
 He dreads the weight of mortal hours.

10

*Second Voice.* O no, O no! they hurry down  
 Like plovers that have heard the call.

*Third Voice.* O kinsmen of the Three in One,  
 O kinsmen, bless the hands that play.  
 The notes they waken shall live on  
 When all this heavy history's done;  
 Our hands, our hands must ebb away.

*Three Voices [together].* The proud and careless notes live on,  
 But bless our hands that ebb away.

20

90 *The Happy Townland*

There's many a strong farmer  
 Whose heart would break in two,  
 If he could see the townland  
 That we are riding to;  
 Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
 At all times of the year;  
 Rivers are running over  
 With red beer and brown beer.  
 An old man plays the bagpipes  
 In a golden and silver wood;  
 Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,  
 Are dancing in a crowd.

10

*The little fox he murmured,  
 'O what of the world's bane?'  
 The sun was laughing sweetly,  
 The moon plucked at my rein;  
 But the little red fox murmured,  
 'O do not pluck at his rein,  
 He is riding to the townland  
 That is the world's bane.'*

20

When their hearts are so high  
 That they would come to blows,  
 They unhook their heavy swords  
 From golden and silver boughs;  
 But all that are killed in battle  
 Awaken to life again.  
 It is lucky that their story  
 Is not known among men,  
 For O, the strong farmers  
 That would let the spade lie,  
 Their hearts would be like a cup  
 That somebody had drunk dry.

30



*The little fox he murmured,  
'O what of the world's bane?'*  
*The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
'O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane.'*

Michael will unhook his trumpet  
From a bough overhead,  
And blow a little noise  
When the supper has been spread.  
Gabriel will come from the water  
With a fish-tail, and talk  
Of wonders that have happened  
On wet roads where men walk,  
And lift up an old horn  
Of hammered silver, and drink  
Till he has fallen asleep  
Upon the starry brink.

*The little fox he murmured,  
'O what of the world's bane?'*  
*The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
'O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane.'*

The Green Helmet  
and Other Poems

1910



# The Green Helmet and Other Poems

## 91 *His Dream*

I swayed upon the gaudy stern  
The butt-end of a steering-oar,  
And saw wherever I could turn  
A crowd upon a shore.

And though I would have hushed the crowd,  
There was no mother's son but said,  
'What is the figure in a shroud  
Upon a gaudy bed?'

And after running at the brim  
Cried out upon that thing beneath 10  
– It had such dignity of limb –  
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,  
What could I but take up the song?  
And running crowd and gaudy ship  
Cried out the whole night long,

Crying amid the glittering sea,  
Naming it with ecstatic breath,  
Because it had such dignity,  
By the sweet name of Death. 20

## 92 *A Woman Homer sung*

If any man drew near  
When I was young,  
I thought, 'He holds her dear,'  
And shook with hate and fear.  
But O! 'twas bitter wrong

If he could pass her by  
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought,  
And now, being grey,  
I dream that I have brought 10  
To such a pitch my thought  
That coming time can say,  
'He shadowed in a glass  
What thing her body was.'

For she had fiery blood  
When I was young,  
And trod so sweetly proud  
As 'twere upon a cloud,  
A woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem 20  
But an heroic dream.

### 93 *Words*

I had this thought a while ago,  
'My darling cannot understand  
What I have done, or what would do  
In this blind bitter land.'

And I grew weary of the sun  
Until my thoughts cleared up again,  
Remembering that the best I have done  
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried, 'At length  
My darling understands it all, 10  
Because I have come into my strength,  
And words obey my call';

That had she done so who can say  
What would have shaken from the sieve?  
I might have thrown poor words away  
And been content to live.

94 *No Second Troy*

Why should I blame her that she filled my days  
 With misery, or that she would of late  
 Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
 Or hurled the little streets upon the great,  
 Had they but courage equal to desire?  
 What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
 That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
 With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind  
 That is not natural in an age like this,  
 Being high and solitary and most stern? 10  
 Why, what could she have done, being what she is?  
 Was there another Troy for her to burn?

95 *Reconciliation*

Some may have blamed you that you took away  
 The verses that could move them on the day  
 When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes blind  
 With lightning, you went from me, and I could find  
 Nothing to make a song about but kings,  
 Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things  
 That were like memories of you – but now  
 We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;  
 And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,  
 Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit. 10  
 But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,  
 My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

96 *King and no King*

'Would it were anything but merely voice!  
 The No King cried who after that was King,  
 Because he had not heard of anything  
 That balanced with a word is more than noise;

Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail  
 Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,  
 Though he'd but cannon – Whereas we that had thought  
 To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale  
 Have been defeated by that pledge you gave  
 In momentary anger long ago; 10  
 And I that have not your faith, how shall I know  
 That in the blinding light beyond the grave  
 We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?  
 The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,  
 The habitual content of each with each  
 When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

## 97 *Peace*

Ah, that Time could touch a form  
 That could show what Homer's age  
 Bred to be a hero's wage.  
 'Were not all her life but storm,  
 Would not painters paint a form  
 Of such noble lines,' I said,  
 'Such a delicate high head,  
 All that sternness amid charm,  
 All that sweetness amid strength?'  
 Ah, but peace that comes at length, 10  
 Came when Time had touched her form.

## 98 *Against Unworthy Praise*

O heart, be at peace, because  
 Nor knave nor dolt can break  
 What's not for their applause,  
 Being for a woman's sake.  
 Enough if the work has seemed,  
 So did she your strength renew,  
 A dream that a lion had dreamed  
 Till the wilderness cried aloud,

A secret between you two,  
Between the proud and the proud. 10

What, still you would have their praise!  
But here's a haughtier text,  
The labyrinth of her days  
That her own strangeness perplexed;  
And how what her dreaming gave  
Earned slander, ingratitude,  
From self-same dolt and knave;  
Aye, and worse wrong than these.  
Yet she, singing upon her road,  
Half lion, half child, is at peace. 20

## 99 *The Fascination of What's Difficult*

The fascination of what's difficult  
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent  
Spontaneous joy and natural content  
Out of my heart. There's something ails our colt  
That must, as if it had not holy blood  
Nor on Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,  
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt  
As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays  
That have to be set up in fifty ways,  
On the day's war with every knave and dolt, 10  
Theatre business, management of men.  
I swear before the dawn comes round again  
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

## 100 *A Drinking Song*

Wine comes in at the mouth  
And love comes in at the eye;



That's all we shall know for truth  
Before we grow old and die.  
I lift the glass to my mouth,  
I look at you, and I sigh.

101 *The Coming of Wisdom with Time*

Though leaves are many, the root is one;  
Through all the lying days of my youth  
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;  
Now I may wither into the truth.

102 *On hearing that the Students of our  
New University have joined the Agitation  
against Immoral Literature*

Where, where but here have Pride and Truth,  
That long to give themselves for wage,  
To shake their wicked sides at youth  
Restraining reckless middle-age?

103 *To a Poet, who would have me  
Praise certain Bad Poets,  
Imitators of His and Mine*

You say, as I have often given tongue  
In praise of what another's said or sung,

'Twere politic to do the like by these;  
But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?

### 104 *The Mask*

'Put off that mask of burning gold  
With emerald eyes.'

'O no, my dear, you make so bold  
To find if hearts be wild and wise,  
And yet not cold.'

'I would but find what's there to find,  
Love or deceit.'

'It was the mask engaged your mind,  
And after set your heart to beat,  
Not what's behind.'

10

'But lest you are my enemy,  
I must enquire.'

'O no, my dear, let all that be;  
What matter, so there is but fire  
In you, in me?'

### 105 *Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation*

How should the world be luckier if this house,  
Where passion and precision have been one  
Time out of mind, became too ruinous  
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?  
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow  
Where wings have memory of wings, and all  
That comes of the best knit to the best? Although  
Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall,  
How should their luck run high enough to reach  
The gifts that govern men, and after these

10

To gradual Time's last gift, a written speech  
Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease?

## 106 *At the Abbey Theatre*

(Imitated from Ronsard)

Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin, look into our case.  
When we are high and airy hundreds say  
That if we hold that flight they'll leave the place,  
While those same hundreds mock another day  
Because we have made our art of common things,  
So bitterly, you'd dream they longed to look  
All their lives through into some drift of wings.  
You've dandled them and fed them from the book  
And know them to the bone; impart to us –  
We'll keep the secret – a new trick to please. 10  
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?

## 107 *These are the Clouds*

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye:  
The weak lay hand 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.  
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run  
And these things came, so much the more thereby  
Have you made greatness your companion,  
Although it be for children that you sigh: 10  
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

108 *At Galway Races*

There where the course is,  
 Delight makes all of the one mind,  
 The riders upon the galloping horses,  
 The crowd that closes in behind:  
 We, too, had good attendance once,  
 Hearers and hearteners of the work;  
 Aye, horsemen for companions,  
 Before the merchant and the clerk  
 Breathed on the world with timid breath.  
 Sing on: somewhere at some new moon, 10  
 We'll learn that sleeping is not death,  
 Hearing the whole earth change its tune,  
 Its flesh being wild, and it again  
 Crying aloud as the racecourse is,  
 And we find hearteners among men  
 That ride upon horses.

109 *A Friend's Illness*

Sickness brought me this  
 Thought, in that scale of his:  
 Why should I be dismayed  
 Though flame had burned the whole  
 World, as it were a coal,  
 Now I have seen it weighed  
 Against a soul?

110 *All Things can tempt Me*

All things can tempt me from this craft of verse:  
 One time it was a woman's face, or worse –  
 The seeming needs of my fool-driven land;

Now nothing but comes readier to the hand  
 Than this accustomed toil. When I was young,  
 I had not given a penny for a song  
 Did not the poet sing it with such airs  
 That one believed he had a sword upstairs;  
 Yet would be now, could I but have my wish,  
 Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish.

10

### III *Brown Penny*

I whispered, 'I am too young,'  
 And then, 'I am old enough';  
 Wherefore I threw a penny  
 To find out if I might love.  
 'Go and love, go and love, young man,  
 If the lady be young and fair.'  
 Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,  
 I am looped in the loops of her hair.

And the penny sang up in my face,  
 'There is nobody wise enough  
 To find out all that is in it,  
 For he would be thinking of love  
 That is looped in the loops of her hair,  
 Till the loops of time had run.'  
 Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny.  
 One cannot begin it too soon.

10

# Responsibilities

1914

*'In dreams begins responsibility.'*

**OLD PLAY**

*'How am I fallen from myself, for a long time now  
I have not seen the Prince of Chang in my dreams.'*

**KHOUNG-FOU-TSEU**

## I I 2

*Pardon, old fathers, if you still remain  
Somewhere in ear-shot for the story's end,  
Old Dublin merchant 'free of the ten and four'  
Or trading out of Galway into Spain;  
Old country scholar, Robert Emmet's friend,  
A hundred-year-old memory to the poor;  
Merchant and scholar who have left me blood  
That has not passed through any huckster's loin,  
Soldiers that gave, whatever die was cast:  
A Butler or an Armstrong that withstood  
Beside the brackish waters of the Boyne  
James and his Irish when the Dutchman crossed;  
Old merchant skipper that leaped overboard  
After a ragged hat in Biscay Bay;  
You most of all, silent and fierce old man,  
Because the daily spectacle that stirred  
My fancy, and set my boyish lips to say,  
'Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun';  
Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,  
Although I have come close on forty-nine,  
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,  
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.*

10

20





# Responsibilities

## 113 *The Grey Rock*

*Poets with whom I learned my trade,  
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,  
Here's an old story I've re-made,  
Imagining 'twould better please  
Your ears than stories now in fashion,  
Though you may think I waste my breath  
Pretending that there can be passion  
That has more life in it than death,  
And though at bottling of your wine  
Old wholesome Goban had no say;  
The moral's yours because it's mine.*

10

When cups went round at close of day –  
Is not that how good stories run? –  
The gods were sitting at the board  
In their great house at Slievenamon.  
They sang a drowsy song, or snored,  
For all were full of wine and meat.  
The smoky torches made a glare  
On metal Goban 'd hammered at,  
On old deep silver rolling there  
Or on some still unemptied cup  
That he, when frenzy stirred his thews,  
Had hammered out on mountain top  
To hold the sacred stuff he brews  
That only gods may buy of him.

20

Now from that juice that made them wise  
All those had lifted up the dim  
Imaginations of their eyes,

For one that was like woman made  
 Before their sleepy eyelids ran 30  
 And trembling with her passion said,  
 'Come out and dig for a dead man,  
 Who's burrowing somewhere in the ground,  
 And mock him to his face and then  
 Hollo him on with horse and hound,  
 For he is the worst of all dead men.'

*We should be dazed and terror-struck,  
 If we but saw in dreams that room,  
 Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our luck  
 That emptied all our days to come. 40  
 I knew a woman none could please,  
 Because she dreamed when but a child  
 Of men and women made like these;  
 And after, when her blood ran wild,  
 Had ravelled her own story out,  
 And said, 'In two or in three years  
 I needs must marry some poor lout,'  
 And having said it, burst in tears.*

*Since, tavern comrades, you have died,  
 Maybe your images have stood, 50  
 Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,  
 Before that roomful or as good.  
 You had to face your ends when young –  
 'Twas wine or women, or some curse –  
 But never made a poorer song  
 That you might have a heavier purse,  
 Nor gave loud service to a cause  
 That you might have a troop of friends.  
 You kept the Muses' sterner laws,  
 And unrepenting faced your ends, 60  
 And therefore earned the right – and yet  
 Dowson and Johnson most I praise –  
 To troop with those the world's forgot,  
 And copy their proud steady gaze.*

'The Danish troop was driven out  
 Between the dawn and dusk,' she said;  
 'Although the event was long in doubt,  
 Although the King of Ireland's dead  
 And half the kings, before sundown  
 All was accomplished.

70

'When this day  
 Murrough, the King of Ireland's son,  
 Foot after foot was giving way,  
 He and his best troops back to back  
 Had perished there, but the Danes ran,  
 Stricken with panic from the attack,  
 The shouting of an unseen man;  
 And being thankful Murrough found,  
 Led by a footsole dipped in blood  
 That had made prints upon the ground,  
 Where by old thorn-trees that man stood;  
 And though when he gazed here and there,  
 He had but gazed on thorn-trees, spoke,  
 "Who is the friend that seems but air  
 And yet could give so fine a stroke?"  
 Thereon a young man met his eye,  
 Who said, "Because she held me in  
 Her love, and would not have me die,  
 Rock-nurtured Aoife took a pin,  
 And pushing it into my shirt,  
 Promised that for a pin's sake,  
 No man should see to do me hurt;  
 But there it's gone; I will not take  
 The fortune that had been my shame  
 Seeing, King's son, what wounds you have."  
 'Twas roundly spoke, but when night came  
 He had betrayed me to his grave,  
 For he and the King's son were dead.  
 I'd promised him two hundred years,  
 And when for all I'd done or said –  
 And these immortal eyes shed tears –

80

90

100

He claimed his country's need was most,  
 I'd saved his life, yet for the sake  
 Of a new friend he has turned a ghost.  
 What does he care if my heart break?  
 I call for spade and horse and hound  
 That we may harry him.' Thereon  
 She cast herself upon the ground  
 And rent her clothes and made her moan:  
 'Why are they faithless when their might  
 Is from the holy shades that rove  
 The grey rock and the windy light?  
 Why should the faithfullest heart most love  
 The bitter sweetness of false faces?  
 Why must the lasting love what passes,  
 Why are the gods by men betrayed?'

110

But thereon every god stood up  
 With a slow smile and without sound,  
 And stretching forth his arm and cup  
 To where she moaned upon the ground,  
 Suddenly drenched her to the skin;  
 And she with Goban's wine adrip,  
 No more remembering what had been,  
 Stared at the gods with laughing lip.

120

*I have kept my faith, though faith was tried,  
 To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot,  
 And the world's altered since you died,  
 And I am in no good repute  
 With the loud host before the sea,  
 That think sword-strokes were better meant  
 Than lover's music – let that be,  
 So that the wandering foot's content.*

130

*114 To a Wealthy Man who promised  
a second Subscription to the Dublin  
Municipal Gallery if it were proved  
the People wanted Pictures*

You gave, but will not give again  
 Until enough of Paudeen's pence  
 By Biddy's halfpennies have lain  
 To be 'some sort of evidence,'  
 Before you'll put your guineas down,  
 That things it were a pride to give  
 Are what the blind and ignorant town  
 Imagines best to make it thrive.  
 What cared Duke Ercole, that bid  
 His mummers to the market-place,  
 What th' onion-sellers thought or did  
 So that his Plautus set the pace  
 For the Italian comedies?  
 And Guidobaldo, when he made  
 That grammar school of courtesies  
 Where wit and beauty learned their trade  
 Upon Urbino's windy hill,  
 Had sent no runners to and fro  
 That he might learn the shepherds' will.  
 And when they drove out Cosimo,  
 Indifferent how the rancour ran,  
 He gave the hours they had set free  
 To Michelozzo's latest plan  
 For the San Marco Library,  
 Whence turbulent Italy should draw  
 Delight in Art whose end is peace,  
 In logic and in natural law  
 By sucking at the dugs of Greece.

10

20

Your open hand but shows our loss,  
 For he knew better how to live.  
 Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss,  
 Look up in the sun's eye and give  
 What the exultant heart calls good  
 That some new day may breed the best  
 Because you gave, not what they would,  
 But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

30

*December 1912*

## 115 *September 1913*

What need you, being come to sense,  
 But fumble in a greasy till  
 And add the halfpence to the pence  
 And prayer to shivering prayer, until  
 You have dried the marrow from the bone;  
 For men were born to pray and save:  
 Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind,  
 The names that stilled your childish play,  
 They have gone about the world like wind,  
 But little time had they to pray  
 For whom the hangman's rope was spun,  
 And what, God help us, could they save?  
 Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

10

Was it for this the wild geese spread  
 The grey wing upon every tide;  
 For this that all that blood was shed,  
 For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
 And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
 All that delirium of the brave?  
 Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

20

Yet could we turn the years again,  
 And call those exiles as they were  
 In all their loneliness and pain,  
 You'd cry, 'Some woman's yellow hair  
 Has maddened every mother's son':  
 They weighed so lightly what they gave. 30  
 But let them be, they're dead and gone,  
 They're with O'Leary in the grave.

*116 To a Friend whose Work has  
 come to Nothing*

Now all the truth is out,  
 Be secret and take defeat  
 From any brazen throat,  
 For how can you compete,  
 Being honour bred, with one  
 Who, were it proved he lies,  
 Were neither shamed in his own  
 Nor in his neighbours' eyes?  
 Bred to a harder thing 10  
 Than Triumph, turn away  
 And like a laughing string  
 Whereon mad fingers play  
 Amid a place of stone,  
 Be secret and exult,  
 Because of all things known  
 That is most difficult.

*117 Paudeen*

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite  
 Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind  
 Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;  
 Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind



A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought  
 That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,  
 There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,  
 A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

## 118 *To a Shade*

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,  
 Whether to look upon your monument  
 (I wonder if the builder has been paid)  
 Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent  
 To drink of that salt breath out of the sea  
 When grey gulls flit about instead of men,  
 And the gaunt houses put on majesty:  
 Let these content you and be gone again;  
 For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man

Of your own passionate serving kind who had      10  
 brought

In his full hands what, had they only known,  
 Had given their children's children loftier thought,  
 Sweeter emotion, working in their veins  
 Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,  
 And insult heaped upon him for his pains,  
 And for his open-handedness, disgrace;  
 Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set  
 The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,

And gather the Glasnevin coverlet  
 About your head till the dust stops your ear,      20  
 The time for you to taste of that salt breath  
 And listen at the corners has not come;  
 You had enough of sorrow before death –  
 Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.

*September 29, 1913*

## 119 *When Helen lived*

We have cried in our despair  
 That men desert,  
 For some trivial affair  
 Or noisy, insolent sport,  
 Beauty that we have won  
 From bitterest hours;  
 Yet we, had we walked within  
 Those topless towers  
 Where Helen walked with her boy,  
 Had given but as the rest  
 Of the men and women of Troy,  
 A word and a jest.

10

## 120 *On Those that hated 'The Playboy of the Western World,' 1907*

Once, when midnight smote the air,  
 Eunuchs ran through Hell and met  
 On every crowded street to stare  
 Upon great Juan riding by:  
 Even like these to rail and sweat  
 Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

## 121 *The Three Beggars*

*'Though to my feathers in the wet,  
 I have stood here from break of day,  
 I have not found a thing to eat,  
 For only rubbish comes my way.  
 Am I to live on lebeen-lone?'*

*Muttered the old crane of Gort.*

*'For all my pains on lebeen-lone?'*

King Guaire walked amid his court  
 The palace-yard and river-side  
 And there to three old beggars said, 10  
 'You that have wandered far and wide  
 Can ravel out what's in my head.  
 Do men who least desire get most,  
 Or get the most who most desire?'  
 A beggar said, 'They get the most  
 Whom man or devil cannot tire,  
 And what could make their muscles taut  
 Unless desire had made them so'  
 But Guaire laughed with secret thought,  
 'If that be true as it seems true, 20  
 One of you three is a rich man,  
 For he shall have a thousand pounds  
 Who is first asleep, if but he can  
 Sleep before the third noon sounds.'  
 And thereon, merry as a bird  
 With his old thoughts, King Guaire went  
 From river-side and palace-yard  
 And left them to their argument.  
 'And if I win,' one beggar said,  
 'Though I am old I shall persuade 30  
 A pretty girl to share my bed';  
 The second: 'I shall learn a trade';  
 The third: 'I'll hurry to the course  
 Among the other gentlemen,  
 And lay it all upon a horse';  
 The second: 'I have thought again:  
 A farmer has more dignity.'  
 One to another sighed and cried:  
 The exorbitant dreams of beggary,  
 That idleness had borne to pride, 40  
 Sang through their teeth from noon to noon;  
 And when the second twilight brought

The frenzy of the beggars' moon  
 None closed his blood-shot eyes but sought  
 To keep his fellows from their sleep;  
 All shouted till their anger grew  
 And they were whirling in a heap.

They mauled and bit the whole night through;  
 They mauled and bit till the day shone;  
 They mauled and bit through all that day 50  
 And till another night had gone,  
 Or if they made a moment's stay  
 They sat upon their heels to rail,  
 And when old Guaire came and stood  
 Before the three to end this tale,  
 They were commingling lice and blood.  
 'Time's up,' he cried, and all the three  
 With blood-shot eyes upon him stared.  
 'Time's up,' he cried, and all the three  
 Fell down upon the dust and snored. 60

*'Maybe I shall be lucky yet,  
 Now they are silent,' said the crane.  
 'Though to my feathers in the wet  
 I've stood as I were made of stone  
 And seen the rubbish run about,  
 It's certain there are trout somewhere  
 And maybe I shall take a trout  
 If but I do not seem to care.'*

## 122 *The Three Hermits*

Three old hermits took the air  
 By a cold and desolate sea,  
 First was muttering a prayer,  
 Second rummaged for a flea;  
 On a windy stone, the third,  
 Giddy with his hundredth year,

Sang unnoticed like a bird:  
 'Though the Door of Death is near  
 And what waits behind the door,  
 Three times in a single day 10  
 I, though upright on the shore,  
 Fall asleep when I should pray.'  
 So the first, but now the second:  
 'We're but given what we have earned  
 When all thoughts and deeds are reckoned,  
 So it's plain to be discerned  
 That the shades of holy men  
 Who have failed, being weak of will,  
 Pass the Door of Birth again,  
 And are plagued by crowds, until 20  
 They've the passion to escape.'  
 Moaned the other, 'They are thrown  
 Into some most fearful shape.'  
 But the second mocked his moan:  
 'They are not changed to anything,  
 Having loved God once, but maybe  
 To a poet or a king  
 Or a witty lovely lady.'  
 While he'd rummaged rags and hair,  
 Caught and cracked his flea, the third, 30  
 Giddy with his hundredth year,  
 Sang unnoticed like a bird.

### 123 *Beggar to Beggar cried*

'Time to put off the world and go somewhere  
 And find my health again in the sea air,'  
*Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,*  
 'And make my soul before my pate is bare.'  
 'And get a comfortable wife and house  
 To rid me of the devil in my shoes,'

*Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,*  
 'And the worse devil that is between my thighs.'

'And though I'd marry with a comely lass,  
 She need not be too comely – let it pass,' 10

*Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,*  
 'But there's a devil in a looking-glass.'

'Nor should she be too rich, because the rich  
 Are driven by wealth as beggars by the itch,'  
*Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,*  
 'And cannot have a humorous happy speech.'

'And there I'll grow respected at my ease,  
 And hear amid the garden's nightly peace,'  
*Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,*  
 'The wind-blown clamour of the barnacle-geese.' 20

## 124 *Running to Paradise*

As I came over Windy Gap  
 They threw a halfpenny into my cap,  
 For I am running to Paradise;  
 And all that I need do is to wish  
 And somebody puts his hand in the dish  
 To throw me a bit of salted fish:  
*And there the king is but as the beggar.*

My brother Mourteen is worn out  
 With skelping his big brawling lout,  
 And I am running to Paradise; 10  
 A poor life, do what he can,  
 And though he keep a dog and a gun,  
 A serving-maid and a serving-man:  
*And there the king is but as the beggar.*

Poor men have grown to be rich men,  
 And rich men grown to be poor again,  
 And I am running to Paradise;

And many a darling wit's grown dull  
That tossed a bare heel when at school,  
Now it has filled an old sock full:

20

*And there the king is but as the beggar.*

The wind is old and still at play  
While I must hurry upon my way,  
For I am running to Paradise;  
Yet never have I lit on a friend  
To take my fancy like the wind  
That nobody can buy or bind:  
*And there the king is but as the beggar.*

## 125 *The Hour before Dawn*

A cursing rogue with a merry face,  
A bundle of rags upon a crutch,  
Stumbled upon that windy place  
Called Cruachan,<sup>1</sup> and it was as much  
As the one sturdy leg could do  
To keep him upright while he cursed.  
He had counted, where long years ago  
Queen Maeve's nine Maines had been nursed,  
A pair of lapwings, one old sheep,  
And not a house to the plain's edge,  
When close to his right hand a heap  
Of grey stones and a rocky ledge  
Reminded him that he could make,  
If he but shifted a few stones,  
A shelter till the daylight broke.

10

But while he fumbled with the stones  
They toppled over; 'Were it not  
I have a lucky wooden shin  
I had been hurt'; and toppling brought  
Before his eyes, where stones had been,

20

<sup>1</sup>Pronounced as if spelt 'Crockan' in modern Gaelic.

A dark deep hollow in the rock.  
 He gave a gasp and thought to have fled,  
 Being certain it was no right rock  
 Because an ancient history said  
 Hell Mouth lay open near that place,  
 And yet stood still, because inside  
 A great lad with a beery face  
 Had tucked himself away beside  
 A ladle and a tub of beer,  
 And snored, no phantom by his look. 30  
 So with a laugh at his own fear  
 He crawled into that pleasant nook.

'Night grows uneasy near the dawn  
 Till even I sleep light; but who  
 Has tired of his own company?  
 What one of Maeve's nine brawling sons  
 Sick of his grave has wakened me?  
 But let him keep his grave for once  
 That I may find the sleep I have lost.'

'What care I if you sleep or wake? 40  
 But I'll have no man call me ghost.'

'Say what you please, but from daybreak  
 I'll sleep another century.'

'And I will talk before I sleep  
 And drink before I talk.'

And he  
 Had dipped the wooden ladle deep  
 Into the sleeper's tub of beer  
 Had not the sleeper started up.

'Before you have dipped it in the beer  
 I dragged from Goban's mountain-top 50  
 I'll have assurance that you are able  
 To value beer; no half-legged fool



Shall dip his nose into my ladle  
 Merely for stumbling on this hole  
 In the bad hour before the dawn.'

'Why, beer is only beer.'

'But say

'I'll sleep until the winter's gone,  
 Or maybe to Midsummer Day,"  
 And drink, and you will sleep that length.'

'I'd like to sleep till winter's gone 60  
 Or till the sun is in his strength.  
 This blast has chilled me to the bone.'

'I had no better plan at first.  
 I thought to wait for that or this;  
 Maybe the weather was accursed  
 Or I had no woman there to kiss;  
 So slept for half a year or so;  
 But year by year I found that less  
 Gave me such pleasure I'd forgo  
 Even a half-hour's nothingness, 70  
 And when at one year's end I found  
 I had not waked a single minute,  
 I chose this burrow under ground.  
 I'll sleep away all time within it:  
 My sleep were now nine centuries  
 But for those mornings when I find  
 The lapwing at their foolish cries  
 And the sheep bleating at the wind  
 As when I also played the fool.'

The beggar in a rage began 80  
 Upon his hunkers in the hole,  
 'It's plain that you are no right man  
 To mock at everything I love  
 As if it were not worth the doing.  
 I'd have a merry life enough  
 If a good Easter wind were blowing,  
 And though the winter wind is bad

I should not be too down in the mouth  
 For anything you did or said  
 If but this wind were in the south.'

90

'You cry aloud, O would 'twere spring  
 Or that the wind would shift a point,  
 And do not know that you would bring,  
 If time were suppler in the joint,  
 Neither the spring nor the south wind  
 But the hour when you shall pass away  
 And leave no smoking wick behind,  
 For all life longs for the Last Day

And there's no man but cocks his ear  
 To know when Michael's trumpet cries

100

That flesh and bone may disappear,  
 And souls as if they were but sighs,  
 And there be nothing but God left;

But I alone being blessèd keep  
 Like some old rabbit to my cleft  
 And wait Him in a drunken sleep.'

He dipped his ladle in the tub  
 And drank and yawned and stretched him out,  
 The other shouted, 'You would rob

My life of every pleasant thought

110

And every comfortable thing,  
 And so take that and that.' Thereon

He gave him a great pummelling,  
 But might have pummelled at a stone  
 For all the sleeper knew or cared;

And after heaped up stone on stone,  
 And then, grown weary, prayed and cursed  
 And heaped up stone on stone again,  
 And prayed and cursed and cursed and fled

From Maeve and all that juggling plain,  
 Nor gave God thanks till overhead

120

The clouds were brightening with the dawn.

## 126 *A Song from 'The Player Queen'*

My mother dandled me and sang,  
 'How young it is, how young!'  
 And made a golden cradle  
 That on a willow swung.

'He went away,' my mother sang,  
 'When I was brought to bed,'  
 And all the while her needle pulled  
 The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the thread  
 And made a golden gown, 10  
 And wept because she had dreamt that I  
 Was born to wear a crown.

'When she was got,' my mother sang,  
 'I heard a sea-mew cry,  
 And saw a flake of the yellow foam  
 That dropped upon my thigh.'

How therefore could she help but braid  
 The gold into my hair,  
 And dream that I should carry  
 The golden top of care? 20

## 127 *The Realists*

Hope that you may understand!  
 What can books of men that wive  
 In a dragon-guarded land,  
 Paintings of the dolphin-drawn  
 Sea-nymphs in their pearly wagons  
 Do, but awake a hope to live  
 That had gone  
 With the dragons?

128 I. *The Witch*

Toil and grow rich,  
 What's that but to lie  
 With a foul witch  
 And after, drained dry,  
 To be brought  
 To the chamber where  
 Lies one long sought  
 With despair?

129 II. *The Peacock*

What's riches to him  
 That has made a great peacock  
 With the pride of his eye?  
 The wind-beaten, stone-grey,  
 And desolate Three Rock  
 Would nourish his whim.  
 Live he or die  
 Amid wet rocks and heather,  
 His ghost will be gay  
 Adding feather to feather  
 For the pride of his eye.

10

130 *The Mountain Tomb*

Pour wine and dance if manhood still have pride,  
 Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;  
 The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,  
 Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet  
 That there be no foot silent in the room

Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain; the cataract still cries;  
The everlasting taper lights the gloom; 10  
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes,  
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

### 131 I. *To a Child dancing in the Wind*

Dance there upon the shore;  
What need have you to care  
For wind or water's roar?  
And tumble out your hair  
That the salt drops have wet;  
Being young you have not known  
The fool's triumph, nor yet  
Love lost as soon as won,  
Nor the best labourer dead  
And all the sheaves to bind. 10  
What need have you to dread  
The monstrous crying of wind?

### 132 II. *Two Years Later*

Has no one said those daring  
Kind eyes should be more learn'd?  
Or warned you how despairing  
The moths are when they are burned?  
I could have warned you; but you are young,  
So we speak a different tongue.

O you will take whatever's offered  
And dream that all the world's a friend,  
Suffer as your mother suffered,  
Be as broken in the end. 10

But I am old and you are young,  
And I speak a barbarous tongue.

### 133 *A Memory of Youth*

The moments passed as at a play;  
I had the wisdom love brings forth;  
I had my share of mother-wit,  
And yet for all that I could say,  
And though I had her praise for it,  
A cloud blown from the cut-throat north  
Suddenly hid Love's moon away.

Believing every word I said,  
I praised her body and her mind  
Till pride had made her eyes grow bright,      10  
And pleasure made her cheeks grow red,  
And vanity her footfall light,  
Yet we, for all that praise, could find  
Nothing but darkness overhead.

We sat as silent as a stone,  
We knew, though she'd not said a word,  
That even the best of love must die,  
And had been savagely undone  
Were it not that Love upon the cry  
Of a most ridiculous little bird      20  
Tore from the clouds his marvellous moon.

### 134 *Fallen Majesty*

Although crowds gathered once if she but showed her face,  
And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,  
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping-place  
Babbling of fallen majesty, records what's gone.

The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,  
 These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd  
 Will gather, and not know it walks the very street  
 Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.

## 135 *Friends*

Now must I these three praise –  
 Three women that have wrought  
 What joy is in my days:  
 One because no thought,  
 Nor those unpassing cares,  
 No, not in these fifteen  
 Many-times-troubled years,  
 Could ever come between  
 Mind and delighted mind;  
 And one because her hand 10  
 Had strength that could unbind  
 What none can understand,  
 What none can have and thrive,  
 Youth's dreamy load, till she  
 So changed me that I live  
 Labouring in ecstasy.  
 And what of her that took  
 All till my youth was gone  
 With scarce a pitying look?  
 How could I praise that one? 20  
 When day begins to break  
 I count my good and bad,  
 Being wakeful for her sake,  
 Remembering what she had,  
 What eagle look still shows,  
 While up from my heart's root  
 So great a sweetness flows  
 I shake from head to foot.

## 136 *The Cold Heaven*

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven  
 That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,  
 And thereupon imagination and heart were driven  
 So wild that every casual thought of that and this  
 Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season  
 With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;  
 And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,  
 Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,  
 Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,  
 Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent 10  
 Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken  
 By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

## 137 *That the Night come*

She lived in storm and strife,  
 Her soul had such desire  
 For what proud death may bring  
 That it could not endure  
 The common good of life,  
 But lived as 'twere a king  
 That packed his marriage day  
 With banneret and pennon,  
 Trumpet and kettledrum,  
 And the outrageous cannon, 10  
 To bundle time away  
 That the night come.

## 138 *An Appointment*

Being out of heart with government  
 I took a broken root to fling



Where the proud, wayward squirrel went,  
 Taking delight that he could spring;  
 And he, with that low whinnying sound  
 That is like laughter, sprang again  
 And so to the other tree at a bound.  
 Nor the tame will, nor timid brain,  
 Nor heavy knitting of the brow  
 Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly limb 10  
 And threw him up to laugh on the bough;  
 No government appointed him.

### 139 *The Magi*

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,  
 In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones  
 Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky  
 With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,  
 And all their helmets of silver hovering side by side,  
 And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,  
 Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,  
 The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

### 140 *The Dolls*

A doll in the doll-maker's house  
 Looks at the cradle and bawls:  
 'That is an insult to us.'  
 But the oldest of all the dolls,  
 Who had seen, being kept for show,  
 Generations of his sort,  
 Out-screams the whole shelf: 'Although  
 There's not a man can report  
 Evil of this place,  
 The man and the woman bring 10  
 Hither, to our disgrace,  
 A noisy and filthy thing.'

Hearing him groan and stretch  
The doll-maker's wife is aware  
Her husband has heard the wretch,  
And crouched by the arm of his chair,  
She murmurs into his ear,  
Head upon shoulder leant:  
'My dear, my dear, O dear,  
It was an accident.'

20

### *141 A Coat*

I made my song a coat  
Covered with embroideries  
Out of old mythologies  
From heel to throat;  
But the fools caught it,  
Wore it in the world's eyes  
As though they'd wrought it.  
Song, let them take it,  
For there's more enterprise  
In walking naked.

10

## 142

*While I, from that reed-throated whisperer  
Who comes at need, although not now as once  
A clear articulation in the air,  
But inwardly, surmise companions  
Beyond the fling of the dull ass's hoof,  
— Ben Jonson's phrase — and find when June is come  
At Kyle-na-no under that ancient roof  
A sterner conscience and a friendlier home,  
I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs,  
Those undreamt accidents that have made me  
— Seeing that Fame has perished this long while,  
Being but a part of ancient ceremony —  
Notorious, till all my priceless things  
Are but a post the passing dogs defile.*

The Wild Swans at Coole  
1919



# The Wild Swans at Coole

## 143 *The Wild Swans at Coole*

The trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me  
Since I first made my count;  
I saw, before I had well finished,  
All suddenly mount 10  
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore.  
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
Trode with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
They paddle in the cold 20  
Companionable streams or climb the air;  
Their hearts have not grown old;  
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful;  
Among what rushes will they build,

By what lake's edge or pool  
 Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
 To find they have flown away?

30

*144 In Memory of  
 Major Robert Gregory*

## I

Now that we're almost settled in our house  
 I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us  
 Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient tower,  
 And having talked to some late hour  
 Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed:  
 Discoverers of forgotten truth  
 Or mere companions of my youth,  
 All, all are in my thoughts to-night being dead.

## II

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old  
 And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,  
 And there is salt to lengthen out the smart  
 In the affections of our heart,  
 And quarrels are blown up upon that head;  
 But not a friend that I would bring  
 This night can set us quarrelling,  
 For all that come into my mind are dead.

10

## III

Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,  
 That loved his learning better than mankind,  
 Though courteous to the worst; much falling he  
 Brooded upon sanctity  
 Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed  
 A long blast upon the horn that brought  
 A little nearer to his thought  
 A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

20

## IV

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,  
That dying chose the living world for text  
And never could have rested in the tomb  
But that, long travelling, he had come  
Towards nightfall upon certain set apart  
In a most desolate stony place, 30  
Towards nightfall upon a race  
Passionate and simple like his heart.

## V

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. 40

## VI

They were my close companions many a year,  
A portion of my mind and life, as it were,  
And now their breathless faces seem to look  
Out of some old picture-book;  
I am accustomed to their lack of breath,  
But not that my dear friend's dear son,  
Our Sidney and our perfect man,  
Could share in that discourtesy of death.

## VII

For all things the delighted eye now sees  
Were loved by him; the old storm-broken trees 50  
That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;  
The tower set on the stream's edge;  
The ford where drinking cattle make a stir  
Nightly, and startled by that sound



The water-hen must change her ground;  
 He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

## VIII

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride  
 From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side  
 Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace;  
 At Mooneen he had leaped a place 60  
 So perilous that half the astonished meet  
 Had shut their eyes; and where was it  
 He rode a race without a bit?  
 And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.

## IX

We dreamed that a great painter had been born  
 To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,  
 To that stern colour and that delicate line  
 That are our secret discipline  
 Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might. 70  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 And yet he had the intensity  
 To have published all to be a world's delight.

## X

What other could so well have counselled us  
 In all lovely intricacies of a house  
 As he that practised or that understood  
 All work in metal or in wood,  
 In moulded plaster or in carven stone?  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 And all he did done perfectly  
 As though he had but that one trade alone. 80

## XI

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume  
 The entire combustible world in one small room  
 As though dried straw, and if we turn about  
 The bare chimney is gone black out

Because the work had finished in that flare.  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 As 'twere all life's epitome.  
 What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?

## XII

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind  
 That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind 90  
 All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved  
 Or boyish intellect approved,  
 With some appropriate commentary on each;  
 Until imagination brought  
 A fitter welcome; but a thought  
 Of that late death took all my heart for speech.

145 *An Irish Airman foresees his Death*

I know that I shall meet my fate  
 Somewhere among the clouds above;  
 Those that I fight I do not hate,  
 Those that I guard I do not love;  
 My country is Kiltartan Cross,  
 My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,  
 No likely end could bring them loss  
 Or leave them happier than before.  
 Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
 Nor public men, nor cheering crowds, 10  
 A lonely impulse of delight  
 Drove to this tumult in the clouds;  
 I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
 The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
 A waste of breath the years behind  
 In balance with this life, this death.

146 *Men improve with the Years*

I am worn out with dreams;  
 A weather-worn, marble triton  
 Among the streams;  
 And all day long I look  
 Upon this lady's beauty  
 As though I had found in a book  
 A pictured beauty,  
 Pleased to have filled the eyes  
 Or the discerning ears,  
 Delighted to be but wise,

10

For men improve with the years;  
 And yet, and yet,  
 Is this my dream, or the truth?  
 O would that we had met  
 When I had my burning youth!  
 But I grow old among dreams,  
 A weather-worn, marble triton  
 Among the streams.

147 *The Collar-bone of a Hare*

Would I could cast a sail on the water  
 Where many a king has gone  
 And many a king's daughter,  
 And alight at the comely trees and the lawn,  
 The playing upon pipes and the dancing,  
 And learn that the best thing is  
 To change my loves while dancing  
 And pay but a kiss for a kiss.

I would find by the edge of that water  
 The collar-bone of a hare  
 Worn thin by the lapping of water,

10

And pierce it through with a gimlet and stare  
 At the old bitter world where they marry in churches,  
 And laugh over the untroubled water  
 At all who marry in churches,  
 Through the white thin bone of a hare.

## 148 *Under the Round Tower*

'Although I'd lie lapped up in linen  
 A deal I'd sweat and little earn  
 If I should live as live the neighbours,'  
 Cried the beggar, Billy Byrne;  
 'Stretch bones till the daylight come  
 On great-grandfather's battered tomb.'

Upon a grey old battered tombstone  
 In Glendalough beside the stream,  
 Where the O'Byrnes and Byrnes are buried,  
 He stretched his bones and fell in a dream  
 Of sun and moon that a good hour  
 Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;

10

Of golden king and silver lady,  
 Bellowing up and bellowing round,  
 Till toes mastered a sweet measure,  
 Mouth mastered a sweet sound,  
 Prancing round and prancing up  
 Until they pranced upon the top.

That golden king and that wild lady  
 Sang till stars began to fade,  
 Hands gripped in hands, toes close together,  
 Hair spread on the wind they made;  
 That lady and that golden king  
 Could like a brace of blackbirds sing.

20

'It's certain that my luck is broken,'  
 That rambling jailbird Billy said;  
 'Before nightfall I'll pick a pocket

And snug it in a feather-bed.  
 I cannot find the peace of home  
 On great-grandfather's battered tomb.' 30

### 149 *Solomon to Sheba*

Sang Solomon to Sheba,  
 And kissed her dusky face,  
 'All day long from mid-day  
 We have talked in the one place,  
 All day long from shadowless noon  
 We have gone round and round  
 In the narrow theme of love  
 Like an old horse in a pound.'

To Solomon sang Sheba,  
 Planted on his knees, 10  
 'If you had broached a matter  
 That might the learned please,  
 You had before the sun had thrown  
 Our shadows on the ground  
 Discovered that my thoughts, not it,  
 Are but a narrow pound.'

Said Solomon to Sheba,  
 And kissed her Arab eyes,  
 'There's not a man or woman  
 Born under the skies 20  
 Dare match in learning with us two,  
 And all day long we have found  
 There's not a thing but love can make  
 The world a narrow pound.'

### 150 *The Living Beauty*

I bade, because the wick and oil are spent  
 And frozen are the channels of the blood,

My discontented heart to draw content  
 From beauty that is cast out of a mould  
 In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,  
 Appears, but when we have gone is gone again,  
 Being more indifferent to our solitude  
 Than 'twere an apparition. O heart, we are old;  
 The living beauty is for younger men:  
 We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.

10

### 151 A Song

I thought no more was needed  
 Youth to prolong  
 Than dumb-bell and foil  
 To keep the body young.  
*O who could have foretold  
 That the heart grows old?*

Though I have many words,  
 What woman's satisfied,  
 I am no longer faint  
 Because at her side?  
*O who could have foretold  
 That the heart grows old?*

10

I have not lost desire  
 But the heart that I had;  
 I thought 'twould burn my body  
 Laid on the death-bed,  
*For who could have foretold  
 That the heart grows old?*

### 152 To a Young Beauty

Dear fellow-artist, why so free  
 With every sort of company,  
 With every Jack and Jill?

Choose your companions from the best;  
 Who draws a bucket with the rest  
 Soon topples down the hill.

You may, that mirror for a school,  
 Be passionate, not bountiful  
 As common beauties may,  
 Who were not born to keep in trim  
 With old Ezekiel's cherubim  
 But those of Beauvarlet.

10

I know what wages beauty gives,  
 How hard a life her servant lives,  
 Yet praise the winters gone:  
 There is not a fool can call me friend,  
 And I may dine at journey's end  
 With Landor and with Donne.

### 153 *To a Young Girl*

My dear, my dear, I know  
 More than another  
 What makes your heart beat so;  
 Not even your own mother  
 Can know it as I know,  
 Who broke my heart for her  
 When the wild thought,  
 That she denies  
 And has forgot,  
 Set all her blood astir  
 And glittered in her eyes.

10

### 154 *The Scholars*

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,  
 Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
 Edit and annotate the lines

That young men, tossing on their beds,  
 Rhymed out in love's despair  
 To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;  
 All wear the carpet with their shoes;  
 All think what other people think;  
 All know the man their neighbour knows. 10  
 Lord, what would they say  
 Did their Catullus walk that way?

### 155 *Tom O'Roughley*

'Though logic-choppers rule the town,  
 And every man and maid and boy  
 Has marked a distant object down,  
 An aimless joy is a pure joy,'  
 Or so did Tom O'Roughley say  
 That saw the surges running by,  
 'And wisdom is a butterfly  
 And not a gloomy bird of prey.

'If little planned is little sinned  
 But little need the grave distress. 10  
 What's dying but a second wind?  
 How but in zig-zag wantonness  
 Could trumpeter Michael be so brave?'  
 Or something of that sort he said,  
 'And if my dearest friend were dead  
 I'd dance a measure on his grave.'

### 156 *Shepherd and Goatherd*

*Shepherd.* That cry's from the first cuckoo of the year.  
 I wished before it ceased.



*Goatherd.* Nor bird nor beast  
 Could make me wish for anything this day,  
 Being old, but that the old alone might die,  
 And that would be against God's Providence.  
 Let the young wish. But what has brought you here?  
 Never until this moment have we met  
 Where my goats browse on the scarce grass or leap  
 From stone to stone.

*Shepherd.* I am looking for strayed sheep;  
 Something has troubled me and in my trouble 10  
 I let them stray. I thought of rhyme alone,  
 For rhyme can beat a measure out of trouble  
 And make the daylight sweet once more; but when  
 I had driven every rhyme into its place  
 The sheep had gone from theirs.

*Goatherd.* I know right well  
 What turned so good a shepherd from his charge.

*Shepherd.* He that was best in every country sport  
 And every country craft, and of us all  
 Most courteous to slow age and hasty youth,  
 Is dead. 20

*Goatherd.* The boy that brings my griddle-cake  
 Brought the bare news.

*Shepherd.* He had thrown the crook away  
 And died in the great war beyond the sea.

*Goatherd.* He had often played his pipes among my hills,  
 And when he played it was their loneliness,  
 The exultation of their stone, that cried  
 Under his fingers.

*Shepherd.* I had it from his mother,  
 And his own flock was browsing at the door.

*Goatherd.* How does she bear her grief? There is not a  
 shepherd  
 But grows more gentle when he speaks her name,

Remembering kindness done, and how can I, 30  
 That found when I had neither goat nor grazing  
 New welcome and old wisdom at her fire  
 Till winter blasts were gone, but speak of her  
 Even before his children and his wife.

*Shepherd.* She goes about her house erect and calm  
 Between the pantry and the linen-chest,  
 Or else at meadow or at grazing overlooks  
 Her labouring men, as though her darling lived,  
 But for her grandson now; there is no change  
 But such as I have seen upon her face 40  
 Watching our shepherd sports at harvest-time  
 When her son's turn was over.

*Goatherd.* Sing your song.  
 I too have rhymed my reveries, but youth  
 Is hot to show whatever it has found,  
 And till that's done can neither work nor wait.  
 Old goatherds and old goats, if in all else  
 Youth can excel them in accomplishment,  
 Are learned in waiting.

*Shepherd.* You cannot but have seen  
 That he alone had gathered up no gear,  
 Set carpenters to work on no wide table, 50  
 On no long bench nor lofty milking shed  
 As others will, when first they take possession,  
 But left the house as in his father's time  
 As though he knew himself, as it were, a cuckoo,  
 No settled man. And now that he is gone  
 There's nothing of him left but half a score  
 Of sorrowful, austere, sweet, lofty pipe tunes.

*Goatherd.* You have put the thought in rhyme.

*Shepherd.* I worked all day,  
 And when 'twas done so little had I done  
 That maybe 'I am sorry' in plain prose 60  
 Had sounded better to your mountain fancy.

[*He sings.*]

'Like the speckled bird that steers  
 Thousands of leagues oversea,  
 And runs or a while half-flies  
 On his yellow legs through our meadows,  
 He stayed for a while; and we  
 Had scarcely accustomed our ears  
 To his speech at the break of day,  
 Had scarcely accustomed our eyes  
 To his shape at the rinsing pool  
 Among the evening shadows,  
 When he vanished from ears and eyes.  
 I might have wished on the day  
 He came, but man is a fool.'

70

*Goatherd.* You sing as always of the natural life,  
 And I that made like music in my youth  
 Hearing it now have sighed for that young man  
 And certain lost companions of my own.

*Shepherd.* 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.

*Goatherd.* Indeed  
 My daily thoughts since the first stupor of youth  
 Have found the path my goats' feet cannot find.

*Shepherd.* Sing, for it may be that your thoughts have  
 plucked  
 Some medicable herb to make our grief  
 Less bitter.

*Goatherd.* They have brought me from that ridge  
 Seed-pods and flowers that are not all wild poppy.

[Sings.]

'He grows younger every second  
 That were all his birthdays reckoned  
 Much too solemn seemed;  
 Because of what he had dreamed,

90

Or the ambitions that he served,  
 Much too solemn and reserved.  
 Jaunting, journeying  
 To his own dayspring,  
 He unpacks the loaded pern  
 Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,  
 Of all that he had made.  
 The outrageous war shall fade; 100  
 At some old winding whitethorn root  
 He'll practise on the shepherd's flute,  
 Or on the close-cropped grass  
 Court his shepherd lass,  
 Or put his heart into some game  
 Till daytime, playtime seem the same;  
 Knowledge he shall unwind  
 Through victories of the mind,  
 Till, clambering at the cradle-side,  
 He dreams himself his mother's pride, 110  
 All knowledge lost in trance  
 Of sweeter ignorance.'

*Shepherd.* When I have shut these ewes and this old ram  
 Into the fold, we'll to the woods and there  
 Cut out our rhymes on strips of new-torn bark  
 But put no name and leave them at her door.  
 To know the mountain and the valley have grieved  
 May be a quiet thought to wife and mother,  
 And children when they spring up shoulder-high.

## 157 *Lines written in Dejection*

When have I last looked on  
 The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies  
 Of the dark leopards of the moon?  
 All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,  
 For all their broom-sticks and their tears,  
 Their angry tears, are gone.

The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;  
 I have nothing but the embittered sun;  
 Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,  
 And now that I have come to fifty years 10  
 I must endure the timid sun.

## 158 *The Dawn*

I would be ignorant as the dawn  
 That has looked down  
 On that old queen measuring a town  
 With the pin of a brooch,  
 Or on the withered men that saw  
 From their pedantic Babylon  
 The careless planets in their courses,  
 The stars fade out where the moon comes,  
 And took their tablets and did sums;  
 I would be ignorant as the dawn 10  
 That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach  
 Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses;  
 I would be – for no knowledge is worth a straw –  
 Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.

## 159 *On Woman*

May God be praised for woman  
 That gives up all her mind,  
 A man may find in no man  
 A friendship of her kind  
 That covers all he has brought  
 As with her flesh and bone,  
 Nor quarrels with a thought  
 Because it is not her own.

Though pedantry denies,  
 It's plain the Bible means 10

That Solomon grew wise  
While talking with his queens,  
Yet never could, although  
They say he counted grass,  
Count all the praises due  
When Sheba was his lass,  
When she the iron wrought, or  
When from the smithy fire  
It shuddered in the water:  
Harshness of their desire 20  
That made them stretch and yawn,  
Pleasure that comes with sleep,  
Shudder that made them one.  
What else He give or keep  
God grant me – no, not here,  
For I am not so bold  
To hope a thing so dear  
Now I am growing old,  
But when, if the tale's true,  
The Pestle of the moon 30  
That pounds up all anew  
Brings me to birth again –  
To find what once I had  
And know what once I have known,  
Until I am driven mad,  
Sleep driven from my bed,  
By tenderness and care,  
Pity, an aching head,  
Gnashing of teeth, despair;  
And all because of some one 40  
Perverse creature of chance,  
And live like Solomon  
That Sheba led a dance.

160 *The Fisherman*

Although I can see him still,  
 The freckled man who goes  
 To a grey place on a hill  
 In grey Connemara clothes  
 At dawn to cast his flies,  
 It's long since I began  
 To call up to the eyes  
 This wise and simple man.  
 All day I'd looked in the face  
 What I had hoped 'twould be 10  
 To write for my own race  
 And the reality;  
 The living men that I hate,  
 The dead man that I loved,  
 The craven man in his seat,  
 The insolent unreprieved,  
 And no knave brought to book  
 Who has won a drunken cheer,  
 The witty man and his joke  
 Aimed at the commonest ear, 20  
 The clever man who cries  
 The catch-cries of the clown,  
 The beating down of the wise  
 And great Art beaten down.  
  
 Maybe a twelvemonth since  
 Suddenly I began,  
 In scorn of this audience,  
 Imagining a man,  
 And his sun-freckled face,  
 And grey Connemara cloth, 30  
 Climbing up to a place  
 Where stone is dark under froth,  
 And the down-turn of his wrist

When the flies drop in the stream;  
 A man who does not exist,  
 A man who is but a dream;  
 And cried, 'Before I am old  
 I shall have written him one  
 Poem maybe as cold  
 And passionate as the dawn.'

40

## 161 *The Hawk*

'Call down the hawk from the air;  
 Let him be hooded or caged  
 Till the yellow eye has grown mild,  
 For larder and spit are bare,  
 The old cook enraged,  
 The scullion gone wild.'

'I will not be clapped in a hood,  
 Nor a cage, nor alight upon wrist,  
 Now I have learnt to be proud  
 Hovering over the wood  
 In the broken mist  
 Or tumbling cloud.'

10

'What tumbling cloud did you cleave,  
 Yellow-eyed hawk of the mind,  
 Last evening? that I, who had sat  
 Dumbfounded before a knave,  
 Should give to my friend  
 A pretence of wit.'

## 162 *Memory*

One had a lovely face,  
 And two or three had charm,  
 But charm and face were in vain



Because the mountain grass  
 Cannot but keep the form  
 Where the mountain hare has lain.

### 163 *Her Praise*

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.  
 I have gone about the house, gone up and down  
 As a man does who has published a new book,  
 Or a young girl dressed out in her new gown,  
 And though I have turned the talk by hook or crook  
 Until her praise should be the uppermost theme,  
 A woman spoke of some new tale she had read,  
 A man confusedly in a half dream  
 As though some other name ran in his head.  
 She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.                    10  
 I will talk no more of books or the long war  
 But walk by the dry thorn until I have found  
 Some beggar sheltering from the wind, and there  
 Manage the talk until her name come round.  
 If there be rags enough he will know her name  
 And be well pleased remembering it, for in the old days,  
 Though she had young men's praise and old men's blame,  
 Among the poor both old and young gave her praise.

### 164 *The People*

'What have I earned for all that work,' I said,  
 'For all that I have done at my own charge?  
 The daily spite of this unmannerly town,  
 Where who has served the most is most defamed,  
 The reputation of his lifetime lost  
 Between the night and morning. I might have lived,  
 And you know well how great the longing has been,  
 Where every day my footfall should have lit  
 In the green shadow of Ferrara wall;

Or climbed among the images of the past – 10  
 The unperturbed and courtly images –  
 Evening and morning, the steep street of Urbino  
 To where the duchess and her people talked  
 The stately midnight through until they stood  
 In their great window looking at the dawn;  
 I might have had no friend that could not mix  
 Courtesy and passion into one like those  
 That saw the wicks grow yellow in the dawn;  
 I might have used the one substantial right  
 My trade allows: chosen my company, 20  
 And chosen what scenery had pleased me best.  
 Thereon my phoenix answered in reproof,  
 ‘The drunkards, pilferers of public funds,  
 All the dishonest crowd I had driven away,  
 When my luck changed and they dared meet my face,  
 Crawled from obscurity, and set upon me  
 Those I had served and some that I had fed;  
 Yet never have I, now nor any time,  
 Complained of the people.’

All I could reply  
 Was: ‘You, that have not lived in thought but deed, 30  
 Can have the purity of a natural force,  
 But I, whose virtues are the definitions  
 Of the analytic mind, can neither close  
 The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech.’  
 And yet, because my heart leaped at her words,  
 I was abashed, and now they come to mind  
 After nine years, I sink my head abashed.

## 165 *His Phoenix*

There is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain,  
 And birthdays and holidays such praises can be heard  
 Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no stain,  
 That she might be that sprightly girl trodden by a bird;

And there's a score of duchesses, surpassing womankind,  
 Or who have found a painter to make them so for pay  
 And smooth out stain and blemish with the elegance of his  
 mind:

I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day.

The young men every night applaud their Gaby's laughing  
 eye,

And Ruth St. Denis had more charm although she had 10  
 poor luck;

From nineteen hundred nine or ten, Pavlova's had the cry,  
 And there's a player in the States who gathers up her cloak  
 And flings herself out of the room when Juliet would be bride  
 With all a woman's passion, a child's imperious way,  
 And there are – but no matter if there are scores beside:  
 I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day.

There's Margaret and Marjorie and Dorothy and Nan,  
 A Daphne and a Mary who live in privacy;

One's had her fill of lovers, another's had but one,  
 Another boasts, 'I pick and choose and have but two or 20  
 three.'

If head and limb have beauty and the instep's high and light  
 They can spread out what sail they please for all I have to say,  
 Be but the breakers of men's hearts or engines of delight:  
 I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day.

There'll be that crowd, that barbarous crowd, through all the  
 centuries,

And who can say but some young belle may walk and talk men  
 wild

Who is my beauty's equal, though that my heart denies,  
 But not the exact likeness, the simplicity of a child,  
 And that proud look as though she had gazed into the  
 burning sun,

And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray. 30  
 I mourn for that most lonely thing; and yet God's will be done:  
 I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day.

166 *A Thought from Propertius*

She might, so noble from head  
 To great shapely knees  
 The long flowing line,  
 Have walked to the altar  
 Through the holy images  
 At Pallas Athena's side,  
 Or been fit spoil for a centaur  
 Drunk with the unmixed wine.

167 *Broken Dreams*

There is grey in your hair.  
 Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath  
 When you are passing;  
 But maybe some old gaffer mutters a blessing  
 Because it was your prayer  
 Recovered him upon the bed of death.  
 For your sole sake – that all heart's ache have known,  
 And given to others all heart's ache,  
 From meagre girlhood's putting on  
 Burdensome beauty – for your sole sake 10  
 Heaven has put away the stroke of her doom,  
 So great her portion in that peace you make  
 By merely walking in a room.

Your beauty can but leave among us  
 Vague memories, nothing but memories.  
 A young man when the old men are done talking  
 Will say to an old man, 'Tell me of that lady  
 The poet stubborn with his passion sang us  
 When age might well have chilled his blood.'

Vague memories, nothing but memories, 20  
 But in the grave all, all, shall be renewed.

The certainty that I shall see that lady  
 Leaning or standing or walking  
 In the first loveliness of womanhood,  
 And with the fervour of my youthful eyes,  
 Has set me muttering like a fool.

You are more beautiful than any one,  
 And yet your body had a flaw:  
 Your small hands were not beautiful,  
 And I am afraid that you will run 30  
 And paddle to the wrist  
 In that mysterious, always brimming lake  
 Where those that have obeyed the holy law  
 Paddle and are perfect. Leave unchanged  
 The hands that I have kissed,  
 For old sake's sake.

The last stroke of midnight dies.  
 All day in the one chair  
 From dream to dream and rhyme to rhyme I have ranged  
 In rambling talk with an image of air: 40  
 Vague memories, nothing but memories.

## 168 *A Deep-sworn Vow*

Others because you did not keep  
 That deep-sworn vow have been friends of mine;  
 Yet always when I look death in the face,  
 When I clamber to the heights of sleep,  
 Or when I grow excited with wine,  
 Suddenly I meet your face.

## 169 *Presences*

This night has been so strange that it seemed  
 As if the hair stood up on my head.  
 From going-down of the sun I have dreamed

That women laughing, or timid or wild,  
In rustle of lace or silken stuff,  
Climbed up my creaking stair. They had read  
All I had rhymed of that monstrous thing  
Returned and yet unrequited love.  
They stood in the door and stood between  
My great wood lectern and the fire  
Till I could hear their hearts beating: 10  
One is a harlot, and one a child  
That never looked upon man with desire,  
And one, it may be, a queen.

170 *The Balloon of the Mind*

Hands, do what you're bid:  
Bring the balloon of the mind  
That bellies and drags in the wind  
Into its narrow shed.

171 *To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-no*

Come play with me;  
Why should you run  
Through the shaking tree  
As though I'd a gun  
To strike you dead?  
When all I would do  
Is to scratch your head  
And let you go.

172 *On being asked for a War Poem*

I think it better that in times like these  
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth  
We have no gift to set a statesman right;

He has had enough of meddling who can please  
 A young girl in the indolence of her youth,  
 Or an old man upon a winter's night.

### 173 *In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen*

Five-and-twenty years have gone  
 Since old William Pollexfen  
 Laid his strong bones down in death  
 By his wife Elizabeth  
 In the grey stone tomb he made.  
 And after twenty years they laid  
 In that tomb by him and her  
 His son George, the astrologer;  
 And Masons drove from miles away  
 To scatter the Acacia spray 10  
 Upon a melancholy man  
 Who had ended where his breath began.  
 Many a son and daughter lies  
 Far from the customary skies,  
 The Mall and Eades's grammar school,  
 In London or in Liverpool;  
 But where is laid the sailor John  
 That so many lands had known,  
 Quiet lands or unquiet seas  
 Where the Indians trade or Japanese? 20  
 He never found his rest ashore,  
 Moping for one voyage more.  
 Where have they laid the sailor John?  
 And yesterday the youngest son,  
 A humorous, unambitious man,  
 Was buried near the astrologer,  
 Yesterday in the tenth year  
 Since he who had been contented long,  
 A nobody in a great throng,  
 Decided he must journey home, 30  
 Now that his fiftieth year had come,

And 'Mr. Alfred' be again  
 Upon the lips of common men  
 Who carried in their memory  
 His childhood and his family.  
 At all these death-beds women heard  
 A visionary white sea-bird  
 Lamenting that a man should die;  
 And with that cry I have raised my cry.

## *Upon a Dying Lady*

### *174 I. Her Courtesy*

With the old kindness, the old distinguished grace,  
 She lies, her lovely piteous head amid dull red hair  
 Propped upon pillows, rouge on the pallor of her face.  
 She would not have us sad because she is lying there,  
 And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter-lit,  
 Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her,  
 Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,  
 Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter.

### *175 II. Certain Artists bring her Dolls and Drawings*

Bring where our Beauty lies  
 A new modelled doll, or drawing,  
 With a friend's or an enemy's  
 Features, or maybe showing  
 Her features when a tress  
 Of dull red hair was flowing  
 Over some silken dress  
 Cut in the Turkish fashion,



Or, it may be, like a boy's.  
 We have given the world our passion, 10  
 We have naught for death but toys.

176 III. *She turns the Dolls' Faces  
 to the Wall*

Because to-day is some religious festival  
 They had a priest say Mass, and even the Japanese,  
 Heel up and weight on toe, must face the wall  
 – Pedant in passion, learned in old courtesies,  
 Vehement and witty she had seemed – ; the Venetian lady  
 Who had seemed to glide to some intrigue in her red shoes,  
 Her domino, her panniered skirt copied from Longhi;  
 The meditative critic; all are on their toes,  
 Even our Beauty with her Turkish trousers on.  
 Because the priest must have like every dog his day 10  
 Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,  
 We and our dolls being but the world were best away.

177 IV. *The End of Day*

She is playing like a child  
 And penance is the play,  
 Fantastical and wild  
 Because the end of day  
 Shows her that some one soon  
 Will come from the house, and say –  
 Though play is but half done –  
 'Come in and leave the play.'

178 V. *Her Race*

She has not grown uncivil  
 As narrow natures would

And called the pleasures evil  
 Happier days thought good;  
 She knows herself a woman,  
 No red and white of a face,  
 Or rank, raised from a common  
 Unreckonable race;  
 And how should her heart fail her  
 Or sickness break her will  
 With her dead brother's valour  
 For an example still?

10

### 179 VI. *Her Courage*

When her soul flies to the predestined dancing-place  
 (I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made  
 Amid the dreams of youth) let her come face to face,  
 Amid that first astonishment, with Grania's shade,  
 All but the terrors of the woodland flight forgot  
 That made her Diarmuid dear, and some old cardinal  
 Pacing with half-closed eyelids in a sunny spot  
 Who had murmured of Giorgione at his latest breath –  
 Aye, and Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim, all  
 Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of Death. 10

### 180 VII. *Her Friends bring her a Christmas Tree*

Pardon, great enemy,  
 Without an angry thought  
 We've carried in our tree,  
 And here and there have bought  
 Till all the boughs are gay,  
 And she may look from the bed  
 On pretty things that may  
 Please a fantastic head.

Give her a little grace,  
 What if a laughing eye  
 Have looked into your face?  
 It is about to die.

10

## 181 *Ego Dominus Tuus*

*Hic.* On the grey sand beside the shallow stream  
 Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still  
 A lamp burns on beside the open book  
 That Michael Robartes left, you walk in the moon  
 And though you have passed the best of life still trace,  
 Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,  
 Magical shapes.

*Ille.* By the help of an image  
 I call to my own opposite, summon all  
 That I have handled least, least looked upon.

*Hic.* And I would find myself and not an image.

10

*Ille.* That is our modern hope and by its light  
 We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind  
 And lost the old nonchalance of the hand;  
 Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush,  
 We are but critics, or but half create,  
 Timid, entangled, empty and abashed,  
 Lacking the countenance of our friends.

*Hic.* And yet

The chief imagination of Christendom,  
 Dante Alighieri, so utterly found himself  
 That he has made that hollow face of his  
 More plain to the mind's eye than any face  
 But that of Christ.

20

*Ille.* And did he find himself  
 Or was the hunger that had made it hollow  
 A hunger for the apple on the bough

Most out of reach? and is that spectral image  
 The man that Lapo and that Guido knew?  
 I think he fashioned from his opposite  
 An image that might have been a stony face  
 Staring upon a Bedouin's horse-hair roof  
 From doored and windowed cliff, or half upturned 30  
 Among the coarse grass and the camel-dung.  
 He set his chisel to the hardest stone.  
 Being mocked by Guido for his lecherous life,  
 Derided and deriding, driven out  
 To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread,  
 He found the unpersuadable justice, he found  
 The most exalted lady loved by a man.

*Hic.* Yet surely there are men who have made their art  
 Out of no tragic war, lovers of life,  
 Impulsive men that look for happiness 40  
 And sing when they have found it.

*Ille.* No, not sing,  
 For those that love the world serve it in action,  
 Grow rich, popular and full of influence,  
 And should they paint or write, still it is action:  
 The struggle of the fly in marmalade.  
 The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,  
 The sentimentalist himself; while art  
 Is but a vision of reality.  
 What portion in the world can the artist have  
 Who has awakened from the common dream 50  
 But dissipation and despair?

*Hic.* And yet  
 No one denies to Keats love of the world;  
 Remember his deliberate happiness.

*Ille.* His art is happy, but who knows his mind?  
 I see a schoolboy when I think of him,  
 With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,  
 For certainly he sank into his grave  
 His senses and his heart unsatisfied,

And made – being poor, ailing and ignorant,  
 Shut out from all the luxury of the world,  
 The coarse-bred son of a livery-stable keeper –  
 Luxuriant song. 60

*Hic.* Why should you leave the lamp  
 Burning alone beside an open book,  
 And trace these characters upon the sands?  
 A style is found by sedentary toil  
 And by the imitation of great masters.

*Ille.* Because I seek an image, not a book.  
 Those men that in their writings are most wise  
 Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.  
 I call to the mysterious one who yet 70  
 Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream  
 And look most like me, being indeed my double,  
 And prove of all imaginable things  
 The most unlike, being my anti-self,  
 And standing by these characters disclose  
 All that I seek; and whisper it as though  
 He were afraid the birds, who cry aloud  
 Their momentary cries before it is dawn,  
 Would carry it away to blasphemous men.

## 182 *A Prayer on going into my House*

God grant a blessing on this tower and cottage  
 And on my heirs, if all remain unspoiled,  
 No table or chair or stool not simple enough  
 For shepherd lads in Galilee; and grant  
 That I myself for portions of the year  
 May handle nothing and set eyes on nothing  
 But what the great and passionate have used  
 Throughout so many varying centuries  
 We take it for the norm; yet should I dream  
 Sinbad the sailor's brought a painted chest, 10  
 Or image, from beyond the Loadstone Mountain,

That dream is a norm; and should some limb of the devil  
 Destroy the view by cutting down an ash  
 That shades the road, or setting up a cottage  
 Planned in a government office, shorten his life,  
 Manacle his soul upon the Red Sea bottom.

## 183 *The Phases of the Moon*

*An old man cocked his ear upon a bridge;  
 He and his friend, their faces to the South,  
 Had trod the uneven road. Their boots were soiled,  
 Their Connemara cloth worn out of shape;  
 They had kept a steady pace as though their beds,  
 Despite a dwindling and late risen moon,  
 Were distant still. An old man cocked his ear.*

*Aherne.* What made that sound?

*Robartes.*

A rat or water-hen

Splashed, or an otter slid into the stream.

We are on the bridge; that shadow is the tower,

10

And the light proves that he is reading still.

He has found, after the manner of his kind,

Mere images; chosen this place to live in

Because, it may be, of the candle-light

From the far tower where Milton's Platonist

Sat late, or Shelley's visionary prince:

The lonely light that Samuel Palmer engraved,

An image of mysterious wisdom won by toil;

And now he seeks in book or manuscript

What he shall never find.

20

*Aherne.*

Why should not you

Who know it all ring at his door, and speak

Just truth enough to show that his whole life

Will scarcely find for him a broken crust

Of all those truths that are your daily bread;

And when you have spoken take the roads again?

*Robartes.* He wrote of me in that extravagant style  
 He had learned from Pater, and to round his tale  
 Said I was dead; and dead I choose to be.

*Aherne.* Sing me the changes of the moon once more;  
 True song, though speech: 'mine author sung it  
 me'. 30

*Robartes.* Twenty-and-eight the phases of the moon,  
 The full and the moon's dark and all the crescents,  
 Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty  
 The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in;  
 For there's no human life at the full or the dark.  
 From the first crescent to the half, the dream  
 But summons to adventure, and the man  
 Is always happy like a bird or a beast;  
 But while the moon is rounding towards the full  
 He follows whatever whim's most difficult 40  
 Among whims not impossible, and though scarred,  
 As with the cat-o'-nine-tails of the mind,  
 His body moulded from within his body  
 Grows comelier. Eleven pass, and then  
 Athena takes Achilles by the hair,  
 Hector is in the dust, Nietzsche is born,  
 Because the hero's crescent is the twelfth.  
 And yet, twice born, twice buried, grow he must,  
 Before the full moon, helpless as a worm.  
 The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war 50  
 In its own being, and when that war's begun  
 There is no muscle in the arm; and after,  
 Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon,  
 The soul begins to tremble into stillness,  
 To die into the labyrinth of itself!

*Aherne.* Sing out the song; sing to the end, and sing  
 The strange reward of all that discipline.

*Robartes.* All thought becomes an image and the soul  
 Becomes a body: that body and that soul  
 Too perfect at the full to lie in a cradle, 60

Too lonely for the traffic of the world:  
 Body and soul cast out and cast away  
 Beyond the visible world.

*Aherne.* All dreams of the soul  
 End in a beautiful man's or woman's body.

*Robartes.* Have you not always known it?

*Aherne.* The song will have it  
 That those that we have loved got their long fingers  
 From death, and wounds, or on Sinai's top,  
 Or from some bloody whip in their own hands.  
 They ran from cradle to cradle till at last  
 Their beauty dropped out of the loneliness  
 Of body and soul.

70

*Robartes.* The lover's heart knows that.

*Aherne.* It must be that the terror in their eyes  
 Is memory or foreknowledge of the hour  
 When all is fed with light and heaven is bare.

*Robartes.* When the moon's full those creatures of the  
 full

Are met on the waste hills by country men  
 Who shudder and hurry by: body and soul  
 Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves,  
 Caught up in contemplation, the mind's eye  
 Fixed upon images that once were thought,  
 For perfected, completed, and immovable  
 Images can break the solitude  
 Of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes.

80

*And thereupon with aged, high-pitched voice  
 Aherne laughed, thinking of the man within,  
 His sleepless candle and laborious pen.*

*Robartes.* And after that the crumbling of the moon:  
 The soul remembering its loneliness  
 Shudders in many cradles; all is changed.  
 It would be the world's servant, and as it serves,

90



Choosing whatever task's most difficult  
 Among tasks not impossible, it takes  
 Upon the body and upon the soul  
 The coarseness of the drudge.

*Aherne.* Before the full  
 It sought itself and afterwards the world.

*Robartes.* Because you are forgotten, half out of life,  
 And never wrote a book, your thought is clear.  
 Reformer, merchant, statesman, learned man,  
 Dutiful husband, honest wife by turn,  
 Cradle upon cradle, and all in flight and all 100  
 Deformed, because there is no deformity  
 But saves us from a dream.

*Aherne.* And what of those  
 That the last servile crescent has set free?

*Robartes.* Because all dark, like those that are all light,  
 They are cast beyond the verge, and in a cloud,  
 Crying to one another like the bats;  
 But having no desire they cannot tell  
 What's good or bad, or what it is to triumph  
 At the perfection of one's own obedience;  
 And yet they speak what's blown into the mind; 110  
 Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,  
 Insipid as the dough before it is baked,  
 They change their bodies at a word.

*Aherne.* And then?

*Robartes.* When all the dough has been so kneaded up  
 That it can take what form cook Nature fancies,  
 The first thin crescent is wheeled round once more.

*Aherne.* But the escape; the song's not finished yet.

*Robartes.* Hunchback and Saint and Fool are the last  
 crescents.  
 The burning bow that once could shoot an arrow  
 Out of the up and down, the wagon-wheel 120

Of beauty's cruelty and wisdom's chatter –  
 Out of that raving tide – is drawn betwixt  
 Deformity of body and of mind.

*Aherne.* Were not our beds far off I'd ring the bell,  
 Stand under the rough roof-timbers of the hall  
 Beside the castle door, where all is stark  
 Austerity, a place set out for wisdom  
 That he will never find; I'd play a part;  
 He would never know me after all these years  
 But take me for some drunken country man;  
 I'd stand and mutter there until he caught  
 'Hunchback and Saint and Fool', and that they  
 came

130

Under the three last crescents of the moon,  
 And then I'd stagger out. He'd crack his wits  
 Day after day, yet never find the meaning.

*And then he laughed to think that what seemed hard  
 Should be so simple – a bat rose from the hazels  
 And circled round him with its squeaky cry,  
 The light in the tower window was put out.*

## 184 *The Cat and the Moon*

The cat went here and there  
 And the moon spun round like a top,  
 And the nearest kin of the moon,  
 The creeping cat, looked up.  
 Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,  
 For, wander and wail as he would,  
 The pure cold light in the sky  
 Troubled his animal blood.  
 Minnaloushe runs in the grass  
 Lifting his delicate feet.  
 Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?  
 When two close kindred meet,  
 What better than call a dance?

10

Maybe the moon may learn,  
 Tired of that courtly fashion,  
 A new dance turn.  
 Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
 From moonlit place to place,  
 The sacred moon overhead  
 Has taken a new phase. 20  
 Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils  
 Will pass from change to change,  
 And that from round to crescent,  
 From crescent to round they range?  
 Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
 Alone, important and wise,  
 And lifts to the changing moon  
 His changing eyes.

## 185 *The Saint and the Hunchback*

*Hunchback.* Stand up and lift your hand and bless  
 A man that finds great bitterness  
 In thinking of his lost renown.  
 A Roman Caesar is held down  
 Under this hump.

*Saint.* God tries each man  
 According to a different plan.  
 I shall not cease to bless because  
 I lay about me with the taws  
 That night and morning I may thrash  
 Greek Alexander from my flesh, 10  
 Augustus Caesar, and after these  
 That great rogue Alcibiades.

*Hunchback.* To all that in your flesh have stood  
 And blessed, I give my gratitude,  
 Honoured by all in their degrees,  
 But most to Alcibiades.

186 *Two Songs of a Fool*

## I

A speckled cat and a tame hare  
 Eat at my hearthstone  
 And sleep there;  
 And both look up to me alone  
 For learning and defence  
 As I look up to Providence.

I start out of my sleep to think  
 Some day I may forget  
 Their food and drink;  
 Or, the house door left unshut, 10  
 The hare may run till it's found  
 The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

I bear a burden that might well try  
 Men that do all by rule,  
 And what can I  
 That am a wandering-witted fool  
 But pray to God that He ease  
 My great responsibilities?

## II

I slept on my three-legged stool by the fire,  
 The speckled cat slept on my knee;  
 We never thought to enquire  
 Where the brown hare might be,  
 And whether the door were shut.  
 Who knows how she drank the wind  
 Stretched up on two legs from the mat,  
 Before she had settled her mind  
 To drum with her heel and to leap?  
 Had I but awakened from sleep 10

And called her name, she had heard,  
 It may be, and had not stirred,  
 That now, it may be, has found  
 The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

## 187 *Another Song of a Fool*

This great purple butterfly,  
 In the prison of my hands,  
 Has a learning in his eye  
 Not a poor fool understands.

Once he lived a schoolmaster  
 With a stark, denying look;  
 A string of scholars went in fear  
 Of his great birch and his great book.

Like the clangour of a bell,  
 Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet,  
 That is how he learnt so well  
 To take the roses for his meat.

10

## 188 *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*

### I

On the grey rock of Cashel the mind's eye  
 Has called up the cold spirits that are born  
 When the old moon is vanished from the sky  
 And the new still hides her horn.

Under blank eyes and fingers never still  
 The particular is pounded till it is man.  
 When had I my own will?  
 O not since life began.

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent  
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood, 10  
Themselves obedient,  
Knowing not evil and good;

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.  
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,  
So dead beyond our death,  
Triumph that we obey.

## 11

On the grey rock of Cashel I suddenly saw  
A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw,  
A Buddha, hand at rest,  
Hand lifted up that blest; 20

And right between these two a girl at play  
That, it may be, had danced her life away,  
For now being dead it seemed  
That she of dancing dreamed.

Although I saw it all in the mind's eye  
There can be nothing solidier till I die;  
I saw by the moon's light  
Now at its fifteenth night.

One lashed her tail; her eyes lit by the moon  
Gazed upon all things known, all things unknown, 30  
In triumph of intellect  
With motionless head erect.

That other's moonlit eyeballs never moved,  
Being fixed on all things loved, all things unloved,  
Yet little peace he had,  
For those that love are sad.

O little did they care who danced between,  
And little she by whom her dance was seen  
So she had outdanced thought.  
Body perfection brought, 40

For what but eye and ear silence the mind  
 With the minute particulars of mankind?  
 Mind moved yet seemed to stop  
 As 'twere a spinning-top.

In contemplation had those three so wrought  
 Upon a moment, and so stretched it out  
 That they, time overthrown,  
 Were dead yet flesh and bone.

## III

I knew that I had seen, had seen at last  
 That girl my unremembering nights hold fast 50  
 Or else my dreams that fly  
 If I should rub an eye,

And yet in flying fling into my meat  
 A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat  
 As though I had been undone  
 By Homer's Paragon

Who never gave the burning town a thought;  
 To such a pitch of folly I am brought,  
 Being caught between the pull  
 Of the dark moon and the full, 60

The commonness of thought and images  
 That have the frenzy of our western seas.  
 Thereon I made my moan,  
 And after kissed a stone,

And after that arranged it in a song  
 Seeing that I, ignorant for so long,  
 Had been rewarded thus  
 In Cormac's ruined house.

**Michael Robartes  
and the Dancer  
1921**





# Michael Robartes and the Dancer

## 189 *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*

*He.* Opinion is not worth a rush;  
In this altar-piece the knight,  
Who grips his long spear so to push  
That dragon through the fading light,  
Loved the lady; and it's plain  
The half-dead dragon was her thought,  
That every morning rose again  
And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.  
Could the impossible come to pass  
She would have time to turn her eyes,                     10  
Her lover thought, upon the glass  
And on the instant would grow wise.

*She.* You mean they argued.

*He.*   Put it so;  
But bear in mind your lover's wage  
Is what your looking-glass can show,  
And that he will turn green with rage  
At all that is not pictured there.

*She.* May I not put myself to college?

*He.* Go pluck Athena by the hair;  
For what mere book can grant a knowledge                     20  
With an impassioned gravity  
Appropriate to that beating breast,  
That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?  
And may the devil take the rest.

*She.* And must no beautiful woman be  
Learned like a man?

*He.* Paul Veronese  
 And all his sacred company  
 Imagined bodies all their days  
 By the lagoon you love so much,  
 For proud, soft, ceremonious proof 30  
 That all must come to sight and touch;  
 While Michael Angelo's Sistine roof,  
 His 'Morning' and his 'Night' disclose  
 How sinew that has been pulled tight,  
 Or it may be loosened in repose,  
 Can rule by supernatural right  
 Yet be but sinew.

*She.* I have heard said  
 There is great danger in the body.

*He.* Did God in portioning wine and bread  
 Give man His thought or His mere body? 40

*She.* My wretched dragon is perplexed.

*He.* I have principles to prove me right.  
 It follows from this Latin text  
 That blest souls are not composite,  
 And that all beautiful women may  
 Live in uncomposite blessedness,  
 And lead us to the like – if they  
 Will banish every thought, unless  
 The lineaments that please their view  
 When the long looking-glass is full, 50  
 Even from the foot-sole think it too.

*She.* They say such different things at school.

## 190 *Solomon and the Witch*

And thus declared that Arab lady:  
 'Last night, where under the wild moon  
 On grassy mattress I had laid me,

Within my arms great Solomon,  
I suddenly cried out in a strange tongue  
Not his, not mine.'

Who understood  
Whatever has been said, sighed, sung,  
Howled, miau-d, barked, brayed, belled, yelled,  
cried, crowed,

Thereon replied: 'A cockerel  
Crew from a blossoming apple bough 10  
Three hundred years before the Fall,  
And never crew again till now,  
And would not now but that he thought,  
Chance being at one with Choice at last,  
All that the brigand apple brought  
And this foul world were dead at last.  
He that crowed out eternity  
Thought to have crowed it in again.  
For though love has a spider's eye  
To find out some appropriate pain – 20  
Aye, though all passion's in the glance –  
For every nerve, and tests a lover  
With cruelties of Choice and Chance;  
And when at last that murder's over  
Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,  
For each an imagined image brings  
And finds a real image there;  
Yet the world ends when these two things,  
Though several, are a single light,  
When oil and wick are burned in one; 30  
Therefore a blessed moon last night  
Gave Sheba to her Solomon.'

'Yet the world stays.'

'If that be so,  
Your cockerel found us in the wrong  
Although he thought it worth a crow.  
Maybe an image is too strong  
Or maybe is not strong enough.'

'The night has fallen; not a sound  
 In the forbidden sacred grove  
 Unless a petal hit the ground,  
 Nor any human sight within it  
 But the crushed grass where we have lain;  
 And the moon is wilder every minute.  
 O! Solomon! let us try again.'

40

## 191 *An Image from a Past Life*

*He.* Never until this night have I been stirred.  
 The elaborate star-light throws a reflection  
 On the dark stream,  
 Till all the eddies gleam;  
 And thereupon there comes that scream  
 From terrified, invisible beast or bird:  
 Image of poignant recollection.

*She.* An image of my heart that is smitten through  
 Out of all likelihood, or reason,  
 And when at last,  
 Youth's bitterness being past,  
 I had thought that all my days were cast  
 Amid most lovely places; smitten as though  
 It had not learned its lesson.

10

*He.* Why have you laid your hands upon my eyes?  
 What can have suddenly alarmed you  
 Whereon 'twere best  
 My eyes should never rest?  
 What is there but the slowly fading west,  
 The river imaging the flashing skies,  
 All that to this moment charmed you?

20

*She.* A sweetheart from another life floats there  
 As though she had been forced to linger  
 From vague distress  
 Or arrogant loveliness,

Merely to loosen out a tress  
 Among the starry eddies of her hair  
 Upon the paleness of a finger.

*He.* But why should you grow suddenly afraid  
 And start – I at your shoulder – 30  
 Imagining  
 That any night could bring  
 An image up, or anything  
 Even to eyes that beauty had driven mad,  
 But images to make me fonder?

*She.* Now she has thrown her arms above her head;  
 Whether she threw them up to flout me,  
 Or but to find,  
 Now that no fingers bind,  
 That her hair streams upon the wind, 40  
 I do not know, that know I am afraid  
 Of the hovering thing night brought me.

## 192 *Under Saturn*

Do not because this day I have grown saturnine  
 Imagine that lost love, inseparable from my thought  
 Because I have no other youth, can make me pine;  
 For how should I forget the wisdom that you brought,  
 The comfort that you made? Although my wits have gone  
 On a fantastic ride, my horse's flanks are spurred  
 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. 10  
 You heard that labouring man who had served my people.

He said

Upon the open road, near to the Sligo quay –  
 No, no, not said, but cried it out – 'You have come again,  
 And surely after twenty years it was time to come.'

I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain  
 Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.

*November 1919*

## 193 *Easter, 1916*

I have met them at close of day  
 Coming with vivid faces  
 From counter or desk among grey  
 Eighteenth-century houses.  
 I have passed with a nod of the head  
 Or polite meaningless words,  
 Or have lingered awhile and said  
 Polite meaningless words,  
 And thought before I had done  
 Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
 To please a companion  
 Around the fire at the club,  
 Being certain that they and I  
 But lived where motley is worn:  
 All changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent  
 In ignorant good-will,  
 Her nights in argument  
 Until her voice grew shrill.  
 What voice more sweet than hers  
 When, young and beautiful,  
 She rode to harriers?  
 This man had kept a school  
 And rode our wingèd horse;  
 This other his helper and friend  
 Was coming into his force;  
 He might have won fame in the end,  
 So sensitive his nature seemed,  
 So daring and sweet his thought.

10

20

30

This other man I had dreamed  
 A drunken, vainglorious lout.  
 He had done most bitter wrong  
 To some who are near my heart,  
 Yet I number him in the song;  
 He, too, has resigned his part  
 In the casual comedy;  
 He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
 Transformed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born.

40

Hearts with one purpose alone  
 Through summer and winter seem  
 Enchanted to a stone  
 To trouble the living stream.  
 The horse that comes from the road,  
 The rider, the birds that range  
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
 Minute by minute they change;  
 A shadow of cloud on the stream  
 Changes minute by minute;

50

A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
 And a horse plashes within it;  
 The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
 And hens to moor-cocks call;  
 Minute by minute they live:  
 The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice  
 Can make a stone of the heart.  
 O when may it suffice?  
 That is Heaven's part, our part

60

To murmur name upon name,  
 As a mother names her child  
 When sleep at last has come  
 On limbs that had run wild.  
 What is it but nightfall?  
 No, no, not night but death;  
 Was it needless death after all?



For England may keep faith  
 For all that is done and said.  
 We know their dream; enough 70  
 To know they dreamed and are dead;  
 And what if excess of love  
 Bewildered them till they died?  
 I write it out in a verse –  
 MacDonagh and MacBride  
 And Connolly and Pearse  
 Now and in time to be,  
 Wherever green is worn,  
 Are changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born. 80

*September 25, 1916*

## 194 *Sixteen Dead Men*

O but we talked at large before  
 The sixteen men were shot,  
 But who can talk of give and take,  
 What should be and what not  
 While those dead men are loitering there  
 To stir the boiling pot?  
  
 You say that we should still the land  
 Till Germany's overcome;  
 But who is there to argue that  
 Now Pearse is deaf and dumb? 10  
 And is their logic to outweigh  
 MacDonagh's bony thumb?  
  
 How could you dream they'd listen  
 That have an ear alone  
 For those new comrades they have found,  
 Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,  
 Or meddle with our give and take  
 That converse bone to bone?

195 *The Rose Tree*

'O words are lightly spoken,'  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
'Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree;  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea.'

'It needs to be but watered,'  
James Connolly replied,  
'To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side, 10  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden's pride.'

'But where can we draw water,'  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
'When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.'

196 *On a Political Prisoner*

She that but little patience knew,  
From childhood on, had now so much  
A grey gull lost its fear and flew  
Down to her cell and there alit,  
And there endured her fingers' touch  
And from her fingers ate its bit.

Did she in touching that lone wing  
Recall the years before her mind  
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,

Her thought some popular enmity: 10  
 Blind and leader of the blind  
 Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?

When long ago I saw her ride  
 Under Ben Bulben to the meet,  
 The beauty of her country-side  
 With all youth's lonely wildness stirred,  
 She seemed to have grown clean and sweet  
 Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird:

Sea-borne, or balanced on the air  
 When first it sprang out of the nest 20  
 Upon some lofty rock to stare  
 Upon the cloudy canopy,  
 While under its storm-beaten breast  
 Cried out the hollows of the sea.

## 197 *The Leaders of the Crowd*

They must to keep their certainty accuse  
 All that are different of a base intent;  
 Pull down established honour; hawk for news  
 Whatever their loose phantasy invent  
 And murmur it with bated breath, as though  
 The abounding gutter had been Helicon  
 Or calumny a song. How can they know  
 Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone,  
 And there alone, that have no solitude?  
 So the crowd come they care not what may come. 10  
 They have loud music, hope every day renewed  
 And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.

198 *Towards Break of Day*

Was it the double of my dream  
 The woman that by me lay  
 Dreamed, or did we halve a dream  
 Under the first cold gleam of day?

I thought: 'There is a waterfall  
 Upon Ben Bulben side  
 That all my childhood counted dear;  
 Were I to travel far and wide  
 I could not find a thing so dear.'  
 My memories had magnified  
 So many times childish delight.

10

I would have touched it like a child  
 But knew my finger could but have touched  
 Cold stone and water. I grew wild  
 Even accusing Heaven because  
 It had set down among its laws:  
 Nothing that we love over-much  
 Is ponderable to our touch.

I dreamed towards break of day,  
 The cold blown spray in my nostril.  
 But she that beside me lay  
 Had watched in bitterer sleep  
 The marvellous stag of Arthur,  
 That lofty white stag, leap  
 From mountain steep to steep.

20

199 *Demon and Beast*

For certain minutes at the least  
 That crafty demon and that loud beast  
 That plague me day and night

Ran out of my sight;  
 Though I had long perned in the gyre,  
 Between my hatred and desire,  
 I saw my freedom won  
 And all laugh in the sun.

The glittering eyes in a death's head  
 Of old Luke Wadding's portrait said 10  
 Welcome, and the Ormondes all  
 Nodded upon the wall,  
 And even Strafford smiled as though  
 It made him happier to know  
 I understood his plan.  
 Now that the loud beast ran  
 There was no portrait in the Gallery  
 But beckoned to sweet company,  
 For all men's thoughts grew clear  
 Being dear as mine are dear. 20

But soon a tear-drop started up,  
 For aimless joy had made me stop  
 Beside the little lake  
 To watch a white gull take  
 A bit of bread thrown up into the air;  
 Now gyring down and perning there  
 He splashed where an absurd  
 Portly green-pated bird  
 Shook off the water from his back; 30  
 Being no more demoniac  
 A stupid happy creature  
 Could rouse my whole nature.

Yet I am certain as can be  
 That every natural victory  
 Belongs to beast or demon,  
 That never yet had freeman  
 Right mastery of natural things,  
 And that mere growing old, that brings  
 Chilled blood, this sweetness brought;

Yet have no dearer thought  
 Than that I may find out a way  
 To make it linger half a day. 40

O what a sweetness strayed  
 Through barren Thebaid,  
 Or by the Mareotic sea  
 When that exultant Anthony  
 And twice a thousand more  
 Starved upon the shore  
 And withered to a bag of bones!  
 What had the Caesars but their thrones? 50

## 200 *The Second Coming*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand. 10  
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
 The darkness drops again; but now I know  
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, 20  
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

201 *A Prayer for my Daughter*

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid  
 Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
 My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
 But Gregory's wood and one bare hill  
 Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,  
 Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
 And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
 Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour  
 And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower, 10  
 And under the arches of the bridge, and scream  
 In the elms above the flooded stream;  
 Imagining in excited reverie  
 That the future years had come,  
 Dancing to a frenzied drum,  
 Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not  
 Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
 Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,  
 Being made beautiful overmuch, 20  
 Consider beauty a sufficient end,  
 Lose natural kindness and maybe  
 The heart-revealing intimacy  
 That chooses right, and never find a friend.

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull  
 And later had much trouble from a fool,  
 While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,  
 Being fatherless could have her way  
 Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.  
 It's certain that fine women eat 30  
 A crazy salad with their meat  
 Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;  
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned  
By those that are not entirely beautiful;  
Yet many, that have played the fool  
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,  
And many a poor man that has roved,  
Loved and thought himself beloved,  
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes. 40

May she become a flourishing hidden tree  
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,  
And have no business but dispensing round  
Their magnanimities of sound,  
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,  
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.  
O may she live like some green laurel  
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,  
The sort of beauty that I have approved, 50  
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,  
Yet knows that to be choked with hate  
May well be of all evil chances chief.  
If there's no hatred in a mind  
Assault and battery of the wind  
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,  
So let her think opinions are accursed.  
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born  
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn, 60  
Because of her opinionated mind  
Barter that horn and every good  
By quiet natures understood  
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,



And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;  
 She can, though every face should scowl 70  
 And every windy quarter howl  
 Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
 Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;  
 For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
 Peddled in the thoroughfares.  
 How but in custom and in ceremony  
 Are innocence and beauty born?  
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree. 80

*June 1919*

## 202 *A Meditation in Time of War*

For one throb of the artery,  
 While on that old grey stone I sat  
 Under the old wind-broken tree,  
 I knew that One is animate,  
 Mankind inanimate phantasy.

## 203 *To be carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee*

I, the poet William Yeats,  
 With old mill boards and sea-green slates,  
 And smithy work from the Gort forge,  
 Restored this tower for my wife George;  
 And may these characters remain  
 When all is ruin once again.

The Tower  
1928



# The Tower

## 204 *Sailing to Byzantium*

### I

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
– Those dying generations – at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.

### II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

10

### III

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

20

## IV

Once out of nature I shall never take  
 My bodily form from any natural thing,  
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

1927

205 *The Tower*

## I

What shall I do with this absurdity –  
 O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,  
 Decrepit age that has been tied to me  
 As to a dog's tail?

Never had I more  
 Excited, passionate, fantastical  
 Imagination, nor an ear and eye  
 That more expected the impossible –  
 No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,  
 Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulbin's back  
 And had the livelong summer day to spend. 10  
 It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,  
 Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend  
 Until imagination, ear and eye,  
 Can be content with argument and deal  
 In abstract things; or be derided by  
 A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

## II

I pace upon the battlements and stare  
 On the foundations of a house, or where

Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;  
And send imagination forth 20  
Under the day's declining beam, and call  
Images and memories  
From ruin or from ancient trees,  
For I would ask a question of them all.

Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French, and once  
When every silver candlestick or scone  
Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine,  
A serving-man, that could divine  
That most respected lady's every wish,  
Ran and with the garden shears 30  
Clipped an insolent farmer's ears  
And brought them in a little covered dish.

Some few remembered still when I was young  
A peasant girl commended by a song,  
Who'd lived somewhere upon that rocky place,  
And praised the colour of her face,  
And had the greater joy in praising her,  
Remembering that, if walked she there,  
Farmers jostled at the fair  
So great a glory did the song confer. 40

And certain men, being maddened by those rhymes,  
Or else by toasting her a score of times,  
Rose from the table and declared it right  
To test their fancy by their sight;  
But they mistook the brightness of the moon  
For the prosaic light of day –  
Music had driven their wits astray –  
And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone.

Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;  
Yet, now I have considered it, I find 50  
That nothing strange; the tragedy began  
With Homer that was a blind man,

And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.  
 O may the moon and sunlight seem  
 One inextricable beam,  
 For if I triumph I must make men mad.

And I myself created Hanrahan  
 And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn  
 From somewhere in the neighbouring cottages.  
 Caught by an old man's juggleries 60  
 He stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and fro  
 And had but broken knees for hire  
 And horrible splendour of desire;  
 I thought it all out twenty years ago:

Good fellows shuffled cards in an old bawn;  
 And when that ancient ruffian's turn was on  
 He so bewitched the cards under his thumb  
 That all but the one card became  
 A pack of hounds and not a pack of cards,  
 And that he changed into a hare. 70  
 Hanrahan rose in frenzy there  
 And followed up those baying creatures towards –

O towards I have forgotten what – enough!  
 I must recall a man that neither love  
 Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear  
 Could, he was so harried, cheer;  
 A figure that has grown so fabulous  
 There's not a neighbour left to say  
 When he finished his dog's day:  
 An ancient bankrupt master of this house. 80

Before that ruin came, for centuries,  
 Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees  
 Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs,  
 And certain men-at-arms there were  
 Whose images, in the Great Memory stored,  
 Come with loud cry and panting breast  
 To break upon a sleeper's rest  
 While their great wooden dice beat on the board.

As I would question all, come all who can;  
 Come old, necessitous, half-mounted man; 90  
 And bring beauty's blind rambling celebrant;  
 The red man the juggler sent  
 Through God-forsaken meadows; Mrs. French,  
 Gifted with so fine an ear;  
 The man drowned in a bog's mire,  
 When mocking muses chose the country wench.

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,  
 Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,  
 Whether in public or in secret rage  
 As I do now against old age? 100  
 But I have found an answer in those eyes  
 That are impatient to be gone;  
 Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,  
 For I need all his mighty memories.

Old lecher with a love on every wind,  
 Bring up out of that deep considering mind  
 All that you have discovered in the grave,  
 For it is certain that you have  
 Reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing  
 Plunge, lured by a softening eye, 110  
 Or by a touch or a sigh,  
 Into the labyrinth of another's being;

Does the imagination dwell the most  
 Upon a woman won or woman lost?  
 If on the lost, admit you turned aside  
 From a great labyrinth out of pride,  
 Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought  
 Or anything called conscience once;  
 And that if memory recur, the sun's  
 Under eclipse and the day blotted out. 120



## III

It is time that I wrote my will;  
 I choose upstanding men  
 That climb the streams until  
 The fountain leap, and at dawn  
 Drop their cast at the side  
 Of dripping stone; I declare  
 They shall inherit my pride,  
 The pride of people that were  
 Bound neither to Cause nor to State,  
 Neither to slaves that were spat on, 130  
 Nor to the tyrants that spat,  
 The people of Burke and of Grattan  
 That gave, though free to refuse –  
 Pride, like that of the morn,  
 When the headlong light is loose,  
 Or that of the fabulous horn,  
 Or that of the sudden shower  
 When all streams are dry,  
 Or that of the hour  
 When the swan must fix his eye 140  
 Upon a fading gleam,  
 Float out upon a long  
 Last reach of glittering stream  
 And there sing his last song.  
 And I declare my faith:  
 I mock Plotinus' thought  
 And cry in Plato's teeth,  
 Death and life were not  
 Till man made up the whole,  
 Made lock, stock and barrel 150  
 Out of his bitter soul,  
 Aye, sun and moon and star, all,  
 And further add to that  
 That, being dead, we rise,  
 Dream and so create  
 Translunar Paradise.

I have prepared my peace  
 With learned Italian things  
 And the proud stones of Greece,  
 Poet's imaginings 160  
 And memories of love,  
 Memories of the words of women,  
 All those things whereof  
 Man makes a superhuman  
 Mirror-resembling dream.

As at the loophole there  
 The daws chatter and scream,  
 And drop twigs layer upon layer.  
 When they have mounted up,  
 The mother bird will rest 170  
 On their hollow top,  
 And so warm her wild nest.

I leave both faith and pride  
 To young upstanding men  
 Climbing the mountain side,  
 That under bursting dawn  
 They may drop a fly;  
 Being of that metal made  
 Till it was broken by  
 This sedentary trade. 180

Now shall I make my soul,  
 Compelling it to study  
 In a learned school  
 Till the wreck of body,  
 Slow decay of blood,  
 Testy delirium  
 Or dull decrepitude,  
 Or what worse evil come –  
 The death of friends, or death  
 Of every brilliant eye 190  
 That made a catch in the breath –

Seem but the clouds of the sky  
 When the horizon fades;  
 Or a bird's sleepy cry  
 Among the deepening shades.

1926

## *Meditations in Time of Civil War*

### 206 I. *Ancestral Houses*

Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,  
 Amid the rustle of his planted hills,  
 Life overflows without ambitious pains;  
 And rains down life until the basin spills,  
 And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains  
 As though to choose whatever shape it will  
 And never stoop to a mechanical  
 Or servile shape, at others' beck and call.

Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet Homer had not sung  
 Had he not found it certain beyond dreams 10  
 That out of life's own self-delight had sprung  
 The abounding glittering jet; though now it seems  
 As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung  
 Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,  
 And not a fountain, were the symbol which  
 Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man  
 Called architect and artist in, that they,  
 Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone  
 The sweetness that all longed for night and day, 20  
 The gentleness none there had ever known;  
 But when the master's buried mice can play,  
 And maybe the great-grandson of that house,  
 For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.

O what if gardens where the peacock strays  
 With delicate feet upon old terraces,  
 Or else all Juno from an urn displays  
 Before the indifferent garden deities;  
 O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways  
 Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease 30  
 And Childhood a delight for every sense,  
 But take our greatness with our violence?

What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,  
 And buildings that a haughtier age designed,  
 The pacing to and fro on polished floors  
 Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined  
 With famous portraits of our ancestors;  
 What if those things the greatest of mankind  
 Consider most to magnify, or to bless,  
 But take our greatness with our bitterness? 40

## 207 II. *My House*

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,  
 A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,  
 An acre of stony ground,  
 Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,  
 Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,  
 The sound of the rain or sound  
 Of every wind that blows;  
 The stilted water-hen  
 Crossing stream again  
 Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows; 10

A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,  
 A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,  
 A candle and written page.  
*Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on  
 In some like chamber, shadowing forth  
 How the daemonic rage

Imagined everything.  
 Benighted travellers  
 From markets and from fairs  
 Have seen his midnight candle glimmering. 20

Two men have founded here. A man-at-arms  
 Gathered a score of horse and spent his days  
 In this tumultuous spot,  
 Where through long wars and sudden night alarms  
 His dwindling score and he seemed castaways  
 Forgetting and forgot;  
 And I, that after me  
 My bodily heirs may find,  
 To exalt a lonely mind,  
 Befitting emblems of adversity. 30

### 208 III. *My Table*

Two heavy trestles, and a board  
 Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,  
 By pen and paper lies,  
 That it may moralise  
 My days out of their aimlessness.  
 A bit of an embroidered dress  
 Covers its wooden sheath.  
 Chaucer had not drawn breath  
 When it was forged. In Sato's house,  
 Curved like new moon, moon-luminous, 10  
 It lay five hundred years.  
 Yet if no change appears  
 No moon; only an aching heart  
 Conceives a changeless work of art.  
 Our learned men have urged  
 That when and where 'twas forged  
 A marvellous accomplishment,  
 In painting or in pottery, went  
 From father unto son

And through the centuries ran 20  
 And seemed unchanging like the sword.  
 Soul's beauty being most adored,  
 Men and their business took  
 The soul's unchanging look;  
 For the most rich inheritor,  
 Knowing that none could pass Heaven's door  
 That loved inferior art,  
 Had such an aching heart  
 That he, although a country's talk  
 For silken clothes and stately walk, 30  
 Had waking wits; it seemed  
 Juno's peacock screamed.

## 209 IV. *My Descendants*

Having inherited a vigorous mind  
 From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams  
 And leave a woman and a man behind  
 As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems  
 Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,  
 Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,  
 But the torn petals strew the garden plot;  
 And there's but common greenness after that.

And what if my descendants lose the flower  
 Through natural declension of the soul, 10  
 Through too much business with the passing hour,  
 Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?  
 May this laborious stair and this stark tower  
 Become a roofless ruin that the owl  
 May build in the cracked masonry and cry  
 Her desolation to the desolate sky.

The Primum Mobile that fashioned us  
 Has made the very owls in circles move;  
 And I, that count myself most prosperous,  
 Seeing that love and friendship are enough, 20

For an old neighbour's friendship chose the house  
 And decked and altered it for a girl's love,  
 And know whatever flourish and decline  
 These stones remain their monument and mine.

## 210 v. *The Road at My Door*

An affable Irregular,  
 A heavily-built Falstaffian man,  
 Comes cracking jokes of civil war  
 As though to die by gunshot were  
 The finest play under the sun.

A brown Lieutenant and his men,  
 Half dressed in national uniform,  
 Stand at my door, and I complain  
 Of the foul weather, hail and rain,  
 A pear tree broken by the storm.

10

I count those feathered balls of soot  
 The moor-hen guides upon the stream,  
 To silence the envy in my thought;  
 And turn towards my chamber, caught  
 In the cold snows of a dream.

## 211 VI. *The Stare's Nest by My Window*

The bees build in the crevices  
 Of loosening masonry, and there  
 The mother birds bring grubs and flies.  
 My wall is loosening; honey-bees,  
 Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
 On our uncertainty; somewhere  
 A man is killed, or a house burned,  
 Yet no clear fact to be discerned:  
 Come build in the empty house of the stare. 10

A barricade of stone or of wood;  
 Some fourteen days of civil war;  
 Last night they trundled down the road  
 That dead young soldier in his blood:  
 Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
 The heart's grown brutal from the fare;  
 More substance in our enmities  
 Than in our love; O honey-bees,  
 Come build in the empty house of the stare. 20

212 VII. *I see Phantoms of Hatred  
 and of the Heart's Fullness  
 and of the Coming Emptiness*

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,  
 A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,  
 Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon  
 That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,  
 A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind  
 And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.  
 Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;  
 Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

'Vengeance upon the murderers,' the cry goes up,  
 'Vengeance for Jacques Molay.' In cloud-pale rags, or in 10  
 lace,

The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop,  
 Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at face,



Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide  
 For the embrace of nothing; and I, my wits astray  
 Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried  
 For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.

Their legs long, delicate and slender, aquamarine their eyes,  
 Magical unicorns bear ladies on their backs.  
 The ladies close their musing eyes. No prophecies,  
 Remembered out of Babylonian almanacs, 20  
 Have closed the ladies' eyes, their minds are but a pool  
 Where even longing drowns under its own excess;  
 Nothing but stillness can remain when hearts are full  
 Of their own sweetness, bodies of their loveliness.

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,  
 The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud or of lace,  
 Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made lean,  
 Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place  
 To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,  
 Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone, 30  
 Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,  
 The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon.

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair  
 Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth  
 In something that all others understand or share;  
 But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth  
 A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,  
 It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,  
 The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,  
 Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy. 40

1923

## 213 *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*

### I

Many ingenious lovely things are gone  
 That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,

Protected from the circle of the moon  
 That pitches common things about. There stood  
 Amid the ornamental bronze and stone  
 An ancient image made of olive wood –  
 And gone are Phidias' famous ivories  
 And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

We too had many pretty toys when young;  
 A law indifferent to blame or praise, 10  
 To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong  
 Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;  
 Public opinion ripening for so long  
 We thought it would outlive all future days.  
 O what fine thought we had because we thought  
 That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

All teeth were drawn, all ancient tricks unlearned,  
 And a great army but a showy thing;  
 What matter that no cannon had been turned  
 Into a ploughshare? Parliament and king 20  
 Thought that unless a little powder burned  
 The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting  
 And yet it lack all glory; and perchance  
 The guardsmen's drowsy chargers would not prance.

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;  
 The night can sweat with terror as before  
 We pieced our thoughts into philosophy, 30  
 And planned to bring the world under a rule,  
 Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned  
 Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant  
 From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,  
 Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent

On master-work of intellect or hand,  
 No honour leave its mighty monument,  
 Has but one comfort left: all triumph would  
 But break upon his ghostly solitude.

40

But is there any comfort to be found?  
 Man is in love and loves what vanishes,  
 What more is there to say? That country round  
 None dared admit, if such a thought were his,  
 Incendiary or bigot could be found  
 To burn that stump on the Acropolis,  
 Or break in bits the famous ivories  
 Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

## II

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound  
 A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,  
 It seemed that a dragon of air  
 Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round  
 Or hurried them off on its own furious path;  
 So the Platonic Year  
 Whirls out new right and wrong,  
 Whirls in the old instead;  
 All men are dancers and their tread  
 Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

50

## III

Some moralist or mythological poet  
 Compares the solitary soul to a swan;  
 I am satisfied with that,  
 Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,  
 Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,  
 An image of its state;  
 The wings half spread for flight,  
 The breast thrust out in pride  
 Whether to play, or to ride  
 Those winds that clamour of approaching night.

60

A man in his own secret meditation  
 Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made 70  
 In art or politics;  
 Some Platonist affirms that in the station  
 Where we should cast off body and trade  
 The ancient habit sticks,  
 And that if our works could  
 But vanish with our breath  
 That were a lucky death,  
 For triumph can but mar our solitude.

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:  
 That image can bring wildness, bring a rage 80  
 To end all things, to end  
 What my laborious life imagined, even  
 The half-imagined, the half-written page;  
 O but we dreamed to mend  
 Whatever mischief seemed  
 To afflict mankind, but now  
 That winds of winter blow  
 Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

## IV

We, who seven years ago  
 Talked of honour and of truth, 90  
 Shriek with pleasure if we show  
 The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

## V

Come let us mock at the great  
 That had such burdens on the mind  
 And toiled so hard and late  
 To leave some monument behind,  
 Nor thought of the levelling wind.

Come let us mock at the wise;  
 With all those calendars whercon

They fixed old aching eyes, 100  
 They never saw how seasons run,  
 And now but gape at the sun.

Come let us mock at the good  
 That fancied goodness might be gay,  
 And sick of solitude  
 Might proclaim a holiday:  
 Wind shrieked – and where are they?

Mock mockers after that  
 That would not lift a hand maybe  
 To help good, wise or great 110  
 To bar that foul storm out, for we  
 Traffic in mockery.

## VI

Violence upon the roads: violence of horses;  
 Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded  
 On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane,  
 But wearied running round and round in their courses  
 All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:  
 Herodias' daughters have returned again,  
 A sudden blast of dusty wind and after  
 Thunder of feet, tumult of images, 120  
 Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;  
 And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter  
 All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,  
 According to the wind, for all are blind.  
 But now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon  
 There lurches past, his great eyes without thought  
 Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,  
 That insolent fiend Robert Artisson  
 To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought  
 Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks. 130

214 *The Wheel*

Through winter-time we call on spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
And when abounding hedges ring  
Declare that winter's best of all;  
And after that there's nothing good  
Because the spring-time has not come –  
Nor know what disturbs our blood  
Is but its longing for the tomb.

215 *Youth and Age*

Much did I rage when young,  
Being by the world oppressed,  
But now with flattering tongue  
It speeds the parting guest.

1924

216 *The New Faces*

If you, that have grown old, were the first dead,  
Neither catalpa tree nor scented lime  
Should hear my living feet, nor would I tread  
Where we wrought that shall break the teeth of Time.  
Let the new faces play what tricks they will  
In the old rooms; night can outbalance day,  
Our shadows rove the garden gravel still,  
The living seem more shadowy than they.

217 *A Prayer for my Son*

Bid a strong ghost stand at the head  
 That my Michael may sleep sound,  
 Nor cry, not turn in the bed  
 Till his morning meal come round;  
 And may departing twilight keep  
 All dread afar till morning's back,  
 That his mother may not lack  
 Her fill of sleep.

Bid the ghost have sword in fist:  
 Some there are, for I avow 10  
 Such devilish things exist,  
 Who have planned his murder, for they know  
 Of some most haughty deed or thought  
 That waits upon his future days,  
 And would through hatred of the bays  
 Bring that to nought.

Though You can fashion everything  
 From nothing every day, and teach  
 The morning stars to sing,  
 You have lacked articulate speech 20  
 To tell Your simplest want, and known,  
 Wailing upon a woman's knee,  
 All of that worst ignominy  
 Of flesh and bone;

And when through all the town there ran  
 The servants of Your enemy,  
 A woman and a man,  
 Unless the Holy Writings lie,  
 Hurried through the smooth and rough  
 And through the fertile and waste, 30  
 Protecting, till the danger past,  
 With human love.

218 *Two Songs from a Play*

## I

I saw a staring virgin stand  
 Where holy Dionysus died,  
 And tear the heart out of his side,  
 And lay the heart upon her hand  
 And bear that beating heart away;  
 And then did all the Muses sing  
 Of Magnus Annus at the spring,  
 As though God's death were but a play.

Another Troy must rise and set,  
 Another lineage feed the crow,  
 Another Argo's painted prow  
 Drive to a flashier bauble yet.  
 The Roman Empire stood appalled:  
 It dropped the reins of peace and war  
 When that fierce virgin and her Star  
 Out of the fabulous darkness called.

10

## II

In pity for man's darkening thought  
 He walked that room and issued thence  
 In Galilean turbulence;  
 The Babylonian starlight brought  
 A fabulous, formless darkness in;  
 Odour of blood when Christ was slain  
 Made all Platonic tolerance vain  
 And vain all Doric discipline.

Everything that man esteems  
 Endures a moment or a day.  
 Love's pleasure drives his love away,  
 The painter's brush consumes his dreams;  
 The herald's cry, the soldier's tread  
 Exhaust his glory and his might:

10



Whatever flames upon the night  
 Man's own resinous heart has fed.

## 219 *Fragments*

### I

Locke sank into a swoon;  
 The Garden died;  
 God took the spinning-jenny  
 Out of his side.

### II

Where got I that truth?  
 Out of a medium's mouth,  
 Out of nothing it came,  
 Out of the forest loam,  
 Out of dark night where lay  
 The crowns of Nineveh.

## 220 *Leda and the Swan*

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
 Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
 By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
 He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
 The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
 And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
 But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
 The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
 And Agamemnon dead.

10

Being so caught up,

So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
 Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
 Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

1923

221 *On a Picture of a Black Centaur by  
 Edmund Dulac*

Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,  
 Even where horrible green parrots call and swing.  
 My works are all stamped down into the sultry mud.  
 I knew that horse-play, knew it for a murderous thing.  
 What wholesome sun has ripened is wholesome food to eat,  
 And that alone; yet I, being driven half insane  
 Because of some green wing, gathered old mummy wheat  
 In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain  
 And after baked it slowly in an oven; but now  
 I bring full-flavoured wine out of a barrel found 10  
 Where seven Ephesian toppers slept and never knew  
 When Alexander's empire passed, they slept so sound.  
 Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;  
 I have loved you better than my soul for all my words,  
 And there is none so fit to keep a watch and keep  
 Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds.

222 *Among School Children*

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;  
 A kind old nun in a white hood replies;  
 The children learn to cipher and to sing,  
 To study reading-books and history,  
 To cut and sew, be neat in everything  
 In the best modern way – the children's eyes

In momentary wonder stare upon  
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

## II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent  
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she 10  
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event  
That changed some childish day to tragedy –  
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent  
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,  
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,  
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

## III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage  
I look upon one child or t'other there  
And wonder if she stood so at that age –  
For even daughters of the swan can share 20  
Something of every paddler's heritage –  
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,  
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:  
She stands before me as a living child.

## IV

Her present image floats into the mind –  
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it  
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind  
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?  
And I though never of Ledaean kind  
Had pretty plumage once – enough of that, 30  
Better to smile on all that smile, and show  
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

## V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap  
Honey of generation had betrayed,  
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape  
As recollection or the drug decide,

Would think her son, did she but see that shape  
 With sixty or more winters on its head,  
 A compensation for the pang of his birth,  
 Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

40

## VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays  
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;  
 Solider Aristotle played the taws  
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings;  
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras  
 Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings  
 What a star sang and careless Muses heard:  
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

## VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,  
 But those the candles light are not as those  
 That animate a mother's reveries,  
 But keep a marble or a bronze repose.  
 And yet they too break hearts – O Presences  
 That passion, piety or affection knows,  
 And that all heavenly glory symbolise –  
 O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

50

## VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,  
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
 O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

60

223 *Colonus' Praise*

(From 'Oedipus at Colonus')

*Chorus.* Come praise Colonus' horses, and come praise  
 The wine-dark of the wood's intricacies,  
 The nightingale that deafens daylight there,  
 If daylight ever visit where,  
 Unvisited by tempest or by sun,  
 Immortal ladies tread the ground  
 Dizzy with harmonious sound,  
 Semele's lad a gay companion.

And yonder in the gymnasts' garden thrives  
 The self-sown, self-begotten shape that gives 10  
 Athenian intellect its mastery,  
 Even the grey-leaved olive-tree  
 Miracle-bred out of the living stone;  
 Nor accident of peace nor war  
 Shall wither that old marvel, for  
 The great grey-eyed Athena stares thereon.

Who comes into this country, and has come  
 Where golden crocus and narcissus bloom,  
 Where the Great Mother, mourning for her daughter  
 And beauty-drunken by the water 20  
 Glittering among grey-leaved olive-trees,  
 Has plucked a flower and sung her loss;  
 Who finds abounding Cephisus  
 Has found the loveliest spectacle there is.

Because this country has a pious mind  
 And so remembers that when all mankind  
 But trod the road, or splashed about the shore,  
 Poseidon gave it bit and oar,  
 Every Colonus lad or lass discourses  
 Of that oar and of that bit; 30  
 Summer and winter, day and night,  
 Of horses and horses of the sea, white horses.

224 *Wisdom*

The true faith discovered was  
 When painted panel, statuary,  
 Glass-mosaic, window-glass,  
 Amended what was told awry  
 By some peasant gospeller;  
 Swept the sawdust from the floor  
 Of that working-carpenter.  
 Miracle had its playtime where  
 In damask clothed and on a seat  
 Chryselephantine, cedar-boarded, 10  
 His majestic Mother sat  
 Stitching at a purple hoarded  
 That He might be nobly breeched  
 In starry towers of Babylon  
 Noah's freset never reached.  
 King Abundance got Him on  
 Innocence; and Wisdom He.  
 That cognomen sounded best  
 Considering what wild infancy  
 Drove horror from His Mother's breast. 20

225 *The Fool by the Roadside*

When all works that have  
 From cradle run to grave  
 From grave to cradle run instead;  
 When thoughts that a fool  
 Has wound upon a spool  
 Are but loose thread, are but loose thread;  
  
 When cradle and spool are past  
 And I mere shade at last  
 Coagulate of stuff

Transparent like the wind,  
 I think that I may find  
 A faithful love, a faithful love.

10

## 226 *Owen Aherne and his Dancers*

## I

A strange thing surely that my Heart, when love had come  
 unsought  
 Upon the Norman upland or in that poplar shade,  
 Should find no burden but itself and yet should be worn out.  
 It could not bear that burden and therefore it went mad.

The south wind brought it longing, and the east wind  
 despair,  
 The west wind made it pitiful, and the north wind afraid.  
 It feared to give its love a hurt with all the tempest there;  
 It feared the hurt that she could give and therefore it went mad.

I can exchange opinion with any neighbouring mind,  
 I have as healthy flesh and blood as any rhymer's had, 10  
 But O! my Heart could bear no more when the upland  
 caught the wind;  
 I ran, I ran, from my love's side because my Heart went  
 mad.

## II

The Heart behind its rib laughed out. 'You have called me  
 mad,' it said.

'Because I made you turn away and run from that young  
 child;  
 How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly bred?  
 Let the cage bird and the cage bird mate and the wild bird  
 mate in the wild.'

'You but imagine lies all day, O murderer,' I replied.  
 'And all those lies have but one end, poor wretches to betray;

I did not find in any cage the woman at my side.  
 O but her heart would break to learn my thoughts are      20  
 far away.'

'Speak all your mind,' my Heart sang out, 'speak all your  
 mind; who cares,  
 Now that your tongue cannot persuade the child till she  
 mistake  
 Her childish gratitude for love and match your fifty years?  
 O let her choose a young man now and all for his wild sake.'

## *A Man Young and Old*

### *227 I. First Love*

Though nurtured like the sailing moon  
 In beauty's murderous brood,  
 She walked awhile and blushed awhile  
 And on my pathway stood  
 Until I thought her body bore  
 A heart of flesh and blood.

But since I laid a hand thereon  
 And found a heart of stone  
 I have attempted many things  
 And not a thing is done,      10  
 For every hand is lunatic  
 That travels on the moon.

She smiled and that transfigured me  
 And left me but a lout,  
 Maundering here, and maundering there,  
 Emptier of thought  
 Than the heavenly circuit of its stars  
 When the moon sails out.



228 II. *Human Dignity*

Like the moon her kindness is,  
 If kindness I may call  
 What has no comprehension in't,  
 But is the same for all  
 As though my sorrow were a scene  
 Upon a painted wall.

So like a bit of stone I lie  
 Under a broken tree.  
 I could recover if I shrieked  
 My heart's agony  
 To passing bird, but I am dumb  
 From human dignity.

10

229 III. *The Mermaid*

A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
 Picked him for her own,  
 Pressed her body to his body,  
 Laughed; and plunging down  
 Forgot in cruel happiness  
 That even lovers drown.

230 IV. *The Death of the Hare*

I have pointed out the yelling pack,  
 The hare leap to the wood,  
 And when I pass a compliment  
 Rejoice as lover should  
 At the drooping of an eye,  
 At the mantling of the blood.

Then suddenly my heart is wrung  
 By her distracted air  
 And I remember wildness lost  
 And after, swept from there,  
 Am set down standing in the wood  
 At the death of the hare.

10

### 231 V. *The Empty Cup*

A crazy man that found a cup,  
 When all but dead of thirst,  
 Hardly dared to wet his mouth  
 Imagining, moon-accursed,  
 That another mouthful  
 And his beating heart would burst.  
 October last I found it too  
 But found it dry as bone,  
 And for that reason am I crazed  
 And my sleep is gone.

10

### 232 VI. *His Memories*

We should be hidden from their eyes,  
 Being but holy shows  
 And bodies broken like a thorn  
 Whereon the bleak north blows,  
 To think of buried Hector  
 And that none living knows.

The women take so little stock  
 In what I do or say  
 They'd sooner leave their cossetting  
 To hear a jackass bray;  
 My arms are like the twisted thorn  
 And yet there beauty lay;

10

The first of all the tribe lay there  
 And did such pleasure take –  
 She who had brought great Hector down  
 And put all Troy to wreck –  
 That she cried into this ear,  
 ‘Strike me if I shriek.’

## 233 VII. *The Friends of his Youth*

Laughter not time destroyed my voice  
 And put that crack in it,  
 And when the moon’s pot-bellied  
 I get a laughing fit,  
 For that old Madge comes down the lane,  
 A stone upon her breast,  
 And a cloak wrapped about the stone,  
 And she can get no rest  
 With singing hush and hush-a-bye;  
 She that has been wild 10  
 And barren as a breaking wave  
 Thinks that the stone’s a child.

And Peter that had great affairs  
 And was a pushing man  
 Shrieks, ‘I am King of the Peacocks,’  
 And perches on a stone;  
 And then I laugh till tears run down  
 And the heart thumps at my side,  
 Remembering that her shriek was love  
 And that he shrieks from pride. 20

## 234 VIII. *Summer and Spring*

We sat under an old thorn-tree  
 And talked away the night,  
 Told all that had been said or done

Since first we saw the light,  
 And when we talked of growing up  
 Knew that we'd halved a soul  
 And fell the one in t'other's arms  
 That we might make it whole;  
 Then Peter had a murdering look, 10  
 For it seemed that he and she  
 Had spoken of their childish days  
 Under that very tree.  
 O what a bursting out there was,  
 And what a blossoming,  
 When we had all the summer-time  
 And she had all the spring!

## 235 IX. *The Secrets of the Old*

I have old women's secrets now  
 That had those of the young;  
 Madge tells me what I dared not think  
 When my blood was strong,  
 And what had drowned a lover once  
 Sounds like an old song.

Though Margery is stricken dumb  
 If thrown in Madge's way,  
 We three make up a solitude;  
 For none alive to-day 10  
 Can know the stories that we know  
 Or say the things we say:

How such a man pleased women most  
 Of all that are gone,  
 How such a pair loved many years  
 And such a pair but one,  
 Stories of the bed of straw  
 Or the bed of down.

236 X. *His Wildness*

O bid me mount and sail up there  
 Amid the cloudy wrack,  
 For Peg and Meg and Paris' love  
 That had so straight a back,  
 Are gone away, and some that stay  
 Have changed their silk for sack.

Were I but there and none to hear  
 I'd have a peacock cry,  
 For that is natural to a man  
 That lives in memory, 10  
 Being all alone I'd nurse a stone  
 And sing it lullaby.

237 XI. *From 'Oedipus at Colonus'*

Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;  
 Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied  
 aged man;

Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.

Even from that delight memory treasures so,  
 Death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of  
 mankind grow,

As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children  
 know.

In the long echoing street the laughing dancers throng,  
 The bride is carried to the bridegroom's chamber through  
 torchlight and tumultuous song;

I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say; 10  
 Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked  
 into the eye of day;  
 The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.

## 238 *The Three Monuments*

They hold their public meetings where  
 Our most renowned patriots stand,  
 One among the birds of the air,  
 A stumpier on either hand;  
 And all the popular statesmen say  
 That purity built up the State  
 And after kept it from decay;  
 Admonish us to cling to that  
 And let all base ambition be,  
 For intellect would make us proud 10  
 And pride bring in impurity:  
 The three old rascals laugh aloud.

## 239 *All Souls' Night*

*Epilogue to 'A Vision'*

Midnight has come and the great Christ Church bell  
 And many a lesser bell sound through the room;  
 And it is All Souls' Night.  
 And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel  
 Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come;  
 For it is a ghost's right,  
 His element is so fine  
 Being sharpened by his death,  
 To drink from the wine-breath  
 While our gross palates drink from the whole wine. 10  
 I need some mind that, if the cannon sound  
 From every quarter of the world, can stay

Wound in mind's pondering,  
 As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound;  
 Because I have a marvellous thing to say,  
 A certain marvellous thing  
 None but the living mock,  
 Though not for sober ear;  
 It may be all that hear  
 Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock. 20

Horton's the first I call. He loved strange thought  
 And knew that sweet extremity of pride  
 That's called platonic love,  
 And that to such a pitch of passion wrought  
 Nothing could bring him, when his lady died,  
 Anodyne for his love.  
 Words were but wasted breath;  
 One dear hope had he:  
 The inclemency  
 Of that or the next winter would be death. 30

Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell  
 Whether of her or God he thought the most,  
 But think that his mind's eye,  
 When upward turned, on one sole image fell;  
 And that a slight companionable ghost,  
 Wild with divinity,  
 Had so lit up the whole  
 Immense miraculous house  
 The Bible promised us,  
 It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl. 40

On Florence Emery I call the next,  
 Who finding the first wrinkles on a face  
 Admired and beautiful,  
 And by foreknowledge of the future vexed;  
 Diminished beauty, multiplied commonplace;  
 Preferred to teach a school  
 Away from neighbour or friend,  
 Among dark skins, and there

Permit foul years to wear  
Hidden from eyesight to the unnoticed end. 50

Before that end much had she ravelled out  
From a discourse in figurative speech  
By some learned Indian  
On the soul's journey. How it is whirled about  
Wherever the orbit of the moon can reach,  
Until it plunge into the sun;  
And there, free and yet fast,  
Being both Chance and Choice,  
Forget its broken toys  
And sink into its own delight at last. 60

I call MacGregor Mathers from his grave,  
For in my first hard spring-time we were friends,  
Although of late estranged.  
I thought him half a lunatic, half knave,  
And told him so, but friendship never ends;  
And what if mind seem changed,  
And it seem changed with the mind,  
When thoughts rise up unbid  
On generous things that he did  
And I grow half contented to be blind! 70

He had much industry at setting out,  
Much boisterous courage, before loneliness  
Had driven him crazed;  
For meditations upon unknown thought  
Make human intercourse grow less and less;  
They are neither paid nor praised.  
But he'd object to the host,  
The glass because my glass;  
A ghost-lover he was  
And may have grown more arrogant being a ghost. 80

But names are nothing. What matter who it be,  
So that his elements have grown so fine  
The fume of muscatel  
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy



No living man can drink from the whole wine.  
I have mummy truths to tell  
Whereat the living mock,  
Though not for sober ear,  
For maybe all that hear  
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock. 90

Such thought – such thought have I that hold it tight  
Till meditation master all its parts,  
Nothing can stay my glance  
Until that glance run in the world's despite  
To where the damned have howled away their hearts,  
And where the blessed dance;  
Such thought, that in it bound  
I need no other thing,  
Wound in mind's wandering  
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound. 100

*Oxford, Autumn 1920*

The Winding Stair  
and Other Poems

1933



# The Winding Stair and Other Poems

## 240 *In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz*

The light of evening, Lissadell,  
Great windows open to the south,  
Two girls in silk kimonos, both  
Beautiful, one a gazelle.  
But a raving autumn shears  
Blossom from the summer's wreath;  
The older is condemned to death,  
Pardoned, drags out lonely years  
Conspiring among the ignorant.  
I know not what the younger dreams – 10  
Some vague Utopia – and she seems,  
When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,  
An image of such politics.  
Many a time I think to seek  
One or the other out and speak  
Of that old Georgian mansion, mix  
Pictures of the mind, recall  
That table and the talk of youth,  
Two girls in silk kimonos, both  
Beautiful, one a gazelle. 20

Dear shadows, now you know it all,  
All the folly of a fight  
With a common wrong or right.  
The innocent and the beautiful  
Have no enemy but time;  
Arise and bid me strike a match  
And strike another till time catch;

Should the conflagration climb,  
 Run till all the sages know.  
 We the great gazebo built,  
 They convicted us of guilt;  
 Bid me strike a match and blow.

30

*October 1927*

## 241 *Death*

Nor dread nor hope attend  
 A dying animal;  
 A man awaits his end  
 Dreading and hoping all;  
 Many times he died,  
 Many times rose again.  
 A great man in his pride  
 Confronting murderous men  
 Casts derision upon  
 Supersession of breath;  
 He knows death to the bone –  
 Man has created death.

10

## 242 *A Dialogue of Self and Soul*

### I

*My Soul.* I summon to the winding ancient stair;  
 Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,  
 Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,  
 Upon the breathless starlit air,  
 Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;  
 Fix every wandering thought upon  
 That quarter where all thought is done:  
 Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?

*My Self.* The consecrated blade upon my knees  
 Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was, 10  
 Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass  
 Unspotted by the centuries;  
 That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn  
 From some court-lady's dress and round  
 The wooden scabbard bound and wound,  
 Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.

*My Soul.* Why should the imagination of a man  
 Long past his prime remember things that are  
 Emblematical of love and war?  
 Think of ancestral night that can, 20  
 If but imagination scorn the earth  
 And intellect its wandering  
 To this and that and t'other thing,  
 Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

*My Self.* Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it  
 Five hundred years ago, about it lie  
 Flowers from I know not what embroidery –  
 Heart's purple – and all these I set  
 For emblems of the day against the tower  
 Emblematical of the night,  
 And claim as by a soldier's right 30  
 A charter to commit the crime once more.

*My Soul.* Such fullness in that quarter overflows  
 And falls into the basin of the mind  
 That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,  
 For intellect no longer knows  
*Is from the Ought, or Knower from the Known –*  
 That is to say, ascends to Heaven;  
 Only the dead can be forgiven;  
 But when I think of that my tongue's a stone. 40

*My Self.* A living man is blind and drinks his drop.  
 What matter if the ditches are impure?

What matter if I live it all once more?  
 Endure that toil of growing up;  
 The ignominy of boyhood; the distress  
 Of boyhood changing into man;  
 The unfinished man and his pain  
 Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;

The finished man among his enemies? –  
 How in the name of Heaven can he escape 50  
 That defiling and disfigured shape  
 The mirror of malicious eyes  
 Casts upon his eyes until at last  
 He thinks that shape must be his shape?  
 And what's the good of an escape  
 If honour find him in the wintry blast?

I am content to live it all again  
 And yet again, if it be life to pitch  
 Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,  
 A blind man battering blind men; 60  
 Or into that most fecund ditch of all,  
 The folly that man does  
 Or must suffer, if he woos  
 A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

I am content to follow to its source  
 Every event in action or in thought;  
 Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!  
 When such as I cast out remorse  
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast  
 We must laugh and we must sing, 70  
 We are blest by everything,  
 Everything we look upon is blest.

243 *Blood and the Moon*

I

Blessed be this place,  
More blessed still this tower;  
A bloody, arrogant power  
Rose out of the race  
Uttering, mastering it,  
Rose like these walls from these  
Storm-beaten cottages –  
In mockery I have set  
A powerful emblem up,  
And sing it rhyme upon rhyme  
In mockery of a time  
Half dead at the top.

10

II

Alexandria's was a beacon tower, and Babylon's  
An image of the moving heavens, a log-book of the sun's  
journey and the moon's;  
And Shelley had his towers, thought's crowned powers he  
called them once.

I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare  
This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my  
ancestral stair;  
That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have  
travelled there.

Swift beating on his breast in sibylline frenzy blind  
Because the heart in his blood-sodden breast had dragged 20  
him down into mankind,  
Goldsmith deliberately sipping at the honey-pot of his mind,



And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,  
 That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century  
 after century,  
 Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality;

And God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream,  
 That this pragmatism, preposterous pig of a world, its farrow  
 that so solid seem,  
 Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme;

*Sæva Indignatio* and the labourer's hire,  
 The strength that gives our blood and state magnanimity of  
 its own desire;  
 Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire. 30

## III

The purity of the unclouded moon  
 Has flung its arrowy shaft upon the floor.  
 Seven centuries have passed and it is pure;  
 The blood of innocence has left no stain.  
 There, on blood-saturated ground, have stood  
 Soldier, assassin, executioner,  
 Whether for daily pittance or in blind fear  
 Or out of abstract hatred, and shed blood,  
 But could not cast a single jet thereon.  
 Odour of blood on the ancestral stair! 40  
 And we that have shed none must gather there  
 And clamour in drunken frenzy for the moon.

## IV

Upon the dusty, glittering windows cling,  
 And seem to cling upon the moonlit skies,  
 Tortoiseshell butterflies, peacock butterflies.  
 A couple of night-moths are on the wing.  
 Is every modern nation like the tower,

Half dead at the top? No matter what I said,  
For wisdom is the property of the dead,  
A something incompatible with life; and power, 50  
Like everything that has the stain of blood,  
A property of the living; but no stain  
Can come upon the visage of the moon  
When it has looked in glory from a cloud.

## 244 *Oil and Blood*

In tombs of gold and lapis lazuli  
Bodies of holy men and women exude  
Miraculous oil, odour of violet.

But under heavy loads of trampled clay  
Lie bodies of the vampires full of blood;  
Their shrouds are bloody and their lips are wet.

## 245 *Veronica's Napkin*

The Heavenly Circuit; Berenice's Hair;  
Tent-pole of Eden; the tent's drapery;  
Symbolical glory of the earth and air!  
The Father and His angelic hierarchy  
That made the magnitude and glory there  
Stood in the circuit of a needle's eye.

Some found a different pole, and where it stood  
A pattern on a napkin dipped in blood.

## 246 *Symbols*

A storm-beaten old watch-tower,  
A blind hermit rings the hour.

All-destroying sword-blade still  
Carried by the wandering fool.

Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade,  
Beauty and fool together laid.

### 247 *Spilt Milk*

We that have done and thought,  
That have thought and done,  
Must ramble, and thin out  
Like milk spilt on a stone.

### 248 *The Nineteenth Century and After*

Though the great song return no more  
There's keen delight in what we have:  
The rattle of pebbles on the shore  
Under the receding wave.

### 249 *Statistics*

'Those Platonists are a curse,' he said,  
'God's fire upon the wane,  
A diagram hung there instead,  
More women born than men.'

### 250 *Three Movements*

Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land;  
Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand;  
What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?

## 251 *The Seven Sages*

*The First.* My great-grandfather spoke to Edmund Burke  
In Grattan's house.

*The Second.* My great-grandfather shared  
A pot-house bench with Oliver Goldsmith once.

*The Third.* My great-grandfather's father talked of music,  
Drank tar-water with the Bishop of Cloyne.

*The Fourth.* But mine saw Stella once.

*The Fifth.* Whence came our thought?

*The Sixth.* From four great minds that hated Whiggery.

*The Fifth.* Burke was a Whig.

*The Sixth.* Whether they knew or not,  
Goldsmith and Burke, Swift and the Bishop of Cloyne  
All hated Whiggery; but what is Whiggery? 10  
A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind  
That never looked out of the eye of a saint  
Or out of drunkard's eye.

*The Seventh.* All's Whiggery now,  
But we old men are massed against the world.

*The First.* American colonies, Ireland, France and India  
Harried, and Burke's great melody against it.

*The Second.* Oliver Goldsmith sang what he had seen,  
Roads full of beggars, cattle in the fields,  
But never saw the trefoil stained with blood,  
The avenging leaf those fields raised up against it. 20

*The Fourth.* The tomb of Swift wears it away.

*The Third.* A voice  
Soft as the rustle of a reed from Cloyne  
That gathers volume; now a thunder-clap.

*The Sixth.* What schooling had these four?

*The Seventh.* They walked the roads  
Mimicking what they heard, as children mimic;  
They understood that wisdom comes of beggary.

## 252 *The Crazy Moon*

Crazed through much child-bearing  
The moon is staggering in the sky;  
Moon-struck by the despairing  
Glances of her wandering eye  
We grope, and grope in vain,  
For children born of her pain.

Children dazed or dead!  
When she in all her virginal pride  
First trod on the mountain's head  
What stir ran through the countryside  
Where every foot obeyed her glance!  
What manhood led the dance!

10

Fly-catchers of the moon,  
Our hands are blenched, our fingers seem  
But slender needles of bone;  
Blenched by that malicious dream  
They are spread wide that each  
May rend what comes in reach.

## 253 *Cool Park, 1929*

I meditate upon a swallow's flight,  
Upon an aged woman and her house,  
A sycamore and lime tree lost in night  
Although that western cloud is luminous,  
Great works constructed there in nature's spite  
For scholars and for poets after us,

Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,  
A dance-like glory that those walls begot.

There Hyde before he had beaten into prose  
That noble blade the Muses buckled on, 10  
There one that ruffled in a manly pose  
For all his timid heart, there that slow man,  
That meditative man, John Synge, and those  
Impetuous men, Shawe-Taylor and Hugh Lane,  
Found pride established in humility,  
A scene well set and excellent company.

They came like swallows and like swallows went,  
And yet a woman's powerful character  
Could keep a swallow to its first intent; 20  
And half a dozen in formation there,  
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,  
Found certainty upon the dreaming air,  
The intellectual sweetness of those lines  
That cut through time or cross it withershins.

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand  
When all those rooms and passages are gone,  
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound  
And saplings root among the broken stone,  
And dedicate – eyes bent upon the ground, 30  
Back turned upon the brightness of the sun  
And all the sensuality of the shade –  
A moment's memory to that laurelled head.

## 254 *Coole and Ballylee, 1931*

Under my window-ledge the waters race,  
Otters below and moor-hens on the top,  
Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face  
Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar' drop,  
Run underground, rise in a rocky place  
In Coole demesne, and there to finish up

Spread to a lake and drop into a hole.  
 What's water but the generated soul?

Upon the border of that lake's a wood  
 Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun, 10  
 And in a copse of beeches there I stood,  
 For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on  
 And all the rant's a mirror of my mood:  
 At sudden thunder of the mounting swan  
 I turned about and looked where branches break  
 The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Another emblem there! That stormy white  
 But seems a concentration of the sky;  
 And, like the soul, it sails into the sight  
 And in the morning's gone, no man knows why; 20  
 And is so lovely that it sets to right  
 What knowledge or its lack had set awry,  
 So arrogantly pure, a child might think  
 It can be murdered with a spot of ink.

Sound of a stick upon the floor, a sound  
 From somebody that toils from chair to chair;  
 Beloved books that famous hands have bound,  
 Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere;  
 Great rooms where travelled men and children found  
 Content or joy; a last inheritor 30  
 Where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame  
 Or out of folly into folly came.

A spot whereon the founders lived and died  
 Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees  
 Or gardens rich in memory glorified  
 Marriages, alliances and families,  
 And every bride's ambition satisfied.  
 Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees  
 Man shifts about – all that great glory spent –  
 Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent. 40

We were the last romantics – chose for theme  
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;  
Whatever's written in what poets name  
The book of the people; whatever most can bless  
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;  
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,  
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode  
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

## 255 *For Anne Gregory*

'Never shall a young man,  
Thrown into despair  
By those great honey-coloured  
Ramparts at your ear,  
Love you for yourself alone  
And not your yellow hair.'

'But I can get a hair-dye  
And set such colour there,  
Brown, or black, or carrot,  
That young men in despair  
May love me for myself alone  
And not my yellow hair.'

10

'I heard an old religious man  
But yesternight declare  
That he had found a text to prove  
That only God, my dear,  
Could love you for yourself alone  
And not your yellow hair.'

## 256 *Swift's Epitaph*

Swift has sailed into his rest;  
Savage indignation there  
Cannot lacerate his breast.



Imitate him if you dare,  
 World-besotted traveller; he  
 Served human liberty.

## 257 *At Algeciras – a Meditation upon Death*

The heron-billed pale cattle-birds  
 That feed on some foul parasite  
 Of the Moroccan flocks and herds  
 Cross the narrow Straits to light  
 In the rich midnight of the garden trees  
 Till the dawn break upon those mingled seas.

Often at evening when a boy  
 Would I carry to a friend –  
 Hoping more substantial joy  
 Did an older mind commend –  
 Not such as are in Newton's metaphor,  
 But actual shells of Rosses' level shore.

10

Greater glory in the sun,  
 An evening chill upon the air,  
 Bid imagination run  
 Much on the Great Questioner;  
 What He can question, what if questioned I  
 Can with a fitting confidence reply.

*November 1928*

## 258 *The Choice*

The intellect of man is forced to choose  
 Perfection of the life, or of the work,  
 And if it take the second must refuse  
 A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

When all that story's finished, what's the news?  
 In luck or out the toil has left its mark:  
 That old perplexity an empty purse,  
 Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

## 259 *Mohini Chatterjee*

I asked if I should pray,  
 But the Brahmin said,  
 'Pray for nothing, say  
 Every night in bed,  
 "I have been a king,  
 I have been a slave,  
 Nor is there anything,  
 Fool, rascal, knave,  
 That I have not been,  
 And yet upon my breast 10  
 A myriad heads have lain."'

That he might set at rest  
 A boy's turbulent days  
 Mohini Chatterjee  
 Spoke these, or words like these.  
 I add in commentary,  
 'Old lovers yet may have  
 All that time denied –  
 Grave is heaped on grave  
 That they be satisfied – 20  
 Over the blackened earth  
 The old troops parade,  
 Birth is heaped on birth  
 That such cannonade  
 May thunder time away,  
 Birth-hour and death-hour meet,  
 Or, as great sages say,  
 Men dance on deathless feet.'

260 *Byzantium*

The unpurged images of day recede;  
 The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;  
 Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song  
 After great cathedral gong;  
 A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains  
 All that man is,  
 All mere complexities,  
 The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,  
 Shade more than man, more image than a shade; 10  
 For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth  
 May unwind the winding path;  
 A mouth that has no moisture and no breath  
 Breathless mouths may summon;  
 I hail the superhuman;  
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,  
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,  
 Planted on the starlit golden bough,  
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow, 20  
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud  
 In glory of changeless metal  
 Common bird or petal  
 And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit  
 Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,  
 Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,  
 Where blood-begotten spirits come  
 And all complexities of fury leave,  
 Dying into a dance, 30  
 An agony of trance,  
 An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,  
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,  
The golden smithies of the Emperor!  
Marbles of the dancing floor  
Break bitter furies of complexity,  
Those images that yet  
Fresh images beget,  
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea. 40

1930

## 261 *The Mother of God*

The three-fold terror of love; a fallen flare  
Through the hollow of an ear;  
Wings beating about the room;  
The terror of all terrors that I bore  
The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the shows  
Every common woman knows,  
Chimney corner, garden walk,  
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes  
And gather all the talk? 10

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,  
This fallen star my milk sustains,  
This love that makes my heart's blood stop  
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones  
And bids my hair stand up?

## 262 *Vacillation*

I

Between extremities  
Man runs his course;  
A brand, or flaming breath,

Comes to destroy  
 All those antinomies  
 Of day and night;  
 The body calls it death,  
 The heart remorse.  
 But if these be right  
 What is joy?

10

## II

A tree there is that from its topmost bough  
 Is half all glittering flame and half all green  
 Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;  
 And half is half and yet is all the scene;  
 And half and half consume what they renew,  
 And he that Attis' image hangs between  
 That staring fury and the blind lush leaf  
 May know not what he knows, but knows not grief.

## III

Get all the gold and silver that you can,  
 Satisfy ambition, or animate  
 The trivial days and ram them with the sun,  
 And yet upon these maxims meditate:  
 All women dote upon an idle man  
 Although their children need a rich estate;  
 No man has ever lived that had enough  
 Of children's gratitude or woman's love.

20

No longer in Lethean foliage caught  
 Begin the preparation for your death  
 And from the fortieth winter by that thought  
 Test every work of intellect or faith  
 And everything that your own hands have wrought,  
 And call those works extravagance of breath  
 That are not suited for such men as come  
 Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.

30

IV

My fiftieth year had come and gone,  
I sat, a solitary man,  
In a crowded London shop,  
An open book and empty cup  
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed 40  
My body of a sudden blazed;  
And twenty minutes more or less  
It seemed, so great my happiness,  
That I was blessed and could bless.

v

Although the summer sunlight gild  
Cloudy leafage of the sky,  
Or wintry moonlight sink the field  
In storm-scattered intricacy,  
I cannot look thereon,  
Responsibility so weighs me down. 50

Things said or done long years ago,  
Or things I did not do or say  
But thought that I might say or do,  
Weigh me down, and not a day  
But something is recalled,  
My conscience or my vanity appalled.

VI

A rivery field spread out below,  
An odour of the new-mown hay  
In his nostrils, the great lord of Chou  
Cried, casting off the mountain snow, 60  
'Let all things pass away.'

Wheels by milk-white asses drawn  
 Where Babylon or Nineveh  
 Rose; some conqueror drew rein  
 And cried to battle-weary men,  
 'Let all things pass away.'

From man's blood-sodden heart are sprung  
 Those branches of the night and day  
 Where the gaudy moon is hung.  
 What's the meaning of all song?  
 'Let all things pass away.'

70

## VII

*The Soul.* Seek out reality, leave things that seem.  
*The Heart.* What, be a singer born and lack a theme?  
*The Soul.* Isaiah's coal, what more can man desire?  
*The Heart.* Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire!  
*The Soul.* Look on that fire, salvation walks within.  
*The Heart.* What theme had Homer but original sin?

## VIII

Must we part, Von Hügel, though much alike, for we  
 Accept the miracles of the saints and honour sanctity?  
 The body of Saint Teresa lies undecayed in tomb,  
 Bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours from it come,  
 Healing from its lettered slab. Those self-same hands  
 perchance  
 Eternalised the body of a modern saint that once  
 Had scooped out Pharaoh's mummy. I – though heart might  
 find relief  
 Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief  
 What seems most welcome in the tomb – play a predestined  
 part.

80

Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.  
The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?  
So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings on your  
head.

1932

## 263 *Quarrel in Old Age*

Where had her sweetness gone?  
What fanatics invent  
In this blind bitter town,  
Fantasy or incident  
Not worth thinking of,  
Put her in a rage.  
I had forgiven enough  
That had forgiven old age.

All lives that has lived;  
So much is certain;  
Old sages were not deceived:  
Somewhere beyond the curtain  
Of distorting days  
Lives that lonely thing  
That shone before these eyes  
Targeted, trod like Spring.

10

## 264 *The Results of Thought*

Acquaintance; companion;  
One dear brilliant woman;  
The best-endowed, the elect,  
All by their youth undone,  
All, all, by that inhuman  
Bitter glory wrecked.



But I have straightened out  
 Ruin, wreck and wrack;  
 I toiled long years and at length  
 Came to so deep a thought  
 I can summon back  
 All their wholesome strength.

10

What images are these  
 That turn dull-eyed away,  
 Or shift Time's filthy load,  
 Straighten aged knees,  
 Hesitate or stay?  
 What heads shake or nod?

*August 1931*

## 265 *Gratitude to the Unknown Instructors*

What they undertook to do  
 They brought to pass;  
 All things hang like a drop of dew  
 Upon a blade of grass.

## 266 *Remorse for Intemperate Speech*

I ranted to the knave and fool,  
 But outgrew that school,  
 Would transform the part,  
 Fit audience found, but cannot rule  
 My fanatic' heart.

I sought my betters: though in each  
 Fine manners, liberal speech,  
 Turn hatred into sport,  
 Nothing said or done can reach  
 My fanatic heart.

10

<sup>1</sup> I pronounce 'fanatic' in what is, I suppose, the older and more Irish way, so that the last line of each stanza contains but two beats.

Out of Ireland have we come.  
 Great hatred, little room,  
 Maimed us at the start.  
 I carry from my mother's womb  
 A fanatic heart.

August 28, 1931

## 267 *Stream and Sun at Glendalough*

Through intricate motions ran  
 Stream and gliding sun  
 And all my heart seemed gay:  
 Some stupid thing that I had done  
 Made my attention stray.

Repentance keeps my heart impure;  
 But what am I that dare  
 Fancy that I can  
 Better conduct myself or have more  
 Sense than a common man?

10

What motion of the sun or stream  
 Or eyelid shot the gleam  
 That pierced my body through?  
 What made me live like these that seem  
 Self-born, born anew?

June 1932

## *Words for Music Perhaps*

### 268 I. *Crazy Jane and the Bishop*

Bring me to the blasted oak  
 That I, midnight upon the stroke,  
 (*All find safety in the tomb.*)

May call down curses on his head  
 Because of my dear Jack that's dead.  
 Coxcomb was the least he said:  
*The solid man and the coxcomb.*

Nor was he Bishop when his ban  
 Banished Jack the Journeyman,  
 (*All find safety in the tomb.*) 10  
 Nor so much as parish priest,  
 Yet he, an old book in his fist,  
 Cried that we lived like beast and beast:  
*The solid man and the coxcomb.*

The Bishop has a skin, God knows,  
 Wrinkled like the foot of a goose,  
 (*All find safety in the tomb.*)  
 Nor can he hide in holy black  
 The heron's hunch upon his back,  
 But a birch-tree stood my Jack: 20  
*The solid man and the coxcomb.*

Jack had my virginity,  
 And bids me to the oak, for he  
 (*All find safety in the tomb.*)  
 Wanders out into the night  
 And there is shelter under it,  
 But should that other come, I spit:  
*The solid man and the coxcomb.*

## 269 II. *Crazy Jane Reproved*

I care not what the sailors say:  
 All those dreadful thunder-stones,  
 All that storm that blots the day  
 Can but show that Heaven yawns;  
 Great Europa played the fool  
 That changed a lover for a bull.  
*Fol de rol, fol de rol.*

To round that shell's elaborate whorl,  
 Adorning every secret track  
 With the delicate mother-of-pearl, 10  
 Made the joints of Heaven crack:  
 So never hang your heart upon  
 A roaring, ranting journeyman.  
*Fol de rol, fol de rol.*

270 III. *Crazy Jane on the  
 Day of Judgment*

'Love is all  
 Unsatisfied  
 That cannot take the whole  
 Body and soul';  
*And that is what Jane said.*

'Take the sour  
 If you take me,  
 I can scoff and lour  
 And scold for an hour.'  
*'That's certainly the case,' said he.* 10

'Naked I lay  
 The grass my bed;  
 Naked and hidden away,  
 That black day';  
*And that is what Jane said.*

'What can be shown?  
 What true love be?  
 All could be known or shown  
 If Time were but gone.'  
*'That's certainly the case,' said he.* 20

271 IV. *Crazy Jane and  
Jack the Journeyman*

I know, although when looks meet  
I tremble to the bone,  
The more I leave the door unlatched  
The sooner love is gone,  
For love is but a skein unwound  
Between the dark and dawn.

A lonely ghost the ghost is  
That to God shall come;  
I – love's skein upon the ground,  
My body in the tomb –  
Shall leap into the light lost  
In my mother's womb.

10

But were I left to lie alone  
In an empty bed,  
The skein so bound us ghost to ghost  
When he turned his head  
Passing on the road that night,  
Mine would walk being dead.

272 V. *Crazy Jane on God*

That lover of a night  
Came when he would,  
Went in the dawning light  
Whether I would or no;  
Men come, men go:  
*All things remain in God.*

Banners choke the sky;  
Men-at-arms tread;  
Armoured horses neigh

Where the great battle was 10  
 In the narrow pass:  
*All things remain in God.*

Before their eyes a house  
 That from childhood stood  
 Uninhabited, ruinous,  
 Suddenly lit up  
 From door to top:  
*All things remain in God.*

I had wild Jack for a lover;  
 Though like a road 20  
 That men pass over  
 My body makes no moan  
 But sings on:  
*All things remain in God.*

273 VI. *Crazy Jane Talks  
 with the Bishop*

I met the Bishop on the road  
 And much said he and I.  
 'Those breasts are flat and fallen now  
 Those veins must soon be dry;  
 Live in a heavenly mansion,  
 Not in some foul sty.'

'Fair and foul are near of kin,  
 And fair needs foul,' I cried.  
 'My friends are gone, but that's a truth  
 Nor grave nor bed denied, 10  
 Learned in bodily lowliness  
 And in the heart's pride.

'A woman can be proud and stiff  
 When on love intent;  
 But Love has pitched his mansion in

The place of excrement;  
 For nothing can be sole or whole  
 That has not been rent.'

## 274 VII. *Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers*

I found that ivory image there  
 Dancing with her chosen youth,  
 But when he wound her coal-black hair  
 As though to strangle her, no scream  
 Or bodily movement did I dare,  
 Eyes under eyelids did so gleam:  
*Love is like the lion's tooth.*

When she, and though some said she played  
 I said that she had danced heart's truth,  
 Drew a knife to strike him dead, 10  
 I could but leave him to his fate;  
 For, no matter what is said,  
 They had all that had their hate:  
*Love is like the lion's tooth.*

Did he die or did she die?  
 Seemed to die or died they both?  
 God be with the times when I  
 Cared not a thraneen for what chanced  
 So that I had the limbs to try 20  
 Such a dance as there was danced –  
*Love is like the lion's tooth.*

## 275 VIII. *Girl's Song*

I went out alone  
 To sing a song or two,

My fancy on a man,  
And you know who.

Another came in sight  
That on a stick relied  
To hold himself upright:  
I sat and cried.

And that was all my song –  
When everything is told,  
Saw I an old man young  
Or young man old?

10

## 276 IX. *Young Man's Song*

'She will change,' I cried,  
'Into a withered crone.'  
The heart in my side,  
That so still had lain,  
In noble rage replied  
And beat upon the bone:

'Uplift those eyes and throw  
Those glances unafraid:  
She would as bravely show  
Did all the fabric fade;  
No withered crone I saw  
Before the world was made.'

10

Abashed by that report,  
For the heart cannot lie,  
I knelt in the dirt.  
And all shall bend the knee  
To my offended heart  
Until it pardon me.



277 X. *Her Anxiety*

Earth in beauty dressed  
 Awaits returning spring.  
 All true love must die,  
 Alter at the best  
 Into some lesser thing.  
*Prove that I lie.*

Such body lovers have,  
 Such exacting breath,  
 That they touch or sigh.  
 Every touch they give,  
 Love is nearer death.  
*Prove that I lie.*

10

278 XI. *His Confidence*

Undying love to buy  
 I wrote upon  
 The corners of this eye  
 All wrongs done.  
 What payment were enough  
 For undying love?

I broke my heart in two  
 So hard I struck.  
 What matter? for I know  
 That out of rock,  
 Out of a desolate source,  
 Love leaps upon its course.

10

279 XII. *Love's Loneliness*

Old fathers, great-grandfathers,  
 Rise as kindred should.  
 If ever lover's loneliness  
 Came where you stood,  
 Pray that Heaven protect us  
 That protect your blood.

The mountain throws a shadow,  
 Thin is the moon's horn;  
 What did we remember  
 Under the ragged thorn?  
 Dread has followed longing,  
 And our hearts are torn.

10

280 XIII. *Her Dream*

I dreamed as in my bed I lay,  
 All night's fathomless wisdom come,  
 That I had shorn my locks away  
 And laid them on Love's lettered tomb:  
 But something bore them out of sight  
 In a great tumult of the air,  
 And after nailed upon the night  
 Berenice's burning hair.

281 XIV. *His Bargain*

Who talks of Plato's spindle;  
 What set it whirling round?  
 Eternity may dwindle,  
 Time is unwound,

Dan and Jerry Lout  
Change their loves about.

However they may take it,  
Before the thread began  
I made, and may not break it  
When the last thread has run,  
A bargain with that hair  
And all the windings there.

10

## 282 XV. *Three Things*

'O cruel Death, give three things back,'  
*Sang a bone upon the shore;*  
'A child found all a child can lack,  
Whether of pleasure or of rest,  
Upon the abundance of my breast':  
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.*

'Three dear things that women know,'  
*Sang a bone upon the shore;*  
'A man if I but held him so  
When my body was alive  
Found all the pleasure that life gave':  
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.*

10

'The third thing that I think of yet,'  
*Sang a bone upon the shore,*  
'Is that morning when I met  
Face to face my rightful man  
And did after stretch and yawn':  
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.*

## 283 XVI. *Lullaby*

Beloved, may your sleep be sound  
That have found it where you fed.

What were all the world's alarms  
To mighty Paris when he found  
Sleep upon a golden bed  
That first dawn in Helen's arms?

Sleep, beloved, such a sleep  
As did that wild Tristram know  
When, the potion's work being done,  
Roe could run or doe could leap  
Under oak and beechen bough,  
Roe could leap or doe could run;

10

Such a sleep and sound as fell  
Upon Eurotas' grassy bank  
When the holy bird, that there  
Accomplished his predestined will,  
From the limbs of Leda sank  
But not from her protecting care.

284 XVII. *After Long Silence*

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,  
That 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.

285 XVIII. *Mad as the Mist and Snow*

Bolt and bar the shutter,  
For the foul winds blow:  
Our minds are at their best this night,

And I seem to know  
That everything outside us is  
*Mad as the mist and snow.*

Horace there by Homer stands,  
Plato stands below,  
And here is Tully's open page.  
How many years ago  
Were you and I unlettered lads  
*Mad as the mist and snow?*

10

You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,  
What makes me shudder so?  
I shudder and I sigh to think  
That even Cicero  
And many-minded Homer were  
*Mad as the mist and snow.*

## 286 XIX. *Those Dancing Days are Gone*

Come, let me sing into your ear;  
Those dancing days are gone,  
All that silk and satin gear;  
Crouch upon a stone,  
Wrapping that foul body up  
In as foul a rag:  
*I carry the sun in a golden cup,  
The moon in a silver bag.*

Curse as you may I sing it through;  
What matter if the knave  
That the most could pleasure you,  
The children that he gave,  
Are somewhere sleeping like a top  
Under a marble flag?  
*I carry the sun in a golden cup,  
The moon in a silver bag.*

10

I thought it out this very day,  
 Noon upon the clock,  
 A man may put pretence away  
 Who leans upon a stick,  
 May sing, and sing until he drop, 20  
 Whether to maid or hag:  
*I carry the sun in a golden cup,*  
*The moon in a silver bag.*

## 287 XX. 'I am of Ireland'

*'I am of Ireland,  
 And the Holy Land of Ireland,  
 And time runs on,' cried she.  
 'Come out of charity,  
 Come dance with me in Ireland.'*

One man, one man alone  
 In that outlandish gear,  
 One solitary man  
 Of all that rambled there  
 Had turned his stately head. 10  
 'That is a long way off,  
 And time runs on,' he said,  
 'And the night grows rough.'

*'I am of Ireland,  
 And the Holy Land of Ireland,  
 And time runs on,' cried she.  
 'Come out of charity  
 And dance with me in Ireland.'*

'The fiddlers are all thumbs,  
 Or the fiddle-string accursed, 20  
 The drums and the kettledrums  
 And the trumpets all are burst,  
 And the trombone,' cried he,  
 'The trumpet and trombone,'

And cocked a malicious eye,  
 'But time runs on, runs on.'

*'I am of Ireland,  
 And the Holy Land of Ireland,  
 And time runs on,' cried she.  
 'Come out of charity  
 And dance with me in Ireland.'*

30

## 288 XXI. *The Dancer at Cruachan<sup>1</sup> and Cro-Patrick*

I, proclaiming that there is  
 Among birds or beasts or men,  
 One that is perfect or at peace,  
 Danced on Cruachan's windy plain,  
 Upon Cro-Patrick sang aloud;  
 All that could run or leap or swim  
 Whether in wood, water or cloud,  
 Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming Him.

## 289 XXII. *Tom the Lunatic*

Sang old Tom the lunatic  
 That sleeps under the canopy;  
 'What change has put my thoughts astray  
 And eyes that had so keen a sight?  
 What has turned to smoking wick  
 Nature's pure unchanging light?  
 'Huddon and Duddon and Daniel O'Leary,  
 Holy Joe, the beggar-man,  
 Wenching, drinking, still remain  
 Or sing a penance on the road;  
 Something made these eyeballs weary  
 That blinked and saw them in a shroud.

10

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced in modern Gaelic as if spelt 'Crockan.'

'Whatever stands in field or flood,  
Bird, beast, fish or man,  
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,  
Stands in God's unchanging eye  
In all the vigour of its blood;  
In that faith I live or die.'

290 XXIII. *Tom at Cruachan*

On Cruachan's plain slept he  
That must sing in a rhyme  
What most could shake his soul:  
'The stallion Eternity  
Mounted the mare of Time,  
'Gat the foal of the world.'

291 XXIV. *Old Tom again*

Things out of perfection sail  
And all their swelling canvas wear,  
Nor shall the self-begotten fail  
Though fantastic men suppose  
Building-yard and stormy shore,  
Winding-sheet and swaddling-clothes.

292 XXV. *The Delphic Oracle  
upon Plotinus*

Behold that great Plotinus swim  
Buffeted by such seas;  
Bland Rhadamanthus beckons him,  
But the Golden Race looks dim,  
Salt blood blocks his eyes.



Scattered on the level grass  
 Or winding through the grove  
 Plato there and Minos pass,  
 There stately Pythagoras  
 And all the choir of Love.

10

*August 19, 1931*

## *A Woman Young and Old*

### 293 I. *Father and Child*

She hears me strike the board and say  
 That she is under ban  
 Of all good men and women,  
 Being mentioned with a man  
 That has the worst of all bad names;  
 And thereupon replies  
 That his hair is beautiful,  
 Cold as the March wind his eyes.

### 294 II. *Before the World was Made*

If I make the lashes dark  
 And the eyes more bright  
 And the lips more scarlet,  
 Or ask if all be right  
 From mirror after mirror,  
 No vanity's displayed:  
 I'm looking for the face I had  
 Before the world was made.

What if I look upon a man  
 As though on my beloved,

10

And my blood be cold the while  
 And my heart unmoved?  
 Why should he think me cruel  
 Or that he is betrayed?  
 I'd have him love the thing that was  
 Before the world was made.

295 III. *A First Confession*

I admit the briar  
 Entangled in my hair  
 Did not injure me;  
 My blenching and trembling  
 Nothing but dissembling,  
 Nothing but coquetry.

I long for truth, and yet  
 I cannot stay from that  
 My better self disowns,  
 For a man's attention  
 Brings such satisfaction  
 To the craving in my bones.

10

Brightness that I pull back  
 From the Zodiac,  
 Why those questioning eyes  
 That are fixed upon me?  
 What can they do but shun me  
 If empty night replies?

296 IV. *Her Triumph*

I did the dragon's will until you came  
 Because I had fancied love a casual  
 Improvisation, or a settled game  
 That followed if I let the kerchief fall:

Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings  
 And heavenly music if they gave it wit;  
 And then you stood among the dragon-rings.  
 I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it  
 And broke the chain and set my ankles free,  
 Saint George or else a pagan Perseus; 10  
 And now we stare astonished at the sea,  
 And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.

## 297 V. *Consolation*

O but there is wisdom  
 In what the sages said;  
 But stretch that body for a while  
 And lay down that head  
 Till I have told the sages  
 Where man is comforted.

How could passion run so deep  
 Had I never thought  
 That the crime of being born  
 Blackens all our lot? 10  
 But where the crime's committed  
 The crime can be forgot.

## 298 VI. *Chosen*

The lot of love is chosen. I learnt that much  
 Struggling for an image on the track  
 Of the whirling Zodiac.  
 Scarce did he my body touch,  
 Scarce sank he from the west  
 Or found a subterranean rest  
 On the maternal midnight of my breast  
 Before I had marked him on his northern way,  
 And seemed to stand although in bed I lay.

I struggled with the horror of daybreak, 10  
 I chose it for my lot! If questioned on  
 My utmost pleasure with a man  
 By some new-married bride, I take  
 That stillness for a theme  
 Where his heart my heart did seem  
 And both adrift on the miraculous stream  
 Where – wrote a learned astrologer –  
 The Zodiac is changed into a sphere.

## 299 VII. *Parting*

*He.* Dear, I must be gone  
 While night shuts the eyes  
 Of the household spies;  
 That song announces dawn.

*She.* No, night's bird and love's  
 Bids all true lovers rest,  
 While his loud song reproves  
 The murderous stealth of day.

*He.* Daylight already flies  
 From mountain crest to crest. , 10

*She.* That light is from the moon.

*He.* That bird . . .

*She.* Let him sing on,  
 I offer to love's play  
 My dark declivities.

## 300 VIII. *Her Vision in the Wood*

Dry timber under that rich foliage,  
 At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood,

Too old for a man's love I stood in rage  
 Imagining men. Imagining that I could  
 A greater with a lesser pang assuage  
 Or but to find if withered vein ran blood,  
 I tore my body that its wine might cover  
 Whatever could recall the lip of lover.

And after that I held my fingers up,  
 Stared at the wine-dark nail, or dark that ran 10  
 Down every withered finger from the top;  
 But the dark changed to red, and torches shone,  
 And deafening music shook the leaves; a troop  
 Shouldered a litter with a wounded man,  
 Or smote upon the string and to the sound  
 Sang of the beast that gave the fatal wound.

All stately women moving to a song  
 With loosened hair or foreheads grief-distraught,  
 It seemed a Quattrocento painter's throng,  
 A thoughtless image of Mantegna's thought – 20  
 Why should they think that are for ever young?  
 Till suddenly in grief's contagion caught,  
 I stared upon his blood-bedabbled breast  
 And sang my malediction with the rest.

That thing all blood and mire, that beast-torn wreck,  
 Half turned and fixed a glazing eye on mine,  
 And, though love's bitter-sweet had all come back,  
 Those bodies from a picture or a coin  
 Nor saw my body fall nor heard it shriek,  
 Nor knew, drunken with singing as with wine, 30  
 That they had brought no fabulous symbol there  
 But my heart's victim and its torturer.

301 IX. *A Last Confession*

What lively lad most pleased me  
 Of all that with me lay?  
 I answer that I gave my soul  
 And loved in misery,  
 But had great pleasure with a lad  
 That I loved bodily.

Flinging from his arms I laughed  
 To think his passion such  
 He fancied that I gave a soul  
 Did but our bodies touch, 10  
 And laughed upon his breast to think  
 Beast gave beast as much.

I gave what other women gave  
 That stepped out of their clothes,  
 But when this soul, its body off,  
 Naked to naked goes,  
 He it has found shall find therein  
 What none other knows,

And give his own and take his own  
 And rule in his own right; 20  
 And though it loved in misery  
 Close and cling so tight,  
 There's not a bird of day that dare  
 Extinguish that delight.

302 X. *Meeting*

Hidden by old age awhile  
 In masker's cloak and hood,  
 Each hating what the other loved,  
 Face to face we stood:  
 'That I have met with such,' said he,  
 'Bodes me little good.'

'Let others boast their fill,' said I,  
 'But never dare to boast  
 That such as I had such a man  
 For lover in the past;  
 Say that of living men I hate  
 Such a man the most.'

10

'A loony'd boast of such a love,'  
 He in his rage declared:  
 But such as he for such as me –  
 Could we both discard  
 This beggarly habiliment –  
 Had found a sweeter word.

### 303 XI. *From the 'Antigone'*

Overcome – O bitter sweetness,  
 Inhabitant of the soft cheek of a girl –  
 The rich man and his affairs,  
 The fat flocks and the fields' fatness,  
 Mariners, rough harvesters;  
 Overcome Gods upon Parnassus;

Overcome the Empyrean; hurl  
 Heaven and Earth out of their places,  
 That in the same calamity  
 Brother and brother, friend and friend,  
 Family and family,  
 City and city may contend,  
 By that great glory driven wild.

10

Pray I will and sing I must,  
 And yet I weep – Oedipus' child  
 Descends into the loveless dust.

[Parnell's Funeral  
and Other Poems  
1935]





# [Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems]

## 304 *Parnell's Funeral*

### I

Under the Great Comedian's tomb the crowd.  
A bundle of tempestuous cloud is blown  
About the sky; where that is clear of cloud  
Brightness remains; a brighter star shoots down;  
What shudders run through all that animal blood?  
What is this sacrifice? Can someone there  
Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star?

Rich foliage that the starlight glittered through,  
A frenzied crowd, and where the branches sprang  
A beautiful seated boy; a sacred bow; 10  
A woman, and an arrow on a string;  
A pierced boy, image of a star laid low.  
That woman, the Great Mother imaging,  
Cut out his heart. Some master of design  
Stamped boy and tree upon Sicilian coin.

An age is the reversal of an age:  
When strangers murdered Emmet, Fitzgerald, Tone,  
We lived like men that watch a painted stage.  
What matter for the scene, the scene once gone:  
It had not touched our lives. But popular rage,  
*Hysterica passio* dragged this quarry down. 20  
None shared our guilt; nor did we play a part  
Upon a painted stage when we devoured his heart.

Come, fix upon me that accusing eye.  
I thirst for accusation. All that was sung,

All that was said in Ireland is a lie  
 Bred out of the contagion of the throng,  
 Saving the rhyme rats hear before they die.  
 Leave nothing but the nothings that belong  
 To this bare soul, let all men judge that can  
 Whether it be an animal or a man.

30

## II

The rest I pass, one sentence I unsay.  
 Had de Valera eaten Parnell's heart  
 No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day,  
 No civil rancour torn the land apart.

Had Cosgrave eaten Parnell's heart, the land's  
 Imagination had been satisfied,  
 Or lacking that, government in such hands,  
 O'Higgins its sole statesman had not died.

Had even O'Duffy – but I name no more –  
 Their school a crowd, his master solitude;  
 Through Jonathan Swift's dark grove he passed, and there  
 Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.

10

305 *Alternative Song for  
 the Severed Head in  
 'The King of the Great Clock Tower'*

Saddle and ride, I heard a man say,  
 Out of Ben Bulben and Knocknarea,  
*What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?*  
 All those tragic characters ride  
 But turn from Rosses' crawling tide,  
 The meet's upon the mountain side.  
*A slow low note and an iron bell.*

What brought them there so far from their home,  
 Cuchulain that fought night long with the foam,  
*What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?* 10  
 Niamh that rode on it; lad and lass  
 That sat so still and played at the chess?  
 What but heroic wantonness?  
*A slow low note and an iron bell.*

Aleel, his Countess; Hanrahan  
 That seemed but a wild wenching man;  
*What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?*  
 And all alone comes riding there  
 The King that could make his people stare,  
 Because he had feathers instead of hair. 20  
*A slow low note and an iron bell.*

*Tune by Arthur Duff.*

## 306 *Two Songs Rewritten for the Tune's Sake*

### I

My Paistin Finn is my sole desire,  
 And I am shrunken to skin and bone,  
 For all my heart has had for its hire  
 Is what I can whistle alone and alone.  
*Oro, oro!*  
*To-morrow night I will break down the door.*

What is the good of a man and he  
 Alone and alone, with a speckled shin?  
 I would that I drank with my love on my knee,  
 Between two barrels at the inn. 10  
*Oro, oro!*  
*To-morrow night I will break down the door.*

Alone and alone nine nights I lay  
 Between two bushes under the rain;  
 I thought to have whistled her down that way,  
 I whistled and whistled and whistled in vain.

*Oro, oro!*

*To-morrow night I will break down the door.*

From *The Pot of Broth*

Tune: *Paistin Finn*

II

I would that I were an old beggar  
 Rolling a blind pearl eye,  
 For he cannot see my lady  
 Go gallivanting by;

A dreary, dreepy beggar  
 Without a friend on the earth  
 But a thieving rascally cur –  
 O a beggar blind from his birth;

Or anything else but a rhymer  
 Without a thing in his head  
 But rhymes for a beautiful lady,  
 He rhyming alone in his bed.

10

From *The Player Queen*

### 307 *A Prayer for Old Age*

God guard me from those thoughts men think  
 In the mind alone;  
 He that sings a lasting song  
 Thinks in a marrow-bone;

From all that makes a wise old man  
 That can be praised of all;  
 O what am I that I should not seem  
 For the song's sake a fool?

I pray – for fashion's word is out  
And prayer comes round again – 10  
That I may seem, though I die old,  
A foolish, passionate man.

### 308 *Church and State*

Here is fresh matter, poet,  
Matter for old age meet;  
Might of the Church and the State,  
Their mobs put under their feet.  
O but heart's wine shall run pure,  
Mind's bread grow sweet.

That were a cowardly song,  
Wander in dreams no more;  
What if the Church and the State  
Are the mob that howls at the door! 10  
Wine shall run thick to the end,  
Bread taste sour.

*August 1934*

### *Supernatural Songs*

#### 309 I. *Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn*

Because you have found me in the pitch-dark night  
With open book you ask me what I do.  
Mark and digest my tale, carry it afar  
To those that never saw this tonsured head

Nor heard this voice that ninety years have cracked.  
 Of Baile and Aillinn you need not speak,  
 All know their tale, all know what leaf and twig,  
 What juncture of the apple and the yew,  
 Surmount their bones; but speak what none have heard.

The miracle that gave them such a death 10  
 Transfigured to pure substance what had once  
 Been bone and sinew; when such bodies join  
 There is no touching here, nor touching there,  
 Nor straining joy, but whole is joined to whole;  
 For the intercourse of angels is a light  
 Where for its moment both seem lost, consumed.

Here in the pitch-dark atmosphere above 20  
 The trembling of the apple and the yew,  
 Here on the anniversary of their death,  
 The anniversary of their first embrace,  
 Those lovers, purified by tragedy,  
 Hurry into each other's arms; these eyes,  
 By water, herb and solitary prayer  
 Made aquiline, are open to that light.  
 Though somewhat broken by the leaves, that light  
 Lies in a circle on the grass; therein  
 I turn the pages of my holy book.

### 310 II. *Ribh denounces Patrick*

An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man,  
 A Trinity that is wholly masculine. Man, woman, child  
 (daughter or son),  
 That's how all natural or supernatural stories run.

Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed.  
 As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead begets  
 Godhead,  
 For things below are copies, the Great Smaragdine Tablet said.

Yet all must copy copies, all increase their kind;  
 When the conflagration of their passion sinks, damped by the  
 body or the mind,  
 That juggling nature mounts, her coil in their embraces  
 twined.

The mirror-scalèd serpent is multiplicity, 10  
 But all that run in couples, on earth, in flood or air, share God  
 that is but three,  
 And could beget or bear themselves could they but love as He.

### 311 III. *Ribh in Ecstasy*

What matter that you understood no word!  
 Doubtless I spoke or sang what I had heard  
 In broken sentences. My soul had found  
 All happiness in its own cause or ground.  
 Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot  
 Godhead. Some shadow fell. My soul forgot  
 Those amorous cries that out of quiet come  
 And must the common round of day resume.

### 312 IV. *There*

There all the barrel-hoops are knit,  
 There all the serpent-tails are bit,  
 There all the gyres converge in one,  
 There all the planets drop in the Sun.



313 V. *Ribh considers Christian Love  
insufficient*

Why should I seek for love or study it?  
It is of God and passes human wit;  
I study hatred with great diligence,  
For that's a passion in my own control,  
A sort of besom that can clear the soul  
Of everything that is not mind or sense.

Why do I hate man, woman or event?  
That is a light my jealous soul has sent.  
From terror and deception freed it can  
Discover impurities, can show at last 10  
How soul may walk when all such things are past,  
How soul could walk before such things began.

Then my delivered soul herself shall learn  
A darker knowledge and in hatred turn  
From every thought of God mankind has had.  
Thought is a garment and the soul's a bride  
That cannot in that trash and tinsel hide:  
Hatred of God may bring the soul to God.

At stroke of midnight soul cannot endure  
A bodily or mental furniture. 20  
What can she take until her Master give!  
Where can she look until He make the show!  
What can she know until He bid her know!  
How can she live till in her blood He live!

314 VI. *He and She*

As the moon sidles up  
Must she sidle up,  
As trips the scared moon

Away must she trip:  
 'His light had struck me blind  
 Dared I stop'.

She sings as the moon sings:  
 'I am I, am I;  
 The greater grows my light  
 The further that I fly'.  
 All creation shivers  
 With that sweet cry.

10

### 315 VII. *What Magic Drum?*

He holds him from desire, all but stops his breathing lest  
 Primordial Motherhood forsake his limbs, the child no longer  
 rest,  
 Drinking joy as it were milk upon his breast.

Through light-obliterating garden foliage what magic drum?  
 Down limb and breast or down that glimmering belly move  
 his mouth and sinewy tongue.

What from the forest came? What beast has licked its young?

### 316 VIII. *Whence had they Come?*

Eternity is passion, girl or boy  
 Cry at the onset of their sexual joy  
 'For ever and for ever'; then awake  
 Ignorant what *Dramatis Personæ* spake;  
 A passion-driven exultant man sings out  
 Sentences that he has never thought;  
 The Flagellant lashes those submissive loins  
 Ignorant what that dramatist enjoins,  
 What master made the lash. Whence had they come,  
 The hand and lash that beat down frigid Rome?  
 What sacred drama through her body heaved  
 When world-transforming Charlemagne was conceived?

10

317 IX. *The Four Ages of Man*

He with body waged a fight,  
But body won; it walks upright.

Then he struggled with the heart;  
Innocence and peace depart.

Then he struggled with the mind;  
His proud heart he left behind.

Now his wars on God begin;  
At stroke of midnight God shall win.

318 X. *Conjunctions*

If Jupiter and Saturn meet,  
What a crop of mummy wheat!

The sword's a cross; thereon He died:  
On breast of Mars the goddess sighed.

319 XI. *A Needle's Eye*

All the stream that's roaring by  
Came out of a needle's eye;  
Things unborn, things that are gone,  
From needle's eye still goad it on.

320 XII. *Meru*

Civilisation is hooped together, brought  
 Under a rule, under the semblance of peace  
 By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,  
 And he, despite his terror, cannot cease  
 Ravening through century after century,  
 Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come  
 Into the desolation of reality:  
 Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!  
 Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,  
 Caverned in night under the drifted snow, 10  
 Or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast  
 Beat down upon their naked bodies, know  
 That day brings round the night, that before dawn  
 His glory and his monuments are gone.



# New Poems, 1938



## New Poems

### 321 *The Gyres*

The gyres! the gyres! Old Rocky Face look forth;  
Things thought too long can be no longer thought  
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,  
And ancient lineaments are blotted out.  
Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;  
Empedocles has thrown all things about;  
Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;  
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.

What matter though numb nightmare ride on top  
And blood and mire the sensitive body stain? 10  
What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,  
A greater, a more gracious time has gone;  
For painted forms or boxes of make-up  
In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;  
What matter? Out of Cavern comes a voice  
And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice.'

Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,  
What matter! Those that Rocky Face holds dear,  
Lovers of horses and of women, shall  
From marble of a broken sepulchre 20  
Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,  
Or any rich, dark nothing disinter  
The workman, noble and saint, and all things run  
On that unfashionable gyre again.



322 *Lapis Lazuli**(For Harry Clifton)*

I have heard that hysterical women say  
 They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,  
 Of poets that are always gay,  
 For everybody knows or else should know  
 That if nothing drastic is done  
 Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,  
 Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in  
 Until the town lie beaten flat.

All perform their tragic play,  
 There struts Hamlet, there is Lear, 10  
 That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;  
 Yet they, should the last scene be there,  
 The great stage curtain about to drop,  
 If worthy their prominent part in the play,  
 Do not break up their lines to weep.  
 They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;  
 Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.  
 All men have aimed at, found and lost;  
 Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:  
 Tragedy wrought to its uttermost. 20  
 Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,  
 And all the drop scenes drop at once  
 Upon a hundred thousand stages,  
 It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,  
 Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,  
 Old civilisations put to the sword.  
 Then they and their wisdom went to rack:  
 No handiwork of Callimachus  
 Who handled marble as if it were bronze, 30  
 Made draperies that seemed to rise  
 When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;

His long lamp chimney shaped like the stem  
 Of a slender palm, stood but a day;  
 All things fall and are built again  
 And those that build them again are gay.

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,  
 Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,  
 Over them flies a long-legged bird  
 A symbol of longevity; 40  
 The third, doubtless a serving-man,  
 Carries a musical instrument.

Every discolouration of the stone,  
 Every accidental crack or dent  
 Seems a water-course or an avalanche,  
 Or lofty slope where it still snows  
 Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch  
 Sweetens the little half-way house  
 Those Chinamen climb towards, and I  
 Delight to imagine them seated there; 50  
 There, on the mountain and the sky,  
 On all the tragic scene they stare.  
 One asks for mournful melodies;  
 Accomplished fingers begin to play.  
 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,  
 Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

### 323 *Imitated from the Japanese*

A most astonishing thing  
 Seventy years have I lived;

(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring  
 For Spring is here again.)

Seventy years have I lived  
 No ragged beggar man,  
 Seventy years have I lived,

Seventy years man and boy,  
And never have I danced for joy.

### 324 *Sweet Dancer*

The girl goes dancing there  
On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth  
Grass plot of the garden;  
Escaped from bitter youth,  
Escaped out of her crowd,  
Or out of her black cloud.  
Ah dancer, ah sweet dancer!

If strange men come from the house  
To lead her away do not say  
That she is happy being crazy; 10  
Lead them gently astray;  
Let her finish her dance,  
Let her finish her dance.  
Ah dancer, ah sweet dancer!

### 325 *The Three Bushes*

*An incident from the 'Historia mei Temporis' of the  
Abbé Michel de Bourdeille.*

Said lady once to lover,  
'None can rely upon  
A love that lacks its proper food;  
And if your love were gone  
How could you sing those songs of love?  
I should be blamed, young man.'  
*O my dear, O my dear.*

'Have no lit candles in your room,'  
That lovely lady said,  
'That I at midnight by the clock 10  
May creep into your bed,

For if I saw myself creep in  
I think I should drop dead.'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

'I love a man in secret,  
Dear chambermaid,' said she,  
'I know that I must drop down dead  
If he stop loving me,  
Yet what could I but drop down dead  
If I lost my chastity?'

20

*O my dear, O my dear.*

'So you must lie beside him  
And let him think me there,  
And maybe we are all the same  
Where no candles are,  
And maybe we are all the same  
That strip the body bare.'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

But no dogs barked and midnights chimed,  
And through the chime she'd say,  
'That was a lucky thought of mine,  
My lover looked so gay;'  
But heaved a sigh if the chambermaid  
Looked half asleep all day.

30

*O my dear, O my dear.*

'No, not another song,' said he,  
'Because my lady came  
A year ago for the first time  
At midnight to my room,  
And I must lie between the sheets  
When the clock begins to chime.'

40

*O my dear, O my dear.*

'A laughing, crying, sacred song,  
A leching song,' they said.

Did ever men hear such a song?  
 No, but that day they did.  
 Did ever man ride such a race?  
 No, not until he rode.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

But when his horse had put its hoof  
 Into a rabbit hole  
 He dropped upon his head and died.  
 His lady saw it all  
 And dropped and died thereon, for she  
 Loved him with her soul.

50

*O my dear, O my dear.*

The chambermaid lived long, and took  
 Their graves into her charge,  
 And there two bushes planted  
 That when they had grown large  
 Seemed sprung from but a single root  
 So did their roses merge.

60

*O my dear, O my dear.*

When she was old and dying,  
 The priest came where she was;  
 She made a full confession.  
 Long looked he in her face,  
 And O, he was a good man  
 And understood her case.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

70

He bade them take and bury her  
 Beside her lady's man,  
 And set a rose-tree on her grave.  
 And now none living can  
 When they have plucked a rose there  
 Know where its roots began.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

326 *The Lady's First Song*

I turn round  
 Like a dumb beast in a show,  
 Neither know what I am  
 Nor where I go,  
 My language beaten  
 Into one name;  
 I am in love  
 And that is my shame.  
 What hurts the soul  
 My soul adores,  
 No better than a beast  
 Upon all fours.

10

327 *The Lady's Second Song*

What sort of man is coming  
 To lie between your feet?  
 What matter we are but women.  
 Wash; make your body sweet;  
 I have cupboards of dried fragrance  
 I can strew the sheet.

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

He shall love my soul as though  
 Body were not at all,  
 He shall love your body  
 Untroubled by the soul,  
 Love cram love's two divisions  
 Yet keep his substance whole.

10

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

Soul must learn a love that is  
 Proper to my breast,

Limbs a love in common  
 With every noble beast.  
 If soul may look and body touch  
 Which is the more blest?

20

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

### 328 *The Lady's Third Song*

When you and my true lover meet  
 And he plays tunes between your feet,  
 Speak no evil of the soul,  
 Nor think that body is the whole  
 For I that am his daylight lady  
 Know worse evil of the body;  
 But in honour split his love  
 Till either neither have enough,  
 That I may hear if we should kiss  
 A contrapuntal serpent hiss,  
 You, should hand explore a thigh,  
 All the labouring heavens sigh.

10

### 329 *The Lover's Song*

Bird sighs for the air,  
 Thought for I know not where,  
 For the womb the seed sighs.  
 Now sinks the same rest  
 On mind, on nest,  
 On straining thighs.

### 330 *The Chambermaid's First Song*

How came this ranger  
 Now sunk in rest,

Stranger with stranger,  
 On my cold breast.  
 What's left to sigh for,  
 Strange night has come;  
 God's love has hidden him  
 Out of all harm,  
 Pleasure has made him  
 Weak as a worm.

10

### 331 *The Chambermaid's Second Song*

From pleasure of the bed,  
 Dull as a worm,  
 His rod and its butting head  
 Limp as a worm,  
 His spirit that has fled  
 Blind as a worm.

### 332 *An Acre of Grass*

Picture and book remain,  
 An acre of green grass  
 For air and exercise,  
 Now strength of body goes;  
 Midnight an old house  
 Where nothing stirs but a mouse.

My temptation is quiet.  
 Here at life's end  
 Neither loose imagination,  
 Nor the mill of the mind  
 Consuming its rag and bone,  
 Can make the truth known.

10

Grant me an old man's frenzy.  
 Myself must I remake  
 Till I am Timon and Lear



Or that William Blake  
 Who beat upon the wall  
 Till truth obeyed his call;

A mind Michael Angelo knew  
 That can pierce the clouds  
 Or inspired by frenzy  
 Shake the dead in their shrouds;  
 Forgotten else by mankind  
 An old man's eagle mind.

20

### 333 *What Then?*

His chosen comrades thought at school  
 He must grow a famous man;  
 He thought the same and lived by rule,  
 All his twenties crammed with toil;  
*'What then?' sang Plato's ghost, 'what then?'*

Everything he wrote was read,  
 After certain years he won  
 Sufficient money for his need,  
 Friends that have been friends indeed;  
*'What then?' sang Plato's ghost, 'what then?'*

10

All his happier dreams came true –  
 A small old house, wife, daughter, son,  
 Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,  
 Poets and Wits about him drew;  
*'What then?' sang Plato's ghost, 'what then?'*

'The work is done,' grown old he thought,  
 'According to my boyish plan;  
 Let the fools rage, I swerved in nought,  
 Something to perfection brought;  
*But louder sang that ghost 'What then?'*

20

### 334 *Beautiful Lofty Things*

Beautiful lofty things; O'Leary's noble head;  
 My father upon the Abbey stage, before him a raging crowd.  
 'This Land of Saints,' and then as the applause died out,  
 'Of plaster Saints;' his beautiful mischievous head thrown back.  
 Standish O'Grady supporting himself between the tables  
 Speaking to a drunken audience high nonsensical words;  
 Augusta Gregory seated at her great ormolu table  
 Her eightieth winter approaching; 'Yesterday he threatened my  
     life,  
 I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this table  
 The blinds drawn up;' Maud Gonne at Howth station      10  
     waiting a train,  
 Pallas Athena in that straight back and arrogant head:  
 All the Olympians; a thing never known again.

### 335 *A Crazy Girl*

That crazed girl improvising her music,  
 Her poetry, dancing upon the shore,  
 Her soul in division from itself  
 Climbing, falling she knew not where,  
 Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship  
 Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare  
 A beautiful lofty thing, or a thing  
 Heroically lost, heroically found.

No matter what disaster occurred  
 She stood in desperate music wound      10  
 Wound, wound, and she made in her triumph  
 Where the bales and the baskets lay  
 No common intelligible sound  
 But sang, 'O sea-starved hungry sea.'

### 336 *To Dorothy Wellesley*

Stretch towards the moonless midnight of the trees  
 As though that hand could reach to where they stand,  
 And they but famous old upholsteries  
 Delightful to the touch; tighten that hand  
 As though to draw them closer yet.

Rammed full

Of that most sensuous silence of the night  
 (For since the horizon's bought strange dogs are still)  
 Climb to your chamber full of books and wait,  
 No books upon the knee and no one there  
 But a great dane that cannot bay the moon  
 And now lies sunk in sleep.

10

What climbs the stair?

Nothing that common women ponder on  
 If you are worth my hope! Neither Content  
 Nor satisfied Conscience, but that great family  
 Some ancient famous authors misrepresent,  
 The Proud Furies each with her torch on high.

### 337 *The Curse of Cromwell*

You ask what I have found and far and wide I go,  
 Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous  
 crew,  
 The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,  
 And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen  
 where are they?  
 And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride  
 His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.  
*O what of that, O what of that*  
*What is there left to say?*

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,  
 But there's no good complaining, for money's rant is on, 10  
 He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount  
 And we and all the Muses are things of no account.  
 They have schooling of their own but I pass their schooling by,  
 What can they know that we know that know the time to die?

*O what of that, O what of that  
 What is there left to say?*

But there's another knowledge that my heart destroys  
 As the fox in the old fable destroyed the Spartan boy's  
 Because it proves that things both can and cannot be;  
 That the swordsmen and the ladies can still keep 20  
 company;

Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,  
 That I am still their servant though all are underground.

*O what of that, O what of that  
 What is there left to say?*

I came on a great house in the middle of the night  
 Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,  
 And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;  
 But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;  
 And when I pay attention I must out and walk  
 Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk. 30

*O what of that, O what of that  
 What is there left to say?*

## 338 Roger Casement

*(After reading 'The Forged Casement Diaries' by Dr. Maloney)*

I say that Roger Casement  
 Did what he had to do,  
 He died upon the gallows  
 But that is nothing new.

Afraid they might be beaten  
 Before the bench of Time  
 They turned a trick by forgery  
 And blackened his good name.

A perjurer stood ready  
 To prove their forgery true; 10  
 They gave it out to all the world  
 And that is something new;

For Spring-Rice had to whisper it  
 Being their Ambassador,  
 And then the speakers got it  
 And writers by the score.

Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop  
 That cried it far and wide,  
 Come from the forger and his desk,  
 Desert the perjurer's side; 20

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

### 339 *The Ghost of Roger Casement*

O what has made that sudden noise?  
 What on the threshold stands?  
 It never crossed the sea because  
 John Bull and the sea are friends;  
 But this is not the old sea  
 Nor this the old seashore.  
 What gave that roar of mockery,  
 That roar in the sea's roar?

*The ghost of Roger Casement  
 Is beating on the door.* 10

John Bull has stood for Parliament,  
 A dog must have his day,

The country thinks no end of him  
 For he knows how to say  
 At a beanfeast or a banquet,  
 That all must hang their trust  
 Upon the British Empire,  
 Upon the Church of Christ.

*The ghost of Roger Casement  
 Is beating on the door.*

20

John Bull has gone to India  
 And all must pay him heed  
 For histories are there to prove  
 That none of another breed  
 Has had a like inheritance,  
 Or sucked such milk as he,  
 And there's no luck about a house  
 If it lack honesty.

*The ghost of Roger Casement  
 Is beating on the door.*

30

I poked about a village church  
 And found his family tomb  
 And copied out what I could read  
 In that religious gloom;  
 Found many a famous man there;  
 But fame and virtue rot.  
 Draw round beloved and bitter men,  
 Draw round and raise a shout;

*The ghost of Roger Casement  
 Is beating on the door.*

40

### 340 *The O'Rahilly*

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

Allow that he, despite  
 All those learned historians,  
 Established it for good;  
 He wrote out that word himself,  
 He christened himself with blood.

*How goes the weather?*

Sing of the O'Rahilly 10  
 That had such little sense,  
 He told Pearse and Connolly  
 He'd gone to great expense  
 Keeping all the Kerry men  
 Out of that crazy fight;  
 That he might be there himself  
 Had travelled half the night.

*How goes the weather?*

'Am I such a craven that  
 I should not get the word 20  
 But for what some travelling man  
 Had heard I had not heard?'  
 Then on Pearse and Connolly  
 He fixed a bitter look,  
 'Because I helped to wind the clock  
 I come to hear it strike.'

*How goes the weather?*

What remains to sing about  
 But of the death he met 30  
 Stretched under a doorway  
 Somewhere off Henry Street;  
 They that found him found upon  
 The door above his head  
 'Here died the O'Rahilly  
 R.I.P.' writ in blood.

*How goes the weather?*

341 *Come Gather Round Me Parnellites*

Come gather round me Parnellites  
 And praise our chosen man,  
 Stand upright on your legs awhile,  
 Stand upright while you can,  
 For soon we lie where he is laid  
 And he is underground;  
 Come fill up all those glasses  
 And pass the bottle round.

And here's a cogent reason  
 And I have many more, 10  
 He fought the might of England  
 And saved the Irish poor,  
 Whatever good a farmer's got  
 He brought it all to pass;  
 And here's another reason,  
 That Parnell loved a lass.

And here's a final reason,  
 He was of such a kind  
 Every man that sings a song  
 Keeps Parnell in his mind 20  
 For Parnell was a proud man,  
 No prouder trod the ground,  
 And a proud man's a lovely man  
 So pass the bottle round.

The Bishops and the Party  
 That tragic story made,  
 A husband that had sold his wife  
 And after that betrayed;  
 But stories that live longest  
 Are sung above the glass, 30  
 And Parnell loved his country  
 And Parnell loved his lass.



342 *The Wild Old Wicked Man*

'Because I am mad about women  
 I am mad about the hills,'  
 Said that wild old wicked man  
 Who travels where God wills,  
 'Not to die on the straw at home,  
 Those hands to close these eyes,  
 That is all I ask, my dear,  
 From the old man in the skies.'

*Day-break and a candle end.*

'Kind are all your words, my dear, 10  
 Do not the rest withhold,  
 Who can know the year, my dear,  
 When an old man's blood grows cold.  
 I have what no young man can have  
 Because he loves too much.  
 Words I have that can pierce the heart,  
 But what can he do but touch?'

*Day-break and a candle end.*

Then said she to that wild old man  
 His stout stick under his hand, 20  
 'Love to give or to withhold  
 Is not at my command.  
 I gave it all to an older man  
 That old man in the skies.  
 Hands that are busy with His beads  
 Can never close those eyes.'

*Day-break and a candle end.*

'Go your ways, O go your ways  
 I choose another mark,  
 Girls down on the seashore 30  
 Who understand the dark;

Bawdy talk for the fishermen  
 A dance for the fisher lads;  
 When dark hangs upon the water  
 They turn down their beds.'

*Day-break and a candle end.*

'A young man in the dark am I  
 But a wild old man in the light  
 That can make a cat laugh, or  
 Can touch by mother wit  
 Things hid in their marrow bones  
 From time long passed away,  
 Hid from all those warty lads  
 That by their bodies lay.'

40

*Day-break and a candle end.*

'All men live in suffering  
 I know as few can know,  
 Whether they take the upper road  
 Or stay content on the low,  
 Rower bent in his row-boat  
 Or weaver bent at his loom,  
 Horsemen erect upon horseback  
 Or child hid in the womb.'

50

*Day-break and a candle end.*

'That some stream of lightning  
 From the old man in the skies  
 Can burn out that suffering  
 No right taught man denies.  
 But a coarse old man am I,  
 I choose the second-best,  
 I forget it all awhile  
 Upon a woman's breast.'

60

*Day-break and a candle end.*

### 343 *The Great Day*

Hurrah for revolution and more cannon shot;  
 A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar upon foot;  
 Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again,  
 The beggars have changed places but the lash goes on.

### 344 *Parnell*

Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man;  
 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone.'

### 345 *What Was Lost*

I sing what was lost and dread what was won,  
 I walk in a battle fought over again,  
 My king a lost king, and lost soldiers my men;  
 Feet to the Rising and Setting may run  
 They always beat on the same small stone.

### 346 *The Spur*

You think it horrible that lust and rage  
 Should dance attendance upon my old age;  
 They were not such a plague when I was young;  
 What else have I to spur me into song?

### 347 *A Drunken Man's Praise of Sobriety*

Come swish around my pretty punk  
 And keep me dancing still  
 That I may stay a sober man  
 Although I drink my fill.  
 Sobriety is a jewel  
 That I do much adore;  
 And therefore keep me dancing

Though drunkards lie and snore.  
 O mind your feet, O mind your feet,  
 Keep dancing like a wave, 10  
 And under every dancer  
 A dead man in his grave.  
 No ups and downs, my Pretty,  
 A mermaid, not a punk;  
 A drunkard is a dead man  
 And all dead men are drunk.

### 348 *The Pilgrim*

I fasted for some forty days on bread and buttermilk  
 For passing round the bottle with girls in rags or silk,  
 In country shawl or Paris cloak, had put my wits astray,  
 And what's the good of women for all that they can say  
 Is fol de rol de roly O.

Round Lough Derg's holy island I went upon the stones,  
 I prayed at all the Stations upon my marrow bones,  
 And there I found an old man and though I prayed all day  
 And that old man beside me, nothing would he say  
 But fol de rol de roly O. 10

All know that all the dead in the world about that place are  
 stuck  
 And that should mother seek her son she'd have but little luck  
 Because the fires of Purgatory have ate their shapes away;  
 I swear to God I questioned them and all they had to say  
 Was fol de rol de roly O.

A great black ragged bird appeared when I was in the boat;  
 Some twenty feet from tip to tip had it stretched rightly out,  
 With flopping and with flapping it made a great display  
 But I never stopped to question, what could the boatman say  
 But fol de rol de roly O. 20

Now I am in the public house and lean upon the wall,  
 So come in rags or come in silk, in cloak or country shawl,  
 And come with learned lovers or with what men you may  
 For I can put the whole lot down, and all I have to say  
 Is fol de rol de roly O.

### 349 *Colonel Martin*

#### I

The Colonel went out sailing,  
 He spoke with Turk and Jew  
 With Christian and with Infidel  
 For all tongues he knew.  
 'O what's a wifeless man?' said he  
 And he came sailing home.  
 He rose the latch and went upstairs  
 And found an empty room.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

#### II

'I kept her much in the country 10  
 And she was much alone,  
 And though she may be there,' he said,  
 'She may be in the town,  
 She may be all alone there  
 For who can say,' he said,  
 'I think that I shall find her  
 In a young man's bed.'  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

#### III

The Colonel met a pedlar, 20  
 Agreed their clothes to swop,  
 And bought the grandest jewelry  
 In a Galway shop,  
 Instead of thread and needle  
 Put jewelry in the pack,

Bound a thong about his hand,  
 Hitched it on his back.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## IV

The Colonel knocked on the rich man's door,  
 'I am sorry,' said the maid  
 'My mistress cannot see these things 30  
 But she is still abed,  
 And never have I looked upon  
 Jewelry so grand.'  
 'Take all to your mistress,'  
 And he laid them on her hand.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## V

And he went in and she went on  
 And both climbed up the stair,  
 And O he was a clever man  
 For he his slippers wore, 40  
 And when they came to the top stair  
 He ran on ahead,  
 His wife he found and the rich man  
 In the comfort of a bed.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## VI

The Judge at the Assize Court  
 When he heard that story told  
 Awarded him for damages  
 Three kegs of gold.  
 The Colonel said to Tom his man 50  
 'Harness an ass and cart,  
 Carry the gold about the town,  
 Throw it in every part.'  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## VII

And there at all street corners  
 A man with a pistol stood,  
 And the rich man had paid them well  
 To shoot the Colonel dead;  
 But they threw down their pistols  
 And all men heard them swear 60  
 That they could never shoot a man  
 Did all that for the poor.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## VIII

'And did you keep no gold, Tom?  
 You had three kegs,' said he.  
 'I never thought of that, Sir;'  
 'Then want before you die.'  
 And want he did; for my own grand-dad,  
 Saw the story's end,  
 And Tom make out a living 70  
 From the sea-weed on the strand.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## 350 *A Model for the Laureate*

On thrones from China to Peru  
 All sorts of kings have sat  
 That men and women of all sorts  
 Proclaimed both good and great;  
 And what's the odds if such as these  
 For reason of the State  
 Should keep their lovers waiting,  
     Keep their lovers waiting.  
 Some boast of beggar-kings and kings  
 Of rascals black and white 10  
 That rule because a strong right arm

Puts all men in a fright,  
 And drunk or sober live at ease  
 Where none gainsay their right,  
 And keep their lovers waiting,  
     Keep their lovers waiting.

The Muse is mute when public men  
 Applaud a modern throne:  
 Those cheers that can be bought or sold  
 That office fools have run,                   20  
 That waxen seal, that signature.  
 For things like these what decent man  
 Would keep his lover waiting?  
     Keep his lover waiting?

### 351 *The Old Stone Cross*

A statesman is an easy man,  
 He tells his lies by rote;  
 A journalist makes up his lies  
 And takes you by the throat;  
 So stay at home and drink your beer  
 And let the neighbours vote,  
     *Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
     *Under the old stone Cross.*

Because this age and the next age  
 Engender in the ditch,                   10  
 No man can know a happy man  
 From any passing wretch,  
 If Folly link with Elegance  
 No man knows which is which,  
     *Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
     *Under the old stone Cross.*

But actors lacking music  
 Do most excite my spleen,



They say it is more human  
 To shuffle, grunt and groan,  
 Not knowing what unearthly stuff  
 Rounds a mighty scene.

20

*Said the man in the golden breastplate  
 Under the old stone Cross.*

### 352 *The Spirit Medium*

Poetry, music, I have loved, and yet  
 Because of those new dead  
 That come into my soul and escape  
 Confusion of the bed,  
 Or those begotten or unbegotten  
 Perring in a band,  
 I bend my body to the spade  
 Or grope with a dirty hand.

Or those begotten or unbegotten.  
 For I would not recall  
 Some that being unbegotten  
 Are not individual,  
 But copy some one action  
 Moulding it of dust or sand  
 I bend my body to the spade  
 Or grope with a dirty hand.

10

An old ghost's thoughts are lightning  
 To follow is to die;  
 Poetry and music I have banished,  
 But the stupidity  
 Of root, shoot, blossom or clay  
 Makes no demand.  
 I bend my body to the spade  
 Or grope with a dirty hand.

20

353 *Those Images*

What if I bade you leave  
 The cavern of the mind?  
 There's better exercise  
 In the sunlight and wind.

I never bade you go  
 To Moscow or to Rome,  
 Renounce that drudgery,  
 Call the Muses home.

Seek those images  
 That constitute the wild,  
 The lion and the virgin,  
 The harlot and the child.

10

Find in middle air  
 An eagle on the wing,  
 Recognise the five  
 That make the Muses sing.

354 *The Municipal Gallery Re-visited*

I

Around me the images of thirty years;  
 An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;  
 Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,  
 Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride;  
 Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears  
 A gentle questioning look that cannot hide  
 A soul incapable of remorse or rest;  
 A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed.

## II

An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand  
 Blessing the Tricolour. 'This is not' I say 10  
 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland  
 'The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'  
 Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand;  
 Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.  
 I met her all but fifty years ago  
 For twenty minutes in some studio.

## III

Heart smitten with emotion I sink down  
 My heart recovering with covered eyes;  
 Wherever I had looked I had looked upon  
 My permanent or impermanent images; 20  
 Augusta Gregory's son; her sister's son,  
 Hugh Lane, 'onlie begetter' of all these;  
 Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale  
 As though some ballad singer had sung it all.

## IV

Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory,  
 'Greatest since Rembrandt,' according to John Synge;  
 A great ebullient portrait certainly;  
 But where is the brush that could show anything  
 Of all that pride and that humility,  
 And I am in despair that time may bring 30  
 Approved patterns of women or of men  
 But not that selfsame excellence again.

## V

My mediaeval knees lack health until they bend,  
 But in that woman, in that household where  
 Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.  
 Childless I thought 'my children may find here

Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,  
 And now that end has come I have not wept;  
 No fox can foul the lair the badger swept.

## VI

(An image out of Spenser and the common tongue.) 40  
 John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
 All that we did, all that we said or sang  
 Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
 Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.  
 We three alone in modern times had brought  
 Everything down to that sole test again,  
 Dream of the noble and the beggarman.

## VII

And here's John Synge himself, that rooted man  
 'Forgetting human words,' a grave deep face.  
 You that would judge me do not judge alone 50  
 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.

## 355 *Are You Content*

I call on those that call me son,  
 Grandson, or great-grandson,  
 On uncles, aunts, great-uncles or great-aunts  
 To judge what I have done.  
 Have I, that put it into words,  
 Spoilt what old loins have sent?  
 Eyes spiritualised by death can judge,  
 I cannot, but I am not content.

He that in Sligo at Drumcliff  
Set up the old stone Cross, 10  
That red-headed rector in County Down  
A good man on a horse,  
Sandymount Corbets, that notable man  
Old William Pollexfen,  
The smuggler Middleton, Butlers far back,  
Half legendary men.

Infirm and aged I might stay  
In some good company,  
I who have always hated work, 20  
Smiling at the sea,  
Or demonstrate in my own life  
What Robert Browning meant  
By an old hunter talking with Gods;  
But I am not content.

[Last Poems, 1938–1939]



[*Last Poems*]

356 *Under Ben Bulben*

I

Swear by what the Sages spoke  
Round the Mareotic Lake  
That the Witch of Atlas knew,  
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.

Swear by those horsemen, by those women,  
Complexion and form prove superhuman,  
That pale, long visaged company  
That airs an immortality  
Completeness of their passions won;  
Now they ride the wintry dawn  
Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.

10

Here's the gist of what they mean.

II

Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities,  
That of race and that of soul,  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.  
Whether man dies in his bed  
Or the rifle knocks him dead,  
A brief parting from those dear  
Is the worst man has to fear.  
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,  
Sharp their spades, their muscle strong,  
They but thrust their buried men  
Back in the human mind again.

20



## III

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard  
 'Send war in our time, O Lord!'  
 Know that when all words are said  
 And a man is fighting mad,  
 Something drops from eyes long blind  
 He completes his partial mind, 30  
 For an instant stands at ease,  
 Laughs aloud, his heart at peace,  
 Even the wisest man grows tense  
 With some sort of violence  
 Before he can accomplish fate  
 Know his work or choose his mate.

## IV

Poet and sculptor do the work  
 Nor let the modish painter shirk  
 What his great forefathers did,  
 Bring the soul of man to God, 40  
 Make him fill the cradles right.

Measurement began our might:  
 Forms a stark Egyptian thought,  
 Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.

Michael Angelo left a proof  
 On the Sistine Chapel roof,  
 Where but half-awakened Adam  
 Can disturb globe-trotting Madam  
 Till her bowels are in heat,  
 Proof that there's a purpose set 50  
 Before the secret working mind:  
 Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattrocento put in paint,  
 On backgrounds for a God or Saint,  
 Gardens where a soul's at ease;  
 Where everything that meets the eye

Flowers and grass and cloudless sky  
 Resemble forms that are, or seem  
 When sleepers wake and yet still dream,  
 And when it's vanished still declare, 60  
 With only bed and bedstead there,  
 That Heavens had opened.

Gyres run on;

When that greater dream had gone  
 Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude  
 Prepared a rest for the people of God,  
 Palmer's phrase, but after that  
 Confusion fell upon our thought.

## v

Irish poets learn your trade  
 Sing whatever is well made,  
 Scorn the sort now growing up 70  
 All out of shape from toe to top,  
 Their unremembering hearts and heads  
 Base-born products of base beds.  
 Sing the peasantry, and then  
 Hard-riding country gentlemen,  
 The holiness of monks, and after  
 Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;  
 Sing the lords and ladies gay  
 That were beaten into the clay  
 Through seven heroic centuries; 80  
 Cast your mind on other days  
 That we in coming days may be  
 Still the indomitable Irishry.

## vi

Under bare Ben Bulben's head  
 In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,  
 An ancestor was rector there  
 Long years ago; a church stands near,

By the road an ancient Cross.  
 No marble, no conventional phrase,  
 On limestone quarried near the spot  
 By his command these words are cut:

90

Cast a cold eye  
 On life, on death.  
 Horseman, pass by!

## 357 *Three Songs to the One Burden*

### I

The Roaring Tinker if you like,  
 But Mannion is my name,  
 And I beat up the common sort  
 And think it is no shame.  
 The common breeds the common,  
 A lout begets a lout,  
 So when I take on half a score  
 I knock their heads about.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

All Mannions come from Manannan,  
 Though rich on every shore  
 He never lay behind four walls  
 He had such character,  
 Nor ever made an iron red  
 Nor soldered pot or pan;  
 His roaring and his ranting  
 Best please a wandering man.

10

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

Could Crazy Jane put off old age  
 And ranting time renew,  
 Could that old god rise up again  
 We'd drink a can or two,

20

And out and lay our leadership  
 On country and on town,  
 Throw likely couples into bed  
 And knock the others down.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

## II

My name is Henry Middleton  
 I have a small demesne,  
 A small forgotten house that's set  
 On a storm-bitten green,  
 I scrub its floors and make my bed,  
 I cook and change my plate,  
 The Post and Garden-boy alone  
 Have keys to my old gate.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

Though I have locked my gate on them 10  
 I pity all the young,  
 I know what devil's trade they learn  
 From those they live among,  
 Their drink, their pitch and toss by day,  
 Their robbery by night;  
 The wisdom of the people's gone,  
 How can the young go straight?

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

When every Sunday afternoon  
 On the Green Lands I walk 20  
 And wear a coat in fashion,  
 Memories of the talk  
 Of hen wives and of queer old men  
 Brace me and make me strong;  
 There's not a pilot on the perch  
 Knows I have lived so long.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

## III

Come gather round me players all:  
 Come praise Nineteen-Sixteen,  
 Those from the pit and gallery  
 Or from the painted scene  
 That fought in the Post Office  
 Or round the City Hall,  
 Praise every man that came again,  
 Praise every man that fell.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

Who was the first man shot that day? 10  
 The player Connolly,  
 Close to the City Hall he died;  
 Carriage and voice had he;  
 He lacked those years that go with skill  
 But later might have been  
 A famous, brilliant figure  
 Before the painted scene.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

Some had no thought of victory 20  
 But had gone out to die  
 That Ireland's mind be greater,  
 Her heart mount up on high,  
 And no man knows what's yet to come  
 But Patrick Pearse has said  
 In every generation  
 Must Ireland's blood be shed.

*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

358 *The Black Tower*

Say that the men of the old black tower  
 Though they but feed as the goatherd feeds  
 Their money spent, their wine gone sour,  
 Lack nothing that a soldier needs,  
 That all are oath-bound men  
 Those banners come not in.

*There in the tomb stand the dead upright  
 But winds come up from the shore  
 They shake when the winds roar  
 Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

10

Those banners come to bribe or threaten  
 Or whisper that a man's a fool  
 Who when his own right king's forgotten  
 Cares what king sets up his rule.  
 If he died long ago  
 Why do you dread us so?

*There in the tomb drops the faint moonlight  
 But wind comes up from the shore  
 They shake when the winds roar  
 Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

20

The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber  
 Catching small birds in the dew of the morn  
 When we hale men lie stretched in slumber  
 Swears that he hears the king's great horn.  
 But he's a lying hound;  
 Stand we on guard oath-bound.

*There in the tomb the dark grows blacker  
 But wind comes up from the shore  
 They shake when the winds roar  
 Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

30

## 359 *Cuchulain Comported*

A man that had six mortal wounds, a man  
Violent and famous, strode among the dead;  
Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

Then certain Shrouds that muttered head to head  
Came and were gone. He leant upon a tree  
As though to meditate on wounds and blood.

A Shroud that seemed to have authority  
Among those bird-like things came, and let fall  
A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three

Came creeping up because the man was still. 10  
And thereupon that linen-carrier said  
'Your life can grow much sweeter if you will

'Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud;  
Mainly because of what we only know  
The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.

'We thread the needles' eyes and all we do  
All must together do.' That done, the man  
Took up the nearest and began to sew.

'Now we shall sing and sing the best we can  
But first you must be told our character: 20  
Convicted cowards all by kindred slain

'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'  
They sang but had nor human notes nor words,  
Though all was done in common as before,

They had changed their throats and had the throats  
of birds.

360 *Three Marching Songs*

## I

Remember all those renowned generations,  
 They left their bodies to fatten the wolves,  
 They left their homesteads to fatten the foxes,  
 Fled to far countries, or sheltered themselves  
 In cavern, crevice or hole,  
 Defending Ireland's soul.

Be still, be still, what can be said?  
 My father sang that song,  
 But time amends old wrong,  
 All that is finished, let it fade.

10

Remember all those renowned generations,  
 Remember all that have sunk in their blood,  
 Remember all that have died on the scaffold,  
 Remember all that have fled, that have stood,  
 Stood, took death like a tune  
 On an old tambourine.

Be still, be still, what can be said?  
 My father sang that song,  
 But time amends old wrong,  
 All that is finished, let it fade.

20

Fail and that history turns into rubbish,  
 All that great past to a trouble of fools;  
 Those that come after shall mock at O'Donnell  
 Mock at the memory of both O'Neills,  
 Mock Emmet, mock Parnell,  
 All the renown that fell.

Be still, be still, what can be said?  
 My father sang that song,  
 But time amends old wrong,  
 All that is finished, let it fade.

30



## II

The soldier takes pride in saluting his Captain,  
 The devotee proffers a knee to his Lord,  
 Some back a mare thrown from a thoroughbred,  
 Troy backed its Helen, Troy died and adored;  
 Great nations blossom above;  
 A slave bows down to a slave.

What marches through the mountain pass?  
 No, no, my son, not yet;  
 That is an airy<sup>1</sup> spot  
 And no man knows what treads the grass. 10

We know what rascal might has defiled  
 The lofty innocent that it has slain,  
 We were not born in the peasant's cot  
 Where man forgives if the belly gain.  
 More dread the life that we live,  
 How can the mind forgive?

What marches through the mountain pass?  
 No, no, my son, not yet;  
 That is an airy spot  
 And no man knows what treads the grass. 20

What if there's nothing up there at the top?  
 Where are the captains that govern mankind?  
 What tears down a tree that has nothing within it?  
 A blast of wind, O a marching wind,  
 March wind, and any old tune,  
 March march and how does it run.

What marches through the mountain pass?  
 No, no, my son, not yet;  
 That is an airy spot  
 And no man knows what treads the grass. 30

<sup>1</sup>'Airy' may be an old pronunciation of 'eerie'. I often heard it in Galway & Sligo.

## III

Grandfather sang it under the gallows:  
'Hear, gentlemen, ladies, and all mankind:  
Money is good and a girl might be better,  
But good strong blows are delights to the mind.'  
There, standing on the cart,  
He sang it from his heart.

Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.

10

'A girl I had, but she followed another,  
Money I had, and it went in the night,  
Strong drink I had, and it brought me to sorrow,  
But a good strong cause and blows are delight.'  
All there caught up the tune:  
'On, on, my darling man.'

Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.

20

'Money is good and a girl might be better,  
No matter what happens and who takes the fall,  
But a good strong cause' – the rope gave a jerk there,  
No more sang he, for his throat was too small;  
But he kicked before he died,  
He did it out of pride.

Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.

30

### 361 *In Tara's Halls.*

A man I praise that once in Tara's Halls  
 Said to the woman on his knees, 'Lie still,  
 My hundredth year is at an end. I think  
 That something is about to happen, I think  
 That the adventure of old age begins.  
 To many women I have said "lie still"  
 And given everything that a woman needs  
 A roof, good clothes, passion, love perhaps  
 But never asked for love, should I ask that  
 I shall be old indeed.'

10

Thereon the king  
 Went to the sacred house and stood between  
 The golden plough and harrow and spoke aloud  
 That all attendants and the casual crowd might hear:  
 'God I have loved, but should I ask return  
 Of God or women the time were come to die.'

He bade, his hundred and first year at end,  
 Diggers and carpenters make grave and coffin,  
 Saw that the grave was deep, the coffin sound,  
 Summoned the generations of his house  
 Lay in the coffin, stopped his breath and died.

20

### 362 *The Statues*

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?  
 His numbers though they moved or seemed to move  
 In marble or in bronze, lacked character.  
 But boys and girls pale from the imagined love  
 Of solitary beds knew what they were,  
 That passion could bring character enough;  
 And pressed at midnight in some public place  
 Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

No; greater than Pythagoras, for the men  
 That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these 10  
 Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down  
 All Asiatic vague immensities,  
 And not the banks of oars that swam upon  
 The many-headed foam at Salamis.  
 Europe put off that foam when Phidias  
 Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

One image crossed the many-headed, sat  
 Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,  
 No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat  
 Dreamer of the Middle-Ages. Empty eye-balls knew 20  
 That knowledge increases unreality, that  
 Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.  
 When gong and conch declare the hour to bless  
 Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,  
 What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,  
 What calculation, number, measurement, replied?  
 We Irish, born into that ancient sect  
 But thrown upon this filthy modern tide  
 And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked, 30  
 Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace  
 The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

### 363 *News for the Delphic Oracle*

#### I

There all the golden codgers lay,  
 There the silver dew,  
 And the great water sighed for love  
 And the wind sighed too.  
 Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed  
 By Oisín on the grass;

There sighed amid his choir of love  
 Tall Pythagoras.  
 Plotinus came and looked about,  
 The salt flakes on his breast, 10  
 And having stretched and yawned awhile  
 Lay sighing like the rest.

## II

Straddling each a dolphin's back  
 And steadied by a fin  
 Those Innocents re-live their death,  
 Their wounds open again.  
 The ecstatic waters laugh because  
 Their cries are sweet and strange,  
 Through their ancestral patterns dance,  
 And the brute dolphins plunge 20  
 Until in some cliff-sheltered bay  
 Where wades the choir of love  
 Proffering its sacred laurel crowns,  
 They pitch their burdens off.

## III

Slim adolescence that a nymph has stripped,  
 Peleus on Thetis stares,  
 Her limbs are delicate as an eyelid,  
 Love has blinded him with tears;  
 But Thetis' belly listens.  
 Down the mountain walls 30  
 From where Pan's cavern is  
 Intolerable music falls.  
 Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,  
 Belly, shoulder, bum,  
 Flash fishlike; nymphs and satyrs  
 Copulate in the foam.

364 *Long-legged Fly*

That civilisation may not sink  
Its great battle lost,  
Quiet the dog, tether the pony  
To a distant post.  
Our master Caesar is in the tent  
Where the maps are spread,  
His eyes fixed upon nothing,  
A hand under his head.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
His mind moves upon silence.

10

That the topless towers be burnt  
And men recall that face,  
Move most gently if move you must  
In this lonely place.  
She thinks, part woman, three parts a child,  
That nobody looks; her feet  
Practise a tinker shuffle  
Picked up on the street.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
Her mind moves upon silence.

20

That girls at puberty may find  
The first Adam in their thought,  
Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,  
Keep those children out.  
There on the scaffolding reclines  
Michael Angelo.  
With no more sound than the mice make  
His hand moves to and fro.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
His mind moves upon silence.

30

365 *A Bronze Head*

Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,  
 Human, super-human, a bird's round eye,  
 Everything else withered and mummy-dead.  
 What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky;  
 (Something may linger there though all else die;)  
 And finds there nothing to make its terror less  
*Hysterica-passio* of its own emptiness?

No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full  
 As though with magnanimity of light  
 Yet a most gentle woman's; who can tell 10  
 Which of her forms has shown her substance right  
 Or may be substance can be composite,  
 Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath  
 A mouthful hold the extreme of life and death.

But even at the starting post, all sleek and new,  
 I saw the wildness in her and I thought  
 A vision of terror that it must live through  
 Had shattered her soul. Propinquity had brought  
 Imagination to that pitch where it casts out  
 All that is not itself, I had grown wild 20  
 And wandered murmuring everywhere 'my child, my  
 child.'

Or else I thought her supernatural;  
 As though a sterner eye looked through her eye  
 On this foul world in its decline and fall,  
 On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,  
 Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,  
 Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave  
 And wondered what was left for massacre to save.

### 366 *A Stick of Incense*

Whence did all that fury come,  
 From empty tomb or Virgin womb?  
 St Joseph thought the world would melt  
 But liked the way his finger smelt.

### 367 *Hound Voice*

Because we love bare hills and stunted trees  
 And were the last to choose the settled ground,  
 Its boredom of the desk or of the spade, because  
 So many years companioned by a hound,  
 Our voices carry; and though slumber bound,  
 Some few half wake and half renew their choice,  
 Give tongue, proclaim their hidden name – ‘hound voice.’

The women that I picked spoke sweet and low  
 And yet gave tongue. ‘Hound voices’ were they all.  
 We picked each other from afar and knew 10  
 What hour of terror comes to test the soul,  
 And in that terror’s name obeyed the call,  
 And understood, what none have understood,  
 Those images that waken in the blood.

Some day we shall get up before the dawn  
 And find our ancient hounds before the door,  
 And wide awake know that the hunt is on;  
 Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,  
 That stumbling to the kill beside the shore;  
 Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds, 20  
 And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.



368 *John Kinsella's Lament for  
Mrs. Mary Moore*

## I

A bloody and a sudden end,  
 Gunshot or a noose,  
 For death who takes what man would keep,  
 Leaves what man would lose.  
 He might have had my sister  
 My cousins by the score,  
 But nothing satisfied the fool  
 But my dear Mary Moore,  
 None other knows what pleasures man  
 At table or in bed. 10  
 What shall I do for pretty girls  
 Now my old bawd is dead?

## II

Though swift to strike a bargain  
 Like an old Jew man,  
 Her bargain struck we laughed and talked  
 And emptied many a can;  
 And O! but she had stories  
 Though not for the priest's ear,  
 To keep the soul of man alive  
 Banish age and care, 20  
 And being old she put a skin  
 On everything she said.  
 What shall I do for pretty girls  
 Now my old bawd is dead?

## III

The priests have got a book that says  
 But for Adam's sin

Eden's garden would be there  
 And I there within.  
 No expectation fails there  
 No pleasing habit ends  
 No man grows old, no girl grows cold,  
 But friends walk by friends.  
 Who quarrels over halfpennies  
 That plucks the trees for bread.  
 What shall I do for pretty girls  
 Now my old bawd is dead?

30

### 369 *High Talk*

Processions that lack high stilts have nothing that catches the  
 eye.

What if my great-granddad had a pair that were twenty foot  
 high,

And mine were but fifteen foot, no modern stalks upon higher,  
 Some rogue of the world stole them to patch up a fence or a  
 fire.

Because piebald ponies, led bears, caged lions, make but poor  
 shows,

Because children demand Daddy-long-legs upon his timber  
 toes,

Because women in the upper stories demand a face at the pane  
 That patching old heels they may shriek, I take to chisel and  
 plane.

Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run wild,  
 From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from father to child. 10

All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all. A barnacle goose  
 Far up in the stretches of night; night splits and the dawn  
 breaks loose;

I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;  
 Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn.

370 *The Apparitions*

Because there is safety in derision  
 I talked about an apparition,  
 I took no trouble to convince,  
 Or seem plausible to a man of sense,  
 Distrustful of that popular eye  
 Whether it be bold or sly.

*Fifteen apparitions have I seen;  
 The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

I have found nothing half so good  
 As my long-planned half solitude, 10  
 Where I can sit up half the night  
 With some friend that has the wit  
 Not to allow his looks to tell  
 When I am unintelligible.

*Fifteen apparitions have I seen;  
 The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

When a man grows old his joy  
 Grows more deep day after day,  
 His empty heart is full at length  
 But he has need of all that strength 20  
 Because of the increasing Night  
 That opens her mystery and fright.

*Fifteen apparitions have I seen;  
 The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

371 *A Nativity*

What woman hugs her infant there?  
 Another star has shot an ear.

What made the drapery glisten so?  
 Not a man but Delacroix.

What made the ceiling waterproof?  
Landor's tarpaulin on the roof.

What brushes fly and moth aside?  
Irving and his plume of pride.

What hurries out the knave and dolt?  
Talma and his thunderbolt.

10

Why is the woman terror-struck?  
Can there be mercy in that look?

### 372 *Man and the Echo*

*Man.* In a cleft that's christened Alt

Under broken stone I halt

At the bottom of a pit

That broad noon has never lit,

And shout a secret to the stone.

All that I have said and done,

Now that I am old and ill,

Turns into a question till

I lie awake night after night

And never get the answers right.

10

Did that play of mine send out

Certain men the English shot?

Did words of mine put too great strain

On that woman's reeling brain?

Could my spoken words have checked

That whereby a house lay wrecked?

And all seems evil until I

Sleepless would lie down and die.

*Echo.* Lie down and die.

*Man.* That were to shirk

The spiritual intellect's great work

20

And shirk it in vain. There is no release

In a bodkin or disease,

Nor can there be a work so great  
 As that which cleans man's dirty slate.  
 While man can still his body keep  
 Wine or love drug him to sleep,  
 Waking he thanks the Lord that he  
 Has body and its stupidity,  
 But body gone he sleeps no more  
 And till his intellect grows sure 30  
 That all's arranged in one clear view  
 Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,  
 Then stands in judgment on his soul,  
 And, all work done, dismisses all  
 Out of intellect and sight  
 And sinks at last into the night.

*Echo.* Into the night.

*Man.* O rocky voice  
 Shall we in that great night rejoice?  
 What do we know but that we face  
 One another in this place? 40  
 But hush, for I have lost the theme  
 Its joy or night seem but a dream;  
 Up there some hawk or owl has struck  
 Dropping out of sky or rock,  
 A stricken rabbit is crying out  
 And its cry distracts my thought.

### 373 *The Circus Animals' Desertion*

#### I

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,  
 I sought it daily for six weeks or so.  
 Maybe at last being but a broken man  
 I must be satisfied with my heart, although  
 Winter and summer till old age began  
 My circus animals were all on show,

Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,  
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

## II

What can I but enumerate old themes,  
First that sea-rider Oisín led by the nose 10  
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,  
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,  
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,  
That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;  
But what cared I that set him on to ride,  
I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride.

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,  
'The Countess Cathleen' was the name I gave it,  
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away  
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it. 20  
I thought my dear must her own soul destroy  
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,  
And this brought forth a dream and soon enough  
This dream itself had all my thought and love.

And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread  
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;  
Heart mysteries there, and yet when all is said  
It was the dream itself enchanted me:  
Character isolated by a deed  
To engross the present and dominate memory. 30  
Players and painted stage took all my love  
And not those things that they were emblems of.

## III

Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind but out of what began?  
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone

I must lie down where all the ladders start  
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

40

### 374 *Politics*

'In our time the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms.'  
THOMAS MANN.

How can I, that girl standing there,  
My attention fix  
On Roman or on Russian  
Or on Spanish politics,  
Yet here's a travelled man that knows  
What he talks about,  
And there's a politician  
That has both read and thought,  
And maybe what they say is true  
Of war and war's alarms,  
But O that I were young again  
And held her in my arms.

10

**NARRATIVE AND  
DRAMATIC**





The Wanderings of Oisín  
1889

*'Give me the world if Thou wilt, but grant me an asylum  
for my affections.'* TULKA

TO  
EDWIN J. ELLIS



# 375 *The Wanderings of Oisín*

## BOOK I

*S. Patrick.* You who are bent, and bald, and blind,  
With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,  
Have known three centuries, poets sing,  
Of dalliance with a demon thing.

*Oisín.* Sad to remember, sick with years,  
The swift innumerable spears,  
The horsemen with their floating hair,  
And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,  
Those merry couples dancing in tune,  
And the white body that lay by mine; 10  
But the tale, though words be lighter than air,  
Must live to be old like the wandering moon.

Caoilte, and Conan, and Finn were there,  
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,  
With Bran, Sceolan, and Lomair,  
And passing the Firbolgs' burial-mounds,  
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill  
Where passionate Maeve is stony-still;  
And found on the dove-grey edge of the sea 20  
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode  
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset on doomed ships;  
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,  
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,  
And with the glimmering crimson glowed  
Of many a figured embroidery;  
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell  
That wavered like the summer streams,  
As her soft bosom rose and fell. 30

*S. Patrick.* You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.

*Oisín.* 'Why do you wind no horn?' she said.

'And every hero droop his head?  
The hornless deer is not more sad  
That many a peaceful moment had,  
More sleek than any granary mouse,  
In his own leafy forest house  
Among the waving fields of fern:  
The hunting of heroes should be glad.'

'O pleasant woman,' answered Finn, 40  
'We think on Oscar's pencilled urn,  
And on the heroes lying slain  
On Gabhra's raven-covered plain;  
But where are your noble kith and kin,  
And from what country do you ride?'

'My father and my mother are  
Aengus and Edain, my own name  
Niamh, and my country far  
Beyond the tumbling of this tide.'

'What dream came with you that you came 50  
Through bitter tide on foam-wet feet?  
Did your companion wander away  
From where the birds of Aengus wing?'

Thereon did she look haughty and sweet:  
'I have not yet, war-weary king,  
Been spoken of with any man;  
Yet now I choose, for these four feet  
Ran through the foam and ran to this  
That I might have your son to kiss.'

'Were there no better than my son 60  
That you through all that foam should run?'

'I loved no man, though kings besought,  
Until the Danaan poets brought  
Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisín's name,

And now I am dizzy with the thought  
 Of all that wisdom and the fame  
 Of battles broken by his hands,  
 Of stories builded by his words  
 That are like coloured Asian birds  
 At evening in their rainless lands.'

70

O Patrick, by your brazen bell,  
 There was no limb of mine but fell  
 Into a desperate gulph of love!  
 'You only will I wed,' I cried,  
 'And I will make a thousand songs,  
 And set your name all names above,  
 And captives bound with leathern thongs  
 Shall kneel and praise you, one by one,  
 At evening in my western dun.'

'O Oisín, mount by me and ride  
 To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,  
 Where men have heaped no burial-mounds,  
 And the days pass by like a wayward tune,  
 Where broken faith has never been known,  
 And the blushes of first love never have flown;  
 And there I will give you a hundred hounds;  
 No mightier creatures bay at the moon;  
 And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,  
 And a hundred calves and a hundred sheep  
 Whose long wool whiter than sea-froth flows,  
 And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,  
 And oil and wine and honey and milk,  
 And always never-anxious sleep;  
 While a hundred youths, mighty of limb,  
 But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,  
 And a hundred ladies, merry as birds,  
 Who when they dance to a fitful measure  
 Have a speed like the speed of the salmon herds,  
 Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,  
 And you shall know the Danaan leisure;

80

90

100



And Niamh be with you for a wife.  
 Then she sighed gently, 'It grows late,  
 Music and love and sleep await,  
 Where I would be when the white moon climbs,  
 The red sun falls and the world grows dim.'

And then I mounted and she bound me  
 With her triumphing arms around me,  
 And whispering to herself enwound me;  
 But when the horse had felt my weight,  
 He shook himself and neighed three times: 110  
 Caoilte, Conan, and Finn came near,  
 And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,  
 And bid me stay, with many a tear;  
 But we rode out from the human lands.

In what far kingdom do you go,  
 Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow?  
 Or are you phantoms white as snow,  
 Whose lips had life's most prosperous glow?  
 O you, with whom in sloping valleys,  
 Or down the dewy forest alleys, 120  
 I chased at morn the flying deer,  
 With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,  
 And heard the foemen's bucklers rattle,  
 And broke the heaving ranks of battle!  
 And Bran, Sceolan, and Lomair,  
 Where are you with your long rough hair?  
 You go not where the red deer feeds,  
 Nor tear the foemen from their steeds.

S. *Patrick*. Boast not, nor mourn with drooping head  
 Companions long accurst and dead, 130  
 And hounds for centuries dust and air.

*Oisín*. We galloped over the glossy sea:  
 I know not if days passed or hours,  
 And Niamh sang continually  
 Danaan songs, and their dewy showers  
 Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,

Lulled weariness, and softly round  
My human sorrow her white arms wound.  
We galloped; now a hornless deer  
Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound 140  
All pearly white, save one red ear;  
And now a lady rode like the wind  
With an apple of gold in her tossing hand;  
And a beautiful young man followed behind  
With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

'Were these two born in the Danaan land,  
Or have they breathed the mortal air?'

'Vex them no longer,' Niamh said,  
And sighing bowed her gentle head,  
And sighing laid the pearly tip 150  
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone  
In the pale west, and the sun's rim sank,  
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank  
About his fading crimson ball:  
The floor of Almhuin's hosting hall  
Was not more level than the sea,  
As, full of loving fantasy,  
And with low murmurs, we rode on,  
Where many a trumpet-twisted shell 160  
That in immortal silence sleeps  
Dreaming of her own melting hues,  
Her golds, her ambers, and her blues,  
Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps.  
But now a wandering land breeze came  
And a far sound of feathery quires;  
It seemed to blow from the dying flame,  
They seemed to sing in the smouldering fires.  
The horse towards the music raced,  
Neighing along the lifeless waste; 170  
Like sooty fingers, many a tree  
Rose ever out of the warm sea;

And they were trembling ceaselessly,  
 As though they all were beating time,  
 Upon the centre of the sun,  
 To that low laughing woodland rhyme.  
 And, now our wandering hours were done,  
 We cantered to the shore, and knew  
 The reason of the trembling trees:  
 Round every branch the song-birds flew, 180  
 Or clung thereon like swarming bees;  
 While round the shore a million stood  
 Like drops of frozen rainbow light,  
 And pondered in a soft vain mood  
 Upon their shadows in the tide,  
 And told the purple deeps their pride,  
 And murmured snatches of delight;  
 And on the shores were many boats  
 With bending sterns and bending bows,  
 And carven figures on their prows 190  
 Of bitterns, and fish-eating stoats,  
 And swans with their exultant throats:  
 And where the wood and waters meet  
 We tied the horse in a leafy clump,  
 And Niamh blew three merry notes  
 Out of a little silver trump;  
 And then an answering whispering flew  
 Over the bare and woody land,  
 A whisper of impetuous feet,  
 And ever nearer, nearer grew; 200  
 And from the woods rushed out a band  
 Of men and ladies, hand in hand,  
 And singing, singing all together;  
 Their brows were white as fragrant milk,  
 Their cloaks made out of yellow silk,  
 And trimmed with many a crimson feather;  
 And when they saw the cloak I wore  
 Was dim with mire of a mortal shore,  
 They fingered it and gazed on me  
 And laughed like murmurs of the sea; 210

But Niamh with a swift distress  
Bid them away and hold their peace;  
And when they heard her voice they ran  
And knelt there, every girl and man,  
And kissed, as they would never cease,  
Her pearl-pale hand and the hem of her dress.  
She bade them bring us to the hall  
Where Aengus dreams, from sun to sun,  
A Druid dream of the end of days  
When the stars are to wane and the world be done. 220

They led us by long and shadowy ways  
Where drops of dew in myriads fall,  
And tangled creepers every hour  
Blossom in some new crimson flower,  
And once a sudden laughter sprang  
From all their lips, and once they sang  
Together, while the dark woods rang,  
And made in all their distant parts,  
With boom of bees in honey-marts,  
A rumour of delighted hearts. 230  
And once a lady by my side  
Gave me a harp, and bid me sing,  
And touch the laughing silver string;  
But when I sang of human joy  
A sorrow wrapped each merry face,  
And, Patrick! by your beard, they wept,  
Until one came, a tearful boy;  
'A sadder creature never stept  
Than this strange human bard,' he cried;  
And caught the silver harp away, 240  
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled  
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place  
That kept dim waters from the sky;  
And each one said, with a long, long sigh,  
'O saddest harp in all the world,  
Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!'

And now, still sad, we came to where  
 A beautiful young man dreamed within  
 A house of wattles, clay, and skin;  
 One hand upheld his beardless chin, 250  
 And one a sceptre flashing out  
 Wild flames of red and gold and blue,  
 Like to a merry wandering rout  
 Of dancers leaping in the air;  
 And men and ladies knelt them there  
 And showed their eyes with teardrops dim,  
 And with low murmurs prayed to him,  
 And kissed the sceptre with red lips,  
 And touched it with their finger-tips.

He held that flashing sceptre up. 260  
 'Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,  
 And fills with stars night's purple cup,  
 And wakes the sluggard seeds of corn,  
 And stirs the young kid's budding horn,  
 And makes the infant ferns unwrap,  
 And for the peewit paints his cap,  
 And rolls along the unwieldy sun,  
 And makes the little planets run:  
 And if joy were not on the earth,  
 There were an end of change and birth, 270  
 And Earth and Heaven and Hell would die,  
 And in some gloomy barrow lie  
 Folded like a frozen fly;  
 Then mock at Death and Time with glances  
 And wavering arms and wandering dances.

'Men's hearts of old were drops of flame  
 That from the saffron morning came,  
 Or drops of silver joy that fell  
 Out of the moon's pale twisted shell;  
 But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves, 280  
 And toss and turn in narrow caves;  
 But here there is nor law nor rule,  
 Nor have hands held a weary tool;

And here there is nor Change nor Death,  
 But only kind and merry breath,  
 For joy is God and God is joy.'  
 With one long glance for girl and boy  
 And the pale blossom of the moon,  
 He fell into a Druid swoon.

And in a wild and sudden dance 290  
 We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance  
 And swept out of the wattled hall  
 And came to where the dewdrops fall  
 Among the foamdrops of the sea,  
 And there we hushed the revelry;  
 And, gathering on our brows a frown,  
 Bent all our swaying bodies down,  
 And to the waves that glimmer by  
 That sloping green De Danaan sod  
 Sang, 'God is joy and joy is God, 300  
 And things that have grown sad are wicked,  
 And things that fear the dawn of the morrow  
 Or the grey wandering osprey Sorrow.'

We danced to where in the winding thicket  
 The damask roses, bloom on bloom,  
 Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom,  
 And bending over them softly said,  
 Bending over them in the dance,  
 With a swift and friendly glance  
 From dewy eyes: 'Upon the dead 310  
 Fall the leaves of other roses,  
 On the dead dim earth encloses:  
 But never, never on our graves,  
 Heaped beside the glimmering waves,  
 Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.  
 For neither Death nor Change comes near us,  
 And all listless hours fear us,  
 And we fear no dawning morrow,  
 Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow.'

The dance wound through the windless woods; 320  
 The ever-summered solitudes;  
 Until the tossing arms grew still  
 Upon the woody central hill;  
 And, gathered in a panting band,  
 We flung on high each waving hand,  
 And sang unto the starry broods.  
 In our raised eyes there flashed a glow  
 Of milky brightness to and fro  
 As thus our song arose: 'You stars,  
 Across your wandering ruby cars 330  
 Shake the loose reins: you slaves of God,  
 He rules you with an iron rod,  
 He holds you with an iron bond,  
 Each one woven to the other,  
 Each one woven to his brother  
 Like bubbles in a frozen pond;  
 But we in a lonely land abide  
 Unchainable as the dim tide,  
 With hearts that know nor law nor rule,  
 And hands that hold no wearisome tool, 340  
 Folded in love that fears no morrow,  
 Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow.'

O Patrick! for a hundred years  
 I chased upon that woody shore  
 The deer, the badger, and the boar.  
 O Patrick! for a hundred years  
 At evening on the glimmering sands,  
 Beside the piled-up hunting spears,  
 These now outworn and withered hands  
 Wrestled among the island bands. 350  
 O Patrick! for a hundred years  
 We went a-fishing in long boats  
 With bending sterns and bending bows,  
 And carven figures on their prows  
 Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats.  
 O Patrick! for a hundred years

The gentle Niamh was my wife;  
 But now two things devour my life;  
 The things that most of all I hate:  
 Fasting and prayers.

360

S. Patrick.

Tell on.

Oisin.

Yes, yes,

For these were ancient Oisin's fate  
 Loosed long ago from Heaven's gate,  
 For his last days to lie in wait.

When one day by the tide I stood,  
 I found in that forgetfulness  
 Of dreamy foam a staff of wood  
 From some dead warrior's broken lance:  
 I turned it in my hands; the stains  
 Of war were on it, and I wept,  
 Remembering how the Fenians stept  
 Along the blood-bedabbled plains,  
 Equal to good or grievous chance:  
 Thereon young Niamh softly came  
 And caught my hands, but spake no word  
 Save only many times my name,  
 In murmurs, like a frightened bird.  
 We passed by woods, and lawns of clover,  
 And found the horse and bridled him,  
 For we knew well the old was over.

370

I heard one say, 'His eyes grow dim  
 With all the ancient sorrow of men';  
 And wrapped in dreams rode out again  
 With hoofs of the pale findrinny  
 Over the glimmering purple sea.  
 Under the golden evening light,  
 The Immortals moved among the fountains  
 By rivers and the woods' old night;  
 Some danced like shadows on the mountains,  
 Some wandered ever hand in hand;  
 Or sat in dreams on the pale strand,

380

390



Each forehead like an obscure star  
 Bent down above each hookèd knee,  
 And sang, and with a dreamy gaze  
 Watched where the sun in a saffron blaze  
 Was slumbering half in the sea-ways;  
 And, as they sang, the painted birds  
 Kept time with their bright wings and feet;  
 Like drops of honey came their words,  
 But fainter than a young lamb's bleat.

'An old man stirs the fire to a blaze, 400  
 In the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother.  
 He has over-lingered his welcome; the days,  
 Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other;  
 He hears the storm in the chimney above,  
 And bends to the fire and shakes with the cold,  
 While his heart still dreams of battle and love,  
 And the cry of the hounds on the hills of old.

'But we are apart in the grassy places,  
 Where care cannot trouble the least of our days,  
 Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces, 410  
 Or love's first tenderness die in our gaze.  
 The hare grows old as she plays in the sun  
 And gazes around her with eyes of brightness;  
 Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done  
 She limps along in an aged whiteness;  
 A storm of birds in the Asian trees  
 Like tulips in the air a-winging,  
 And the gentle waves of the summer seas,  
 That raise their heads and wander singing,  
 Must murmur at last, "Unjust, unjust"; 420  
 And "My speed is a weariness," falters the mouse,  
 And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,  
 And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house.  
 But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day  
 When God shall come from the sea with a sigh  
 And bid the stars drop down from the sky,  
 And the moon like a pale rose wither away.'

## BOOK II

Now, man of croziers, shadows called our names  
 And then away, away, like whirling flames;  
 And now fled by, mist-covered, without sound,  
 The youth and lady and the deer and hound;  
 'Gaze no more on the phantoms,' Niamh said,  
 And kissed my eyes, and, swaying her bright head  
 And her bright body, sang of faery and man  
 Before God was or my old line began;  
 Wars shadowy, vast, exultant; faeries of old  
 Who wedded men with rings of Druid gold; 10  
 And how those lovers never turn their eyes  
 Upon the life that fades and flickers and dies,  
 Yet love and kiss on dim shores far away  
 Rolled round with music of the sighing spray:  
 Yet sang no more as when, like a brown bee  
 That has drunk full, she crossed the misty sea  
 With me in her white arms a hundred years  
 Before this day; for now the fall of tears  
 Troubled her song.

I do not know if days  
 Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays 20  
 Shone many times among the glimmering flowers  
 Woven into her hair, before dark towers  
 Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed  
 About them; and the horse of Faery screamed  
 And shivered, knowing the Isle of Many Fears,  
 Nor ceased until white Niamh stroked his ears  
 And named him by sweet names.

A foaming tide  
 Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,  
 Burst from a great door marred by many a blow  
 From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago 30  
 When gods and giants warred. We rode between  
 The seaweed-covered pillars; and the green  
 And surging phosphorus alone gave light

On our dark pathway, till a countless flight  
 Of moonlit steps glimmered; and left and right  
 Dark statues glimmered over the pale tide  
 Upon dark thrones. Between the lids of one  
 The imaged meteors had flashed and run  
 And had disported in the stilly jet,  
 And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and set, 40  
 Since God made Time and Death and Sleep: the other  
 Stretched his long arm to where, a misty smother,  
 The stream churned, churned, and churned – his lips  
 apart,  
 As though he told his never-slumbering heart  
 Of every foamdrop on its misty way.  
 Tying the horse to his vast foot that lay  
 Half in the unvesselled sea, we climbed the stair  
 And climbed so long, I thought the last steps were  
 Hung from the morning star; when these mild words  
 Fanned the delighted air like wings of birds: 50  
 'My brothers spring out of their beds at morn,  
 A-murmur like young partridge: with loud horn  
 They chase the noontide deer;  
 And when the dew-drowned stars hang in the air  
 Look to long fishing-lines, or point and pare  
 An ashen hunting spear.  
 O sigh, O fluttering sigh, be kind to me;  
 Flutter along the froth lips of the sea,  
 And shores the froth lips wet:  
 And stay a little while, and bid them weep: 60  
 Ah, touch their blue-veined eyelids if they sleep,  
 And shake their coverlet.  
 When you have told how I weep endlessly,  
 Flutter along the froth lips of the sea  
 And home to me again,  
 And in the shadow of my hair lie hid,  
 And tell me that you found a man unbid,  
 The saddest of all men.'

A lady with soft eyes like funeral tapers,  
 And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit  
 vapours, 70

And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous  
 As any ruddy moth, looked down on us;  
 And she with a wave-rusted chain was tied  
 To two old eagles, full of ancient pride,  
 That with dim eyeballs stood on either side.  
 Few feathers were on their dishevelled wings,  
 For their dim minds were with the ancient things.

'I bring deliverance,' pearl-pale Niamh said.

'Neither the living, nor the unlabouring dead,  
 Nor the high gods who never lived, may fight 80  
 My enemy and hope; demons for fright  
 Jabber and scream about him in the night;  
 For he is strong and crafty as the seas  
 That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees,  
 And I must needs endure and hate and weep,  
 Until the gods and demons drop asleep,  
 Hearing Aed touch the mournful strings of gold.'

'Is he so dreadful?'

'Be not over-bold,  
 But fly while still you may.'

And thereon I:

'This demon shall be battered till he die, 90  
 And his loose bulk be thrown in the loud tide.'

'Flee from him,' pearl-pale Niamh weeping cried,  
 'For all men flee the demons'; but moved not  
 My angry king-remembering soul one jot.  
 There was no mightier soul of Heber's line;  
 Now it is old and mouse-like. For a sign  
 I burst the chain: still earless, nerveless, blind,  
 Wrapped in the things of the unhuman mind,  
 In some dim memory or ancient mood,  
 Still earless, nerveless, blind, the eagles stood. 100

And then we climbed the stair to a high door;  
 A hundred horsemen on the basalt floor  
 Beneath had paced content: we held our way  
 And stood within: clothed in a misty ray  
 I saw a foam-white seagull drift and float  
 Under the roof, and with a straining throat  
 Shouted, and hailed him: he hung there a star,  
 For no man's cry shall ever mount so far;  
 Not even your God could have thrown down that hall;  
 Stabling His unloosed lightnings in their stall,                   110  
 He had sat down and sighed with cumbered heart,  
 As though His hour were come.

We sought the part

That was most distant from the door; green slime  
 Made the way slippery, and time on time  
 Showed prints of sea-born scales, while down through it  
 The captive's journeys to and fro were writ  
 Like a small river, and where feet touched came  
 A momentary gleam of phosphorus flame.  
 Under the deepest shadows of the hall  
 That woman found a ring hung on the wall,                   120  
 And in the ring a torch, and with its flare  
 Making a world about her in the air,  
 Passed under the dim doorway, out of sight,  
 And came again, holding a second light  
 Burning between her fingers, and in mine  
 Laid it and sighed: I held a sword whose shine  
 No centuries could dim, and a word ran  
 Thereon in Ogham letters, 'Manannan';  
 That sea-god's name, who in a deep content  
 Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons sent                   130  
 Out of the sevenfold seas, built the dark hall  
 Rooted in foam and clouds, and cried to all  
 The mightier masters of a mightier race;  
 And at his cry there came no milk-pale face  
 Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,  
 But only exultant faces.

Niamh stood

With bowed head, trembling when the white blade  
shone,

But she whose hours of tenderness were gone  
Had neither hope nor fear. I bade them hide  
Under the shadows till the tumults died 140

Of the loud-crashing and earth-shaking fight,  
Lest they should look upon some dreadful sight;  
And thrust the torch between the slimy flags.

A dome made out of endless carven jags,  
Where shadowy face flowed into shadowy face,  
Looked down on me; and in the self-same place  
I waited hour by hour, and the high dome,  
Windowless, pillarless, multitudinous home  
Of faces, waited; and the leisured gaze  
Was loaded with the memory of days 150

Buried and mighty. When through the great door  
The dawn came in, and glimmered on the floor

With a pale light, I journeyed round the hall  
And found a door deep sunken in the wall,

The least of doors; beyond on a dim plain

A little runnel made a bubbling strain,

And on the runnel's stony and bare edge

A dusky demon dry as a withered sedge  
Swayed, crooning to himself an unknown tongue:

In a sad revelry he sang and swung 160

Bacchant and mournful, passing to and fro

His hand along the runnel's side, as though

The flowers still grew there: far on the sea's waste  
Shaking and waving, vapour vapour chased,

While high frail cloudlets, fed with a green light,  
Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,

Hung in the passionate dawn. He slowly turned:

A demon's leisure: eyes, first white, now burned

Like wings of kingfishers; and he arose

Barking. We trampled up and down with blows 170

Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day

Gave to high noon and noon to night gave way;

And when he knew the sword of Manannan  
 Amid the shades of night, he changed and ran  
 Through many shapes; I lunged at the smooth throat  
 Of a great eel; it changed, and I but smote  
 A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top;  
 And thereupon I drew the livid chop  
 Of a drowned dripping body to my breast;  
 Horror from horror grew; but when the west 180  
 Had surged up in a plummy fire, I drave  
 Through heart and spine; and cast him in the wave  
 Lest Niamh shudder.

Full of hope and dread  
 Those two came carrying wine and meat and bread,  
 And healed my wounds with unguents out of flowers  
 That feed white moths by some De Danaan shrine;  
 Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea-shine,  
 We lay on skins of otters, and drank wine,  
 Brewed by the sea-gods, from huge cups that lay  
 Upon the lips of sea-gods in their day; 190  
 And then on heaped-up skins of otters slept.  
 And when the sun once more in saffron stept,  
 Rolling his flagrant wheel out of the deep,  
 We sang the loves and angers without sleep,  
 And all the exultant labours of the strong.  
 But now the lying clerics murder song  
 With barren words and flatteries of the weak.  
 In what land do the powerless turn the beak  
 Of ravening Sorrow, or the hand of Wrath?  
 For all your croziers, they have left the path 200  
 And wander in the storms and clinging snows,  
 Hopeless for ever: ancient Oisin knows,  
 For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies  
 On the anvil of the world.

*S. Patrick.* Be still: the skies  
 Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce wind,  
 For God has heard, and speaks His angry mind;

Go cast your body on the stones and pray,  
For He has wrought midnight and dawn and day.

*Oisín.* Saint, do you weep? I hear amid the thunder  
The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder; 210  
Laughter and cries. The armies clash and shock,  
And now the daylight-darkening ravens flock.  
Cease, cease, O mournful, laughing Fenian horn!

We feasted for three days. On the fourth morn  
I found, dropping sea-foam on the wide stair,  
And hung with slime, and whispering in his hair,  
That demon dull and unsubduable;  
And once more to a day-long battle fell,  
And at the sundown threw him in the surge, 220  
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge  
His new-healed shape; and for a hundred years  
So warred, so feasted, with nor dreams nor fears,  
Nor languor nor fatigue: an endless feast,  
An endless war.

The hundred years had ceased;  
I stood upon the stair: the surges bore  
A beech-bough to me, and my heart grew sore,  
Remembering how I had stood by white-haired Finn  
Under a beech at Almhuin and heard the thin  
Outcry of bats.

And then young Niamh came  
Holding that horse, and sadly called my name; 230  
I mounted, and we passed over the lone  
And drifting greyness, while this monotone,  
Surly and distant, mixed inseparably  
Into the clangour of the wind and sea.

'I hear my soul drop down into decay,  
And Manannan's dark tower, stone after stone,  
Gather sea-slime and fall the seaward way,  
And the moon goad the waters night and day,  
That all be overthrown.



‘But till the moon has taken all, I wage 240  
 War on the mightiest men under the skies,  
 And they have fallen or fled, age after age.  
 Light is man’s love, and lighter is man’s rage;  
 His purpose drifts and dies.’

And then lost Niamh murmured, ‘Love, we go  
 To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo!  
 The Islands of Dancing and of Victories  
 Are empty of all power.’

‘And which of these  
 Is the Island of Content?’

‘None know,’ she said;  
 And on my bosom laid her weeping head. 250

### BOOK III

Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering and  
 milky smoke,  
 High as the saddle-girth, covering away from our glances the  
 tide;  
 And those that fled, and that followed, from the foam-pale  
 distance broke;  
 The immortal desire of Immortals we saw in their faces, and  
 sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and Bran, Sceolan,  
 Lomair,  
 And never a song sang Niamh, and over my finger-tips  
 Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping of mist-cold hair,  
 And now the warmth of sighs, and after the quiver of lips.

Were we days long or hours long in riding, when, rolled in a  
 grisly peace,  
 An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and oak? 10

And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not; for whiter than  
new-washed fleece  
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering and  
milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge; the sea's edge  
barren and grey,  
Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over the dripping  
trees,  
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would  
hasten away,  
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the moan of  
the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense in their  
wrinkling bark;  
Dropping; a murmurous dropping; old silence and that one  
sound;  
For no live creatures lived there, no weasels moved in the  
dark:  
Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us bubbled the 20  
ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away in the hollow  
night,  
For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the gleams of the  
world and the sun,  
Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel and oak leaf, the  
light,  
And the stars were blotted above us, and the whole of the  
world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny; for, cumbrous with stems of the  
hazel and oak,  
A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there in the long  
grass lay,

Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous slumbering folk,  
Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out and heaped in  
the way.

And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow and shield and  
blade;  
And dew-blanch'd horns, in whose hollow a child of three 30  
years old  
Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all inwrought and  
inlaid,  
And more comely than man can make them with bronze and  
silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was huger than  
fourscore men;  
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands were the  
claws of birds,  
And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and the leaves of the  
mural glen,  
The breathing came from those bodies, long warless, grown  
whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that He who has stars  
for His flocks  
Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor go from His  
dew-cumbered skies;  
So long were they sleeping, the owls had builded their nests in  
their locks,  
Filling the fibrous dimness with long generations of eyes. 40

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls wandered  
and came,  
Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow-place wide;  
And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees in the soft  
star-flame,  
Lay loose in a place of shadow: we drew the reins by his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely along the dim  
ground;  
In one was a branch soft-shining with bells more many than  
sighs  
In midst of an old man's bosom; owls ruffling and pacing  
around  
Sidled their bodies against him, filling the shade with their  
eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers; no, not since  
the world began,  
In realms where the handsome were many, nor in 50  
glamours by demons flung,  
Have faces alive with such beauty been known to the salt eye  
of man,  
Yet weary with passions that faded when the sevenfold seas  
were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far sung by  
the Sennachies.  
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary, their camping in  
grasses deep,  
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the shores of the  
wandering seas,  
Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it, and fed of  
unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niamh, I blew a long lingering note.  
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a sound like the  
stirring of flies.  
He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving the pillar of his  
throat,  
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the wells of his 60  
eyes.

I cried, 'Come out of the shadow, king of the nails of gold!  
And tell of your goodly household and the goodly works of  
your hands,

That we may muse in the starlight and talk of the battles of  
old;  
Your questioner, Oisin, is worthy, he comes from the Fenian  
lands.'

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull with the smoke of  
their dreams;  
His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer out of them came;  
Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch, slow dropping  
a sound in faint streams  
Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing the marrow like  
flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness more than of  
earth,  
The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone like a sea- 70  
covered stone  
Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the  
memories of the whole of my mirth,  
And a softness came from the starlight and filled me full to  
the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body as low;  
And the pearl-pale Niamh lay by me, her brow on the midst  
of my breast;  
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years after years  
'gan flow;  
Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, binding us down to  
our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot  
How the fetlocks drip blood in the battle, when the fallen on  
fallen lie rolled;  
How the falconer follows the falcon in the weeds of the  
heron's plot,  
And the name of the demon whose hammer made 80  
Conchubar's sword-blade of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot  
That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood, the shield out of  
osier and hide;  
How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the spear-head's  
burning spot;  
How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low sadly at evening  
tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the dust with  
their throngs,  
Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all who are winter  
tales;  
Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roaring of  
laughter and songs,  
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or piercing the  
tempest with sails.

Came Blamid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward of old  
time slunk,  
Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the spittle on his 90  
beard never dry,  
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car-borne, his mighty head  
sunk  
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and death-making  
eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in loud  
streams,  
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of  
bone.  
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with  
creatures of dreams,  
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a  
stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun was on  
silver or gold;  
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in the dimness they  
love going by;

When a glow-worm was green on a grass-leaf, lured from his  
 lair in the mould;  
 Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed on the 100  
 grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at the heel of a  
 century fell,  
 Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his miles in the midst  
 of the air,  
 A starling like them that forgathered 'neath a moon waking  
 white as a shell  
 When the Fenians made foray at morning with Bran,  
 Sceolan, Lomair.

I awoke: the strange horse without summons out of the  
 distance ran,  
 Thrusting his nose to my shoulder; he knew in his bosom deep  
 That once more moved in my bosom the ancient sadness of  
 man,  
 And that I would leave the Immortals, their dimness, their  
 dew-drops dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niamh grow white as the waters  
 are white,  
 Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your hands and 110  
 wept;  
 But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering alone  
 that delight  
 Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs  
 impatiently step.

I cried, 'O Niamh! O white one! if only a twelve-houred day,  
 I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where the old  
 men and young  
 In the Fenians' dwellings of wattle lean on the chess-boards  
 and play,  
 Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan's slanderous  
 tongue!

'Like me were some galley forsaken far off in Meridian isle,  
 Remembering its long-oared companions, sails turning to  
 threadbare rags;  
 No more to crawl on the seas with long oars mile after mile,  
 But to be amid shooting of flies and flowering of rushes 120  
 and flags.'

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild with  
 mysterious thought,  
 Watched her those seamless faces from the valley's  
 glimmering girth;  
 As she murmured, 'O wandering Oisín, the strength of the  
 bell-branch is naught,  
 For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering sadness of  
 earth.

'Then go through the lands in the saddle and see what the  
 mortals do,  
 And softly come to your Niamh over the tops of the tide;  
 But weep for your Niamh, O Oisín, weep; for if only your  
 shoe  
 Brush lightly as haymousse earth's pebbles, you will come no  
 more to my side.

'O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your  
 rest?'  
 I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth she made 130  
 her moan:  
 'I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn, for  
 breast unto breast  
 We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their sweetness  
 lone

'In the isles of the farthest seas where only the spirits come.  
 Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon who  
 sleeps on her nest,  
 Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the sea's  
 vague drum?  
 O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your  
 rest?'



The wailing grew distant; I rode by the woods of the  
wrinkling bark,  
Where ever is murmurous dropping, old silence and that one  
sound;  
For no live creatures live there, no weasels move in the dark;  
In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the bubbling 140  
ground.

And I rode by the plains of the sea's edge, where all is barren  
and grey,  
Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over the dripping  
trees,  
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would  
hasten away,  
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the moan of  
the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea's edge turning and  
turning go,  
As my mind made the names of the Fenians. Far from the  
hazel and oak,  
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the saddle-bow,  
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a wandering and  
milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the winds fled out of  
the vast,  
Snatching the bird in secret; nor knew I, embosomed apart, 150  
When they froze the cloth on my body like armour riveted  
fast,  
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the gates of  
my heart.

Till, fattening the winds of the morning, an odour of new-  
mown hay  
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears like berries fell  
down;

Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of a shore far  
away,

From the great grass-barnacle calling, and later the shore-  
weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crushing the sand  
and the shells,

Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a chaunt of love on  
my lips,

Not coughing, my head on my knees, and praying, and wroth  
with the bells,

I would leave no saint's head on his body from 160  
Rachlin to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode on a bridle-  
path

Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles and  
woodwork made,

Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the sacred cairn  
and the rath,

And a small and a feeble populace stooping with mattock  
and spade,

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with much-  
toil wet;

While in this place and that place, with bodies unglorious,  
their chieftains stood,

Awaiting in patience the straw-death, crozied one, caught  
in your net:

Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the roaring of  
wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so speedy with eyes  
so bright,

Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man 170  
lifted his head:

And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, 'The Fenians hunt  
wolves in the night,

So sleep thee by daytime.' A voice cried, 'The Fenians a long  
time are dead.'

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway, the flesh of his  
face as dried grass,  
And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he sad as a  
child without milk;  
And the dreams of the islands were gone, and I knew how  
men sorrow and pass,  
And their hound, and their horse, and their love, and their  
eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I murmured, 'In old  
age they ceased';  
And my tears were larger than berries, and I murmured,  
'Where white clouds lie spread  
On Crevroe or broad Knockfein, with many of old they  
feast  
On the floors of the gods.' He cried, 'No, the gods a           180  
long time are dead.'

And lonely and longing for Niamh, I shivered and turned  
me about,  
The heart in me longing to leap like a grasshopper into her  
heart;  
I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the sea's  
old shout  
Till I saw where Maeve lies sleeping till starlight and  
midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a sack  
full of sand,  
They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell with  
their burden at length.  
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung it five  
yards with my hand,  
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the  
Fenians' old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O croziered man; how, when  
divided the girth,  
I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a           190  
summer fly;

And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and  
walked on the earth,  
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his  
beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a church with its  
belfry in air;  
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my dim eyes  
the crozier gleams;

What place have Caoilte and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan,  
Lomair?

Speak, you too are old with your memories, an old man  
surrounded with dreams.

*S. Patrick.* Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the  
burning stones is their place;  
Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning  
stones of wide Hell,  
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the smile on  
God's face,  
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of the 200  
angels who fell.

*Oisín.* Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians, O  
cleric, to chaunt  
The war-songs that roused them of old; they will rise,  
making clouds with their breath,  
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay underneath them  
shall pant,  
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled beneath  
them in death.

And demons afraid in their darkness; deep horror of eyes  
and of wings,  
Afraid, their ears on the earth laid, shall listen and rise up  
and weep;  
Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver of stretched  
bowstrings,  
Hearing Hell loud with a murmur, as shouting and  
mocking we sweep.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the gateway  
of brass

And enter, and none sayeth 'No' when there enters the 210  
strongly armed guest;

Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on as oxen move  
over young grass;

Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old wounds,  
and turn to our rest.

*S. Patrick.* On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of  
the Fenians are tost;

None war on the masters of Hell, who could break up the  
world in their rage;

But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your soul  
that is lost

Through the demon love of its youth and its godless and  
passionate age.

*Oisín.* Ah me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with  
old age and pain,

Without laughter, a show unto children, alone with  
remembrance and fear;

All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's cloak in the rain,  
As a hay-cock out on the flood, or a wolf sucked 220  
under a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessèd and no man I loved of  
old there;

I throw down the chain of small stones! when life in my  
body has ceased,

I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan,  
Lomair,

And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or  
at feast.

The Old Age of Queen Maeve  
1903



## 376 *The Old Age of Queen Maeve*

*A certain poet in outlandish clothes  
Gathered a crowd in some Byzantine lane,  
Talked of his country and its people, sang  
To some stringed instrument none there had seen,  
A wall behind his back, over his head  
A latticed window. His glance went up at times  
As though one listened there, and his voice sank  
Or let its meaning mix into the strings.*

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,  
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze, 10  
In her high house at Cruachan<sup>1</sup>; the long hearth,  
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed  
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,  
Or on the benches underneath the walls,  
In comfortable sleep; all living slept  
But that great queen, who more than half the night  
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.  
Though now in her old age, in her young age  
She had been beautiful in that old way  
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone, 20  
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all  
But soft beauty and indolent desire.  
She could have called over the rim of the world  
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,  
And yet had been great-bodied and great-limbed,  
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;  
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,  
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,  
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,  
Sudden and laughing. 30

<sup>1</sup>Pronounced in modern Gaelic as if spelt 'Crockan.'



O unquiet heart,  
 Why do you praise another, praising her,  
 As if there were no tale but your own tale  
 Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?  
 Have I not bid you tell of that great queen  
 Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose  
 Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour  
 Shook the ale-horns and shields upon their hooks;  
 But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power  
 Had filled the house with Druid heaviness; 40  
 And wondering who of the many-changing Sidhe  
 Had come as in the old times to counsel her,  
 Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being old,  
 To that small chamber by the outer gate.  
 The porter slept, although he sat upright  
 With still and stony limbs and open eyes.  
 Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise  
 Broke from his parted lips and broke again,  
 She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,  
 And shook him wide awake, and bid him say 50  
 Who of the wandering many-changing ones  
 Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say  
 Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs  
 More still than they had been for a good month,  
 He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed  
 nothing,

He could remember when he had had fine dreams.  
 It was before the time of the great war  
 Over the White-Horned Bull and the Brown Bull.

She turned away; he turned again to sleep  
 That no god troubled now, and, wondering 60  
 What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,  
 Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh  
 Lifted the curtain of her sleeping-room,  
 Remembering that she too had seemed divine  
 To many thousand eyes, and to her own

One that the generations had long waited  
 That work too difficult for mortal hands  
 Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up  
 She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,  
 And thought of days when he'd had a straight body, 70  
 And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,  
 Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,  
 And not with his own voice or a man's voice,  
 But with the burning, live, unshaken voice  
 Of those that, it may be, can never age.  
 He said, 'High Queen of Cruachan and Magh Ai,  
 A king of the Great Plain would speak with you.'  
 And with glad voice Maeve answered him, 'What king 80  
 Of the far-wandering shadows has come to me,  
 As in the old days when they would come and go  
 About my threshold to counsel and to help?'  
 The parted lips replied, 'I seek your help,  
 For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love.'  
 'How may a mortal whose life gutters out  
 Help them that wander with hand clasping hand,  
 Their haughty images that cannot wither,  
 For all their beauty's like a hollow dream,  
 Mirrored in streams that neither hail nor rain  
 Nor the cold North has troubled?' 90

He replied,

'I am from those rivers and I bid you call  
 The children of the Maines out of sleep,  
 And set them digging under Bual's hill.  
 We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,  
 Will overthrow his shadows and carry off  
 Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.  
 I helped your fathers when they built these walls,  
 And I would have your help in my great need,  
 Queen of high Cruachan.'

'I obey your will  
 With speedy feet and a most thankful heart: 100

For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,  
 Our giver of good counsel and good luck.  
 And with a groan, as if the mortal breath  
 Could but awaken sadly upon lips  
 That happier breath had moved, her husband turned  
 Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;  
 But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,  
 Came to the threshold of the painted house  
 Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,  
 Until the pillared dark began to stir 110  
 With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.  
 She told them of the many-changing ones;  
 And all that night, and all through the next day  
 To middle night, they dug into the hill.  
 At middle night great cats with silver claws,  
 Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,  
 Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds  
 With long white bodies came out of the air  
 Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and 120  
 stood  
 With quaking joints and terror-stricken faces,  
 Till Maeve called out, 'These are but common men.  
 The Maines' children have not dropped their spades  
 Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,  
 Casts up a show and the winds answer it  
 With holy shadows.' Her high heart was glad,  
 And when the uproar ran along the grass  
 She followed with light footfall in the midst,  
 Till it died out where an old thorn-tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had stood 130  
 With equal courage in that whirling rout;  
 For you, although you've not her wandering heart,  
 Have all that greatness, and not hers alone,  
 For there is no high story about queens  
 In any ancient book but tells of you;  
 And when I've heard how they grew old and died,

Or fell into unhappiness, I've said,  
'She will grow old and die, and she has wept!'  
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,  
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!  
Outrun the measure. 140

I'd tell of that great queen  
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn  
Until two lovers came out of the air  
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,  
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings,  
Said, 'Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks  
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all  
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace.'  
Then Maeve: 'O Aengus, Master of all lovers,  
A thousand years ago you held high talk 150  
With the first kings of many-pillared Cruachan.  
O when will you grow weary?'

They had vanished;  
But out of the dark air over her head there came  
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.



**Baile and Aillinn**

**1903**



## 377 *Baile and Aillinn*

ARGUMENT. *Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.*

*I hardly hear the curlew cry,  
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,  
Before my thoughts begin to run  
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,  
Baile, who had the honey mouth;  
And that mild woman of the south,  
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.  
Their love was never drowned in care  
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold  
Because their bodies had grown old. 10  
Being forbid to marry on earth;  
They blossomed to immortal mirth.*

About the time when Christ was born,  
When the long wars for the White Horn  
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,  
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some  
Called rather Baile Little-Land,  
Rode out of Emain with a band  
Of harpers and young men; and they  
Imagined, as they struck the way 20  
To many-pastured Muirthemne,  
That all things fell out happily,  
And there, for all that fools had said,  
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

They found an old man running there:  
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;  
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;



He had puddle-water in his shoes;  
 He had half a cloak to keep him dry,  
 Although he had a squirrel's eye. 30

*O wandering birds and rushy beds,  
 You put such folly in our heads  
 With all this crying in the wind;  
 No common love is to our mind,  
 And our poor Kate or Nan is less  
 Than any whose unhappiness  
 Awoke the harp-strings long ago.  
 Yet they that know all things but know  
 That all this life can give us is  
 A child's laughter, a woman's kiss. 40  
 Who was it put so great a scorn  
 In the grey reeds that night and morn  
 Are trodden and broken by the herds,  
 And in the light bodies of birds  
 The north wind tumbles to and fro  
 And pinches among hail and snow?*

That runner said: 'I am from the south;  
 I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,  
 To tell him how the girl Aillinn  
 Rode from the country of her kin, 50  
 And old and young men rode with her:  
 For all that country had been astir  
 If anybody half as fair  
 Had chosen a husband anywhere  
 But where it could see her every day.  
 When they had ridden a little way  
 An old man caught the horse's head  
 With: "You must home again, and wed  
 With somebody in your own land."  
 A young man cried and kissed her hand, 60  
 "O lady, wed with one of us";  
 And when no face grew piteous  
 For any gentle thing she spake,  
 She fell and died of the heart-break.'

Because a lover's heart's worn out,  
 Being tumbled and blown about  
 By its own blind imagining,  
 And will believe that anything  
 That is bad enough to be true, is true,  
 Baile's heart was broken in two; 70  
 And he, being laid upon green boughs,  
 Was carried to the goodly house  
 Where the Hound of Ulad sat before  
 The brazen pillars of his door,  
 His face bowed low to weep the end  
 Of the harper's daughter and her friend.  
 For although years had passed away  
 He always wept them on that day,  
 For on that day they had been betrayed;  
 And now that Honey-Mouth is laid 80  
 Under a cairn of sleepy stone  
 Before his eyes, he has tears for none,  
 Although he is carrying stone, but two  
 For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

*We hold, because our memory is  
 So full of that thing and of this,  
 That out of sight is out of mind.  
 But the grey rush under the wind  
 And the grey bird with crooked bill  
 Have such long memories that they still 90  
 Remember Deirdre and her man;  
 And when we walk with Kate or Nan  
 About the windy water-side,  
 Our hearts can hear the voices chide.  
 How could we be so soon content,  
 Who know the way that Naoise went?  
 And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,  
 Who being lovely was so wise –  
 Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.*

Now had that old gaunt crafty one, 100  
 Gathering his cloak about him, run

Where Aillinn rode with waiting-maids,  
 Who amid leafy lights and shades  
 Dreamed of the hands that would unlace  
 Their bodices in some dim place  
 When they had come to the marriage-bed;  
 And harpers, pacing with high head  
 As though their music were enough  
 To make the savage heart of love  
 Grow gentle without sorrowing, 110  
 Imagining and pondering  
 Heaven knows what calamity;

'Another's hurried off,' cried he,  
 'From heat and cold and wind and wave;  
 They have heaped the stones above his grave  
 In Muirthemne, and over it  
 In changeless Ogham letters writ –  
*Baile, that was of Rury's seed.*  
 But the gods long ago decreed  
 No waiting-maid should ever spread 120  
 Baile and Aillinn's marriage-bed,  
 For they should clip and clip again  
 Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.  
 Therefore it is but little news  
 That put this hurry in my shoes.'

Then seeing that he scarce had spoke  
 Before her love-worn heart had broke,  
 He ran and laughed until he came  
 To that high hill the herdsmen name  
 The Hill Seat of Leighin, because 130  
 Some god or king had made the laws  
 That held the land together there,  
 In old times among the clouds of the air.

That old man climbed; the day grew dim;  
 Two swans came flying up to him,  
 Linked by a gold chain each to each,  
 And with low murmuring laughing speech

Alighted on the windy grass.

They knew him: his changed body was  
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings  
Were hovering over the harp-strings  
That Edain, Midhir's wife, had wove  
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

140

What shall I call them? fish that swim,  
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim  
By a broad water-lily leaf;  
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf  
Forgotten at the threshing-place;  
Or birds lost in the one clear space  
Of morning light in a dim sky;  
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,  
Or the door-pillars of one house,  
Or two sweet blossoming apple-boughs  
That have one shadow on the ground;  
Or the two strings that made one sound  
Where that wise harper's fingers ran.  
For this young girl and this young man  
Have happiness without an end,  
Because they have made so good a friend.

150

They know all wonders, for they pass  
The towery gates of Gorias,  
And Findrias and Falias,  
And long-forgotten Murias,  
Among the giant kings whose hoard,  
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,  
Was robbed before earth gave the wheat;  
Wandering from broken street to street  
They come where some huge watcher is,  
And tremble with their love and kiss.

160

They know undying things, for they  
Wander where earth withers away,  
Though nothing troubles the great streams  
But light from the pale stars, and gleams

170

From the holy orchards, where there is none  
 But fruit that is of precious stone,  
 Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them? They eat  
 Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat;  
 Who when night thickens are afloat  
 On dappled skins in a glass boat, 180  
 Far out under a windless sky;  
 While over them birds of Aengus fly,  
 And over the tiller and the prow,  
 And waving white wings to and fro  
 Awaken wanderings of light air  
 To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,  
 A yew tree where his body lay;  
 But a wild apple hid the grass  
 With its sweet blossom where hers was; 190  
 And being in good heart, because  
 A better time had come again  
 After the deaths of many men,  
 And that long fighting at the ford,  
 They wrote on tablets of thin board,  
 Made of the apple and the yew,  
 All the love stories that they knew.

*Let rush and bird cry out their fill  
 Of the harper's daughter if they will,  
 Beloved, I am not afraid of her. 200  
 She is not wiser nor lovelier,  
 And you are more high of heart than she,  
 For all her wanderings over-sea;  
 But I'd have bird and rush forget  
 Those other two; for never yet  
 Has lover lived, but longed to wive  
 Like them that are no more alive.*

**The Shadowy Waters**  
**1906**

TO  
LADY GREGORY

*I walked among the seven woods of Coole,  
 Shan-walla, where a willow-bordered pond  
 Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;  
 Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-no,  
 Where many hundred squirrels are as happy  
 As though they had been hidden by green boughs  
 Where old age cannot find them; Pairc-na-lee,  
 Where hazel and ash and privet blind the paths;  
 Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling  
 Their sudden fragrances on the green air; 10  
 Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes  
 Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;  
 Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox  
 And marten-cat, and borders that old wood  
 Wise Biddy Early called the wicked wood:  
 Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.  
 I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,  
 Yet dreamed that beings happier than men  
 Moved round me in the shadows, and at night  
 My dreams were cloven by voices and by fires; 20  
 And the images I have woven in this story  
 Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters  
 Moved round me in the voices and the fires,  
 And more I may not write of, for they that cleave  
 The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue  
 Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.  
 How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows?  
 I only know that all we know comes from you,  
 And that you come from Eden on flying feet.  
 Is Eden far away, or do you hide 30  
 From human thought, as hares and mice and coneys  
 That run before the reaping-hook and lie  
 In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods*



*And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,  
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?  
Is Eden out of time and out of space?  
And do you gather about us when pale light  
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,  
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of feathers  
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?*

40

*I have made this poem for you, that men may read it  
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,  
As men in the old times, before the harps began,  
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.*

*September 1900*

379 *The Harp of Aengus*

*Edain came out of Midhir's hill, and lay  
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,  
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds  
And Druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,  
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made  
Of opal and ruby and pale chrysolite  
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,  
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,  
Because her hands had been made wild by love.  
When Midhir's wife had changed her to a fly,  
He made a harp with Druid apple-wood  
That she among her winds might know he wept;  
And from that hour he has watched over none  
But faithful lovers.*

## PERSONS IN THE POEM

FORGAEL

AIBRIC

SAILORS

DECTORA

# 380 *The Shadowy Waters*

## A DRAMATIC POEM

*The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast, with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. When the play opens there are four persons upon the deck. Aibric stands by the tiller. Forgael sleeps upon the raised portion of the deck towards the front of the stage. Two Sailors are standing near to the mast, on which a harp is hanging.*

*First Sailor.* Has he not led us into these waste seas  
For long enough?

*Second Sailor.* Aye, long and long enough.

*First Sailor.* We have not come upon a shore or ship  
These dozen weeks.

*Second Sailor.* And I had thought to make  
A good round sum upon this cruise, and turn –  
For I am getting on in life – to something  
That has less ups and downs than robbery.

*First Sailor.* I am so tired of being a bachelor  
I could give all my heart to that Red Moll  
That had but the one eye.

10

*Second Sailor.* Can no bewitchment  
Transform these rascal billows into women  
That I may drown myself?

*First Sailor.* Better steer home,  
Whether he will or no; and better still  
To take him while he sleeps and carry him  
And drop him from the gunnel.

*Second Sailor.* I dare not do it.  
 Were't not that there is magic in his harp,  
 I would be of your mind; but when he plays it  
 Strange creatures flutter up before one's eyes,  
 Or cry about one's ears.

*First Sailor.* Nothing to fear.

*Second Sailor.* Do you remember when we sank that  
 galley  
 At the full moon? 20

*First Sailor.* He played all through the night.

*Second Sailor.* Until the moon had set; and when I looked  
 Where the dead drifted, I could see a bird  
 Like a grey gull upon the breast of each.  
 While I was looking they rose hurriedly,  
 And after circling with strange cries awhile  
 Flew westward; and many a time since then  
 I've heard a rustling overhead in the wind.

*First Sailor.* I saw them on that night as well as you.  
 But when I had eaten and drunk myself asleep  
 My courage came again. 30

*Second Sailor.* But that's not all.  
 The other night, while he was playing it,  
 A beautiful young man and girl came up  
 In a white breaking wave; they had the look  
 Of those that are alive for ever and ever.

*First Sailor.* I saw them, too, one night. Forgael was playing,  
 And they were listening there beyond the sail.  
 He could not see them, but I held out my hands  
 To grasp the woman.

*Second Sailor.* You have dared to touch her?

*First Sailor.* O she was but a shadow, and slipped  
 from me. 40

*Second Sailor.* But were you not afraid?

*First Sailor.* Why should I fear?

*Second Sailor.* 'Twas Aengus and Edain, the wandering  
lovers,  
To whom all lovers pray.

*First Sailor.* But what of that?  
A shadow does not carry sword or spear.

*Second Sailor.* My mother told me that there is not one  
Of the Ever-living half so dangerous  
As that wild Aengus. Long before her day  
He carried Edain off from a king's house,  
And hid her among fruits of jewel-stone  
And in a tower of glass, and from that day  
Has hated every man that's not in love,  
And has been dangerous to him.

50

*First Sailor.* I have heard  
He does not hate seafarers as he hates  
Peaceable men that shut the wind away,  
And keep to the one weary marriage-bed.

*Second Sailor.* I think that he has Forgael in his net,  
And drags him through the sea.

*First Sailor.* Well, net or none,  
I'd drown him while we have the chance to do it.

*Second Sailor.* It's certain I'd sleep easier o' nights  
If he were dead; but who will be our captain,  
Judge of the stars, and find a course for us?

60

*First Sailor.* I've thought of that. We must have Aibric  
with us,  
For he can judge the stars as well as Forgael.

[*Going towards Aibric.*]

Become our captain, Aibric. I am resolved  
To make an end of Forgael while he sleeps.  
There's not a man but will be glad of it  
When it is over, nor one to grumble at us.

*Aibric.* You have taken pay and made your bargain for it.

*First Sailor.* What good is there in this hard way of living,  
 Unless we drain more flagons in a year 70  
 And kiss more lips than lasting peaceable men  
 In their long lives? Will you be of our troop  
 And take the captain's share of everything  
 And bring us into populous seas again?

*Aibric.* Be of your troop! Aibric be one of you  
 And Forgael in the other scale! kill Forgael,  
 And he my master from my childhood up!  
 If you will draw that sword out of its scabbard  
 I'll give my answer.

*First Sailor.* You have awakened him.  
[*To Second Sailor.*]  
 We'd better go, for we have lost this chance. 80  
[*They go out.*]

*Forgael.* Have the birds passed us? I could hear your voice,  
 But there were others.

*Aibric.* I have seen nothing pass.

*Forgael.* You're certain of it? I never wake from sleep  
 But that I am afraid they may have passed,  
 For they're my only pilots. If I lost them  
 Straying too far into the north or south,  
 I'd never come upon the happiness  
 That has been promised me. I have not seen them  
 These many days; and yet there must be many  
 Dying at every moment in the world, 90  
 And flying towards their peace.

*Aibric.* Put by these thoughts,  
 And listen to me for a while. The sailors  
 Are plotting for your death.

*Forgael.* Have I not given  
 More riches than they ever hoped to find?  
 And now they will not follow, while I seek  
 The only riches that have hit my fancy.

*Aibric.* What riches can you find in this waste sea  
 Where no ship sails, where nothing that's alive  
 Has ever come but those man-headed birds,  
 Knowing it for the world's end? 100

*Forgael.* Where the world ends  
 The mind is made unchanging, for it finds  
 Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,  
 The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,  
 The roots of the world.

*Aibric.* Shadows before now  
 Have driven travellers mad for their own sport.

*Forgael.* Do you, too, doubt me? Have you joined their plot?

*Aibric.* No, no, do not say that. You know right well  
 That I will never lift a hand against you.

*Forgael.* Why should you be more faithful than the rest,  
 Being as doubtful? 110

*Aibric.* I have called you master  
 Too many years to lift a hand against you.

*Forgael.* Maybe it is but natural to doubt me.  
 You've never known, I'd lay a wager on it,  
 A melancholy that a cup of wine,  
 A lucky battle, or a woman's kiss  
 Could not amend.

*Aibric.* I have good spirits enough.

*Forgael.* If you will give me all your mind awhile –  
 All, all, the very bottom of the bowl –  
 I'll show you that I am made differently,  
 That nothing can amend it but these waters, 120  
 Where I am rid of life – the events of the world –  
 What do you call it? – that old promise-breaker,  
 The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,  
 'You will have all you have wished for when you have  
 earned



Land for your children or money in a pot.  
 And when we have it we are no happier,  
 Because of that old draught under the door,  
 Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all  
 How are we better off than Seaghan the fool,  
 That never did a hand's turn? Aibric! Aibric! 130  
 We have fallen in the dreams the Ever-living  
 Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world  
 And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh,  
 And find their laughter sweeter to the taste  
 For that brief sighing.

*Aibric.* If you had loved some woman –

*Forgael.* You say that also? You have heard the voices,  
 For that is what they say – all, all the shadows –  
 Aengus and Edain, those passionate wanderers,  
 And all the others; but it must be love  
 As they have known it. Now the secret's out; 140  
 For it is love that I am seeking for,  
 But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind  
 That is not in the world.

*Aibric.* And yet the world  
 Has beautiful women to please every man.

*Forgael.* But he that gets their love after the fashion  
 Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope  
 And bodily tenderness, and finds that even  
 The bed of love, that in the imagination  
 Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,  
 Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting, 150  
 And as soon finished.

*Aibric.* All that ever loved  
 Have loved that way – there is no other way.

*Forgael.* Yet never have two lovers kissed but they  
 Believed there was some other near at hand,  
 And almost wept because they could not find it.

*Aibric.* When they have twenty years; in middle life  
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,  
And let the dream go by.

*Forgael.* It's not a dream,  
But the reality that makes our passion  
As a lamp shadow – no – no lamp, the sun. 160  
What the world's million lips are thirsting for  
Must be substantial somewhere.

*Aibric.* I have heard the Druids  
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.  
It may be that the Ever-living know it –  
No mortal can.

*Forgael.* Yes; if they give us help.

*Aibric.* They are besotting you as they besot  
The crazy herdsman that will tell his fellows  
That he has been all night upon the hills,  
Riding to hurley, or in the battle-host  
With the Ever-living. 170

*Forgael.* What if he speak the truth,  
And for a dozen hours have been a part  
Of that more powerful life?

*Aibric.* His wife knows better.  
Has she not seen him lying like a log,  
Or fumbling in a dream about the house?  
And if she hear him mutter of wild riders,  
She knows that it was but the cart-horse coughing  
That set him to the fancy.

*Forgael.* All would be well  
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,  
And get into their world that to the sense  
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly 180  
Among substantial things; for it is dreams  
That lift us to the flowing, changing world  
That the heart longs for. What is love itself,  
Even though it be the lightest of light love,

But dreams that hurry from beyond the world  
 To make low laughter more than meat and drink,  
 Though it but set us sighing? Fellow-wanderer,  
 Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,  
 Not in its image on the mirror!

*Aibric.*

While

We're in the body that's impossible.

190

*Forgael.* And yet I cannot think they're leading me  
 To death; for they that promised to me love  
 As those that can outlive the moon have known it,  
 Had the world's total life gathered up, it seemed,  
 Into their shining limbs – I've had great teachers.  
 Aengus and Edain ran up out of the wave –  
 You'd never doubt that it was life they promised  
 Had you looked on them face to face as I did,  
 With so red lips, and running on such feet,  
 And having such wide-open, shining eyes.

200

*Aibric.* It's certain they are leading you to death.  
 None but the dead, or those that never lived,  
 Can know that ecstasy. *Forgael!* *Forgael!*  
 They have made you follow the man-headed birds,  
 And you have told me that their journey lies  
 Towards the country of the dead.

*Forgael.*

What matter

If I am going to my death? – for there,  
 Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have promised.  
 That much is certain. I shall find a woman,  
 One of the Ever-living, as I think –  
 One of the Laughing People – and she and I  
 Shall light upon a place in the world's core,  
 Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,  
 Like charmed apples made of chrysoprase,  
 Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;  
 And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,

210

Become one movement, energy, delight,  
Until the overburthened moon is dead.

[A number of Sailors enter hurriedly.]

*First Sailor.* Look there! there in the mist! a ship of spice!  
And we are almost on her!

220

*Second Sailor.* We had not known  
But for the ambergris and sandalwood.

*First Sailor.* No; but opoponax and cinnamon.

*Forgael* [taking the tiller from *Aibric*]. The Ever-living have  
kept my bargain for me,  
And paid you on the nail.

*Aibric.* Take up that rope  
To make her fast while we are plundering her.

*First Sailor.* There is a king and queen upon her deck,  
And where there is one woman there'll be others.

*Aibric.* Speak lower, or they'll hear.

*First Sailor.* They cannot hear;  
They are too busy with each other. Look!  
He has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

230

*Second Sailor.* When she finds out we have better men aboard  
She may not be too sorry in the end.

*First Sailor.* She will be like a wild cat; for these queens  
Care more about the kegs of silver and gold  
And the high fame that come to them in marriage,  
Than a strong body and a ready hand.

*Second Sailor.* There's nobody is natural but a robber,  
And that is why the world totters about  
Upon its bandy legs.

*Aibric.* Run at them now,  
And overpower the crew while yet asleep!

240

[The Sailors go out.]

[Voices and the clashing of swords are heard from the other ship,  
which cannot be seen because of the sail.]

A Voice. Armed men have come upon us! O I am slain!

Another Voice. Wake all below!

Another Voice. Why have you broken our sleep?

First Voice. Armed men have come upon us! O I am slain!

Forgael [who has remained at the tiller]. There! there they  
come! Gull, gannet, or diver,

But with a man's head, or a fair woman's,

They hover over the masthead awhile

To wait their friends; but when their friends have come

They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs.

One – and one – a couple – five together;

And I will hear them talking in a minute.

250

Yes, voices! but I do not catch the words.

Now I can hear. There's one of them that says,

'How light we are, now we are changed to birds!'

Another answers, 'Maybe we shall find

Our heart's desire now that we are so light.'

And then one asks another how he died,

And says, 'A sword-blade pierced me in my sleep.'

And now they all wheel suddenly and fly

To the other side, and higher in the air.

And now a laggard with a woman's head

260

Comes crying, 'I have run upon the sword.

I have fled to my beloved in the air,

In the waste of the high air, that we may wander

Among the windy meadows of the dawn.'

But why are they still waiting? why are they

Circling and circling over the masthead?

What power that is more mighty than desire

To hurry to their hidden happiness

Withholds them now? Have the Ever-living Ones

A meaning in that circling overhead?

270

But what's the meaning? [He cries out.] Why do you  
linger there?

Why linger? Run to your desire,  
Are you not happy wingèd bodies now?

[*His voice sinks again.*]

Being too busy in the air and the high air,  
They cannot hear my voice; but what's the meaning?

[*The Sailors have returned. Dectora is with them.*]

*Forgael* [*turning and seeing her*]. Why are you standing  
with your eyes upon me?

You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!

That cannot be the meaning of the birds.

You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,

But have not bitten yet.

280

*Dectora.* I am a queen,

And ask for satisfaction upon these

Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.

[*Breaking loose from the Sailors who are holding her.*]

Let go my hands!

*Forgael.* Why do you cast a shadow?

Where do you come from? Who brought you to this  
place?

They would not send me one that casts a shadow.

*Dectora.* Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,

And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,

And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,

Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,

I ask a fitting punishment for all

That raised their hands against him.

290

*Forgael.* There are some

That weigh and measure all in these waste seas –

They that have all the wisdom that's in life,

And all that prophesying images

Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;

They have it that the plans of kings and queens

Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters

But laughter and tears – laughter, laughter, and tears;

That every man should carry his own soul  
Upon his shoulders.

300

*Dectora.* You've nothing but wild words,  
And I would know if you will give me vengeance.

*Forgael.* When she finds out I will not let her go –  
When she knows that.

*Dectora.* What is it that you are muttering –  
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

*Forgael.* Although you are more beautiful than any,  
I almost long that it were possible;  
But if I were to put you on that ship,  
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,  
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind  
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,  
It had washed among the stars and put them out,  
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,  
Until you stood before me on the deck –  
As now.

310

*Dectora.* Does wandering in these desolate seas  
And listening to the cry of wind and wave  
Bring madness?

*Forgael.* Queen, I am not mad.

*Dectora.* Yet say  
That unimaginable storms of wind and wave  
Would rise against me.

*Forgael.* No, I am not mad –  
If it be not that hearing messages  
From lasting watchers, that outlive the moon,  
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

320

*Dectora.* And did those watchers bid you take me captive?

*Forgael.* Both you and I are taken in the net.  
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake  
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised

I shall have love in their immortal fashion;  
 And for this end they gave me my old harp  
 That is more mighty than the sun and moon,  
 Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,  
 That none might take you from me.

330

*Dectora* [*first trembling back from the mast where the harp is  
 and then laughing*]. For a moment

Your raving of a message and a harp  
 More mighty than the stars half troubled me,  
 But all that's raving. Who is there can compel  
 The daughter and the granddaughter of kings  
 To be his bedfellow?

*Forgael.* Until your lips  
 Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.

*Dectora.* My husband and my king died at my feet,  
 And yet you talk of love.

*Forgael.* The movement of time  
 Is shaken in these seas, and what one does  
 One moment has no might upon the moment  
 That follows after.

340

*Dectora.* I understand you now.  
 You have a Druid craft of wicked sound  
 Wrung from the cold women of the sea –  
 A magic that can call a demon up,  
 Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

*Forgael.* Your soul shall give the kiss.

*Dectora.* I am not afraid,  
 While there's a rope to run into a noose  
 Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,  
 And I would have you look into my face  
 And know that it is fearless.

350

*Forgael.* Do what you will,  
 For neither I nor you can break a mesh  
 Of the great golden net that is about us.



*Dectora.* There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear.

[*She passes Forgael and stands for a moment looking into his face.*]

I have good reason for that thought.

[*She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.*]

And now

I can put fear away as a queen should.

[*She mounts on to the bulwark and turns towards Forgael.*]

Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face

You do not see my purpose. I shall have gone

Before a hand can touch me.

*Forgael* [*folding his arms*]. My hands are still;

The Ever-living hold us. Do what you will,

You cannot leap out of the golden net.

360

*First Sailor.* No need to drown, for, if you will pardon us

And measure out a course and bring us home,

We'll put this man to death.

*Dectora.*

I promise it.

*First Sailor.* There is none to take his side.

*Aibric.*

I am on his side.

I'll strike a blow for him to give him time

To cast his dreams away.

[*Aibric goes in front of Forgael with drawn sword. Forgael takes the harp.*]

*First Sailor.*

No other 'll do it.

[*The Sailors throw Aibric on one side. He falls and lies upon the deck. They lift their swords to strike Forgael, who is about to play the harp. The stage begins to darken. The Sailors hesitate in fear.*]

*Second Sailor.* He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

*Dectora.* Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn

To him that strikes him first!

*First Sailor.*

I will strike him first.

[*He goes close up to Forgael with his sword lifted.*]

[*Shrinking back.*] He has caught the crescent moon  
out of the sky,  
And carries it between us.

370

*Second Sailor.* Holy fire  
To burn us to the marrow if we strike.

*Dectora.* I'll give a golden galley full of fruit,  
That has the heady flavour of new wine,  
To him that wounds him to the death.

*First Sailor.* I'll do it.  
For all his spells will vanish when he dies,  
Having their life in him.

*Second Sailor.* Though it be the moon  
That he is holding up between us there,  
I will strike at him.

*The Others.* And I! And I! And I!

[*Forgael plays the harp.*]

*First Sailor* [*falling into a dream suddenly*]. But you were 380  
saying there is somebody  
Upon that other ship we are to wake.  
You did not know what brought him to his end,  
But it was sudden.

*Second Sailor.* You are in the right;  
I had forgotten that we must go wake him.

*Dectora.* He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,  
And set you dreaming.

*Second Sailor.* How can we have a wake  
When we have neither brown nor yellow ale?

*First Sailor.* I saw a flagon of brown ale aboard her.

*Third Sailor.* How can we raise the keen that do not know  
What name to call him by?

390

*First Sailor.* Come to his ship.  
His name will come into our thoughts in a minute.

I know that he died a thousand years ago,  
And has not yet been waked.

*Second Sailor [beginning to keen].* Ohone! O! O! O!  
The yew-bough has been broken into two,  
And all the birds are scattered.

*All the Sailors.*

O! O! O! O!

[*They go out keening.*]

*Dectora.* Protect me now, gods that my people swear by.  
[*Aibric has risen from the deck where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.*]

*Aibric.* Where is my sword that fell out of my hand  
When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!  
[*He goes dreamily towards the sword, but Dectora runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.*]

*Aibric [sleepily].* Queen, give it me.

*Dectora.* No, I have need of it.

*Aibric.* Why do you need a sword? But you may keep      400  
it.

Now that he's dead I have no need of it,  
For everything is gone.

*A Sailor [calling from the other ship].* Come hither, Aibric,  
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

*Aibric [half to Dectora, half to himself].* What name had that  
dead king? Arthur of Britain?

No, no – not Arthur. I remember now.

It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died  
Broken-hearted, having lost his queen  
Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,  
For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!

For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

410

[*He goes out.*]

[*While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows one hears the wailing of the Sailors from the other ship.*

*Dectora stands with the sword lifted in front of Forgael.*]

*Dectora.* I will end all your magic on the instant.

*[Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.]*

This sword is to lie beside him in the grave.  
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,  
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,  
For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,  
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,  
And that he died a thousand years ago.  
O! O! O! O!

*[Forgael changes the tune.]*

But no, that is not it.

I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing  
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O! 420  
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.  
But what is it that made me say I loved him?  
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,  
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,  
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

*Forgael.* Do you not know me, lady? I am he  
That you are weeping for.

*Dectora.* No, for he is dead.  
O! O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

*Forgael.* It was so given out, but I will prove  
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy 430  
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.  
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon  
And you will recollect my face and voice,  
For you have listened to me playing it  
These thousand years.

*[He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp slips from his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks behind him.]*

What are the birds at there?  
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?

What are you calling out above the mast?  
 If railing and reproach and mockery  
 Because I have awakened her to love  
 By magic strings, I'll make this answer to it: 440  
 Being driven on by voices and by dreams  
 That were clear messages from the Ever-living,  
 I have done right. What could I but obey?  
 And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

*Dectora* [*laughing*]. Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning  
 That I should keen him from the full of the moon  
 To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

*Forgael*. How have I wronged her now that she is merry?  
 But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.  
 You know the counsels of the Ever-living, 450  
 And all that tossing of your wings is joy,  
 And all that murmuring's but a marriage-song;  
 But if it be reproach, I answer this:  
 There is not one among you that made love  
 By any other means. You call it passion,  
 Consideration, generosity;  
 But it was all deceit, and flattery  
 To win a woman in her own despite,  
 For love is war, and there is hatred in it;  
 And if you say that she came willingly – 460

*Dectora*. Why do you turn away and hide your face,  
 That I would look upon for ever?

*Forgael*. My grief!

*Dectora*. Have I not loved you for a thousand years?

*Forgael*. I never have been golden-armed Iollan.

*Dectora*. I do not understand. I know your face  
 Better than my own hands.

*Forgael*. I have deceived you  
 Out of all reckoning.

*Dectora*. Is it not true

That you were born a thousand years ago,  
 In islands where the children of Aengus wind  
 In happy dances under a windy moon, 470  
 And that you'll bring me there?

*Forgael.* I have deceived you;  
 I have deceived you utterly.

*Dectora.* How can that be?  
 Is it that though your eyes are full of love  
 Some other woman has a claim on you,  
 And I've but half?

*Forgael.* O no!

*Dectora.* And if there is,  
 If there be half a hundred more, what matter?  
 I'll never give another thought to it;  
 No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.  
 Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,  
 Their heads being turned with praise and flattery; 480  
 And that is why their lovers are afraid  
 To tell them a plain story.

*Forgael.* That's not the story;  
 But I have done so great a wrong against you,  
 There is no measure that it would not burst.  
 I will confess it all.

*Dectora.* What do I care,  
 Now that my body has begun to dream,  
 And you have grown to be a burning sod  
 In the imagination and intellect?  
 If something that's most fabulous were true –  
 If you had taken me by magic spells, 490  
 And killed a lover or husband at my feet –  
 I would not let you speak, for I would know  
 That it was yesterday and not to-day  
 I loved him; I would cover up my ears,  
 As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?

*Forgael.* I weep because I've nothing for your eyes  
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

*Dectora.* O why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

*Forgael.* I weep – I weep because bare night's above,  
And not a roof of ivory and gold. 500

*Dectora.* I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,  
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.  
I would that there was nothing in the world  
But my beloved – that night and day had perished,  
And all that is and all that is to be,  
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

*Forgael.* You turn away. Why do you turn away?  
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon  
My enemy?

*Dectora.* I looked upon the moon,  
Longing to knead and pull it into shape 510  
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.  
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,  
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know  
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought  
Wander a moment when one is in love?

[*He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the  
sea, shading his eyes.*]

Why are you looking at the sea?

*Forgael.* Look there!

*Dectora.* What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds  
That fly into the west?

*Forgael.* But listen, listen!

*Dectora.* What is there but the crying of the birds?

*Forgael.* If you'll but listen closely to that crying 520  
You'll hear them calling out to one another  
With human voices.

*Dectora.* O, I can hear them now.

What are they? Unto what country do they fly?

*Forgael.* To unimaginable happiness.

They have been circling over our heads in the air,  
But now that they have taken to the road  
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;  
And though they're but the colour of grey ash,  
They're crying out, could you but hear their words,  
'There is a country at the end of the world  
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'

530

[*The Sailors come in with Aibric. They are in great excitement.*]

*First Sailor.* The hold is full of treasure.

*Second Sailor.* Full to the hatches.

*First Sailor.* Treasure on treasure.

*Third Sailor.* Boxes of precious spice.

*First Sailor.* Ivory images with amethyst eyes.

*Third Sailor.* Dragons with eyes of ruby.

*First Sailor.* The whole ship  
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

*Third Sailor.* Let's home; I'd give some rubies to a woman.

*Second Sailor.* There's somebody I'd give the amethyst  
eyes to.

*Aibric* [*silencing them with a gesture*]. We would return to  
our own country, Forgael,

For we have found a treasure that's so great  
Imagination cannot reckon it.

540

And having lit upon this woman there,  
What more have you to look for on the seas?

*Forgael.* I cannot – I am going on to the end.

As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

*Aibric.* The Ever-living have made you mad; but no,  
It was this woman in her woman's vengeance  
That drove you to it, and I fool enough



To fancy that she'd bring you home again.  
 'Twas you that egged him to it, for you know  
 That he is being driven to his death.

550

*Dectora.* That is not true, for he has promised me  
 An unimaginable happiness.

*Aibric.* And if that happiness be more than dreams,  
 More than the froth, the feather, the dust-whirl,  
 The crazy nothing that I think it is,  
 It shall be in the country of the dead,  
 If there be such a country.

*Dectora.* No, not there,  
 But in some island where the life of the world  
 Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world  
 Had run into one fountain.

560

*Aibric.* Speak to him.  
 He knows that he is taking you to death;  
 Speak – he will not deny it.

*Dectora.* Is that true?

*Forgael.* I do not know for certain, but I know  
 That I have the best of pilots.

*Aibric.* Shadows, illusions,  
 That the Shape-changers, the Ever-laughing Ones,  
 The Immortal Mockers have cast into his mind,  
 Or called before his eyes.

*Dectora.* O carry me  
 To some sure country, some familiar place.  
 Have we not everything that life can give  
 In having one another?

570

*Forgael.* How could I rest  
 If I refused the messengers and pilots  
 With all those sights and all that crying out?

*Dectora.* But I will cover up your eyes and ears,  
 That you may never hear the cry of the birds,  
 Or look upon them.

*Forgael.*                      Were they but lowlier  
I'd do your will, but they are too high – too high.

*Dectora.* Being too high, their heady prophecies  
But harry us with hopes that come to nothing,  
Because we are not proud, imperishable,                      580  
Alone and winged.

*Forgael.*                      Our love shall be like theirs  
When we have put their changeless image on.

*Dectora.* I am a woman, I die at every breath.

*Aibric.* Let the birds scatter, for the tree is broken,  
And there's no help in words. [*To the Sailors.*] To the  
other ship,  
And I will follow you and cut the rope  
When I have said farewell to this man here,  
For neither I nor any living man  
Will look upon his face again.

[*The Sailors go out.*]

*Forgael* [*to Dectora*].                      Go with him,  
For he will shelter you and bring you home.                      590

*Aibric* [*taking Forgael's hand*]. I'll do it for his sake.

*Dectora.*                      No. Take this sword  
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

*Aibric* [*half falling into the keen*]. The yew-bough has been  
broken into two,  
And all the birds are scattered – O! O! O!  
Farewell! farewell!                      [*He goes out.*]

*Dectora.*                      The sword is in the rope –  
The rope's in two – it falls into the sea,  
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,  
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,  
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,  
And I am left alone with my beloved,                      600  
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.

We are alone for ever, and I laugh,  
 Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.  
 The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I  
 Shall be alone for ever. We two – this crown –  
 I half remember. It has been in my dreams.  
 Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.  
 O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,  
 O silver fish that my two hands have taken  
 Out of the running stream, O morning star,  
 Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn  
 Upon the misty border of the wood,  
 Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,  
 For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

610

*Forgael [gathering Dectora's hair about him].* Beloved, having  
 dragged the net about us,  
 And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;  
 And that old harp awakens of itself  
 To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,  
 That have had dreams for father, live in us.

# The Two Kings

1914



## 381 *The Two Kings*

King Eochaid came at sundown to a wood  
Westward of Tara. Hurrying to his queen  
He had outridden his war-wasted men  
That with empounded cattle trod the mire,  
And where beech trees had mixed a pale green light  
With the ground-ivy's blue, he saw a stag  
Whiter than curds, its eyes the tint of the sea.  
Because it stood upon his path and seemed  
More hands in height than any stag in the world  
He sat with tightened rein and loosened mouth 10  
Upon his trembling horse, then drove the spur;  
But the stag stooped and ran at him, and passed,  
Rending the horse's flank. King Eochaid reeled,  
Then drew his sword to hold its levelled point  
Against the stag. When horn and steel were met  
The horn resounded as though it had been silver,  
A sweet, miraculous, terrifying sound.  
Horn locked in sword, they tugged and struggled there  
As though a stag and unicorn were met  
Among the African Mountains of the Moon, 20  
Until at last the double horns, drawn backward,  
Butted below the single and so pierced  
The entrails of the horse. Dropping his sword  
King Eochaid seized the horns in his strong hands  
And stared into the sea-green eye, and so  
Hither and thither to and fro they trod  
Till all the place was beaten into mire.  
The strong thigh and the agile thigh were met,  
The hands that gathered up the might of the world,  
And hoof and horn that had sucked in their speed 30  
Amid the elaborate wilderness of the air.  
Through bush they plunged and over ivied root,  
And where the stone struck fire, while in the leaves

A squirrel whinnied and a bird screamed out;  
 But when at last he forced those sinewy flanks  
 Against a beech-bole, he threw down the beast  
 And knelt above it with drawn knife. On the instant  
 It vanished like a shadow, and a cry  
 So mournful that it seemed the cry of one  
 Who had lost some unimaginable treasure  
 Wandered between the blue and the green leaf  
 And climbed into the air, crumbling away,  
 Till all had seemed a shadow or a vision  
 But for the trodden mire, the pool of blood,  
 The disembowelled horse.

40

King Eochaid ran  
 Toward peopled Tara, nor stood to draw his breath  
 Until he came before the painted wall,  
 The posts of polished yew, circled with bronze,  
 Of the great door; but though the hanging lamps  
 Showed their faint light through the unshuttered  
 windows,

50

Nor door, nor mouth, nor slipper made a noise,  
 Nor on the ancient beaten paths, that wound  
 From well-side or from plough-land, was there noise;  
 Nor had there been the noise of living thing  
 Before him or behind, but that far off  
 On the horizon edge bellowed the herds.

Knowing that silence brings no good to kings,  
 And mocks returning victory, he passed  
 Between the pillars with a beating heart  
 And saw where in the midst of the great hall  
 Pale-faced, alone upon a bench, Edain  
 Sat upright with a sword before her feet.

60

Her hands on either side had gripped the bench,  
 Her eyes were cold and steady, her lips tight.  
 Some passion had made her stone. Hearing a foot  
 She started and then knew whose foot it was;  
 But when he thought to take her in his arms  
 She motioned him afar, and rose and spoke:  
 'I have sent among the fields or to the woods

The fighting-men and servants of this house,  
 For I would have your judgment upon one  
 Who is self-accused. If she be innocent  
 She would not look in any known man's face  
 Till judgment has been given, and if guilty,  
 Would never look again on known man's face.'  
 And at these words he paled, as she had paled,  
 Knowing that he should find upon her lips  
 The meaning of that monstrous day.

70

Then she:

'You brought me where your brother Ardan sat  
 Always in his one seat, and bid me care him  
 Through that strange illness that had fixed him there,  
 And should he die to heap his burial-mound  
 And carve his name in Ogham.' Eochaid said,  
 'He lives?' 'He lives and is a healthy man.'  
 'While I have him and you it matters little  
 What man you have lost, what evil you have found.'  
 'I bid them make his bed under this roof  
 And carried him his food with my own hands,  
 And so the weeks passed by. But when I said,  
 "What is this trouble?" he would answer nothing,  
 Though always at my words his trouble grew;  
 And I but asked the more, till he cried out,  
 Weary of many questions: "There are things  
 That make the heart akin to the dumb stone."  
 Then I replied, "Although you hide a secret,  
 Hopeless and dear, or terrible to think on,  
 Speak it, that I may send through the wide world  
 For medicine." Thereon he cried aloud,  
 "Day after day you question me, and I,  
 Because there is such a storm amid my thoughts  
 I shall be carried in the gust, command,  
 Forbid, beseech and waste my breath." Then I:  
 "Although the thing that you have hid were evil,  
 The speaking of it could be no great wrong,  
 And evil must it be, if done 'twere worse  
 Than mound and stone that keep all virtue in,

80

90

100



And loosen on us dreams that waste our life,  
 Shadows and shows that can but turn the brain."  
 But finding him still silent I stooped down  
 And whispering that none but he should hear,                    110  
 Said, "If a woman has put this on you,  
 My men, whether it please her or displease,  
 And though they have to cross the Loughlan waters  
 And take her in the middle of armed men,  
 Shall make her look upon her handiwork,  
 That she may quench the rick she has fired; and though  
 She may have worn silk clothes, or worn a crown,  
 She'll not be proud, knowing within her heart  
 That our sufficient portion of the world  
 Is that we give, although it be brief giving,                    120  
 Happiness to children and to men."  
 Then he, driven by his thought beyond his thought,  
 And speaking what he would not though he would,  
 Sighed, "You, even you yourself, could work the cure!"  
 And at those words I rose and I went out  
 And for nine days he had food from other hands,  
 And for nine days my mind went whirling round  
 The one disastrous zodiac, muttering  
 That the immedicable mound's beyond  
 Our questioning, beyond our pity even.                    130  
 But when nine days had gone I stood again  
 Before his chair and bending down my head  
 I bade him go when all his household slept  
 To an old empty woodman's house that's hidden  
 Westward of Tara, among the hazel-trees –  
 For hope would give his limbs the power – and await  
 A friend that could, he had told her, work his cure  
 And would be no harsh friend.

When night had deepened,

I groped my way from beech to hazel wood,  
 Found that old house, a sputtering torch within,                    140  
 And stretched out sleeping on a pile of skins  
 Ardan, and though I called to him and tried  
 To shake him out of sleep, I could not rouse him.

I waited till the night was on the turn,  
 Then fearing that some labourer, on his way  
 To plough or pasture-land, might see me there,  
 Went out.

Among the ivy-covered rocks,  
 As on the blue light of a sword, a man  
 Who had unnatural majesty, and eyes  
 Like the eyes of some great kite scouring the woods, 150  
 Stood on my path. Trembling from head to foot  
 I gazed at him like grouse upon a kite;  
 But with a voice that had unnatural music,  
 "A weary wooing and a long," he said,  
 "Speaking of love through other lips and looking  
 Under the eyelids of another, for it was my craft  
 That put a passion in the sleeper there,  
 And when I had got my will and drawn you here,  
 Where I may speak to you alone, my craft  
 Sucked up the passion out of him again 160  
 And left mere sleep. He'll wake when the sun wakes,  
 Push out his vigorous limbs and rub his eyes,  
 And wonder what has ailed him these twelve months."  
 I cowered back upon the wall in terror,  
 But that sweet-sounding voice ran on: "Woman,  
 I was your husband when you rode the air,  
 Danced in the whirling foam and in the dust,  
 In days you have not kept in memory,  
 Being betrayed into a cradle, and I come  
 That I may claim you as my wife again." 170  
 I was no longer terrified – his voice  
 Had half awakened some old memory –  
 Yet answered him, "I am King Eochaid's wife  
 And with him have found every happiness  
 Women can find." With a most masterful voice,  
 That made the body seem as it were a string  
 Under a bow, he cried, "What happiness  
 Can lovers have that know their happiness  
 Must end at the dumb stone? But where we build  
 Our sudden palaces in the still air 180

Pleasure itself can bring no weariness,  
 Nor can time waste the cheek, nor is there foot  
 That has grown weary of the wandering dance,  
 Nor an unlaughing mouth, but mine that mourns,  
 Among those mouths that sing their sweethearts' praise,  
 Your empty bed." "How should I love," I answered,  
 "Were it not that when the dawn has lit my bed  
 And shown my husband sleeping there, I have sighed,  
 'Your strength and nobleness will pass away.'  
 Or how should love be worth its pains were it not 190  
 That when he has fallen asleep within my arms,  
 Being wearied out, I love in man the child?  
 What can they know of love that do not know  
 She builds her nest upon a narrow ledge  
 Above a windy precipice?" Then he:  
 "Seeing that when you come to the deathbed  
 You must return, whether you would or no,  
 This human life blotted from memory,  
 Why must I live some thirty, forty years,  
 Alone with all this useless happiness?" 200  
 Thereon he seized me in his arms, but I  
 Thrust him away with both my hands and cried,  
 "Never will I believe there is any change  
 Can blot out of my memory this life  
 Sweetened by death, but if I could believe,  
 That were a double hunger in my lips  
 For what is doubly brief."

And now the shape  
 My hands were pressed to vanished suddenly.  
 I staggered, but a beech tree stayed my fall,  
 And clinging to it I could hear the cocks 210  
 Crow upon Tara.'

King Eochaid bowed his head  
 And thanked her for her kindness to his brother,  
 For that she promised, and for that refused.  
 Thereon the bellowing of the empounded herds  
 Rose round the walls, and through the bronze-ringed  
 door

Jostled and shouted those war-wasted men,  
And in the midst King Eochaid's brother stood,  
And bade all welcome, being ignorant.



# The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid

1923



## 382 *The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid*

Kusta ben Luka is my name, I write  
To Abd Al-Rabban; fellow-roysterer once,  
Now the good Caliph's learned Treasurer,  
And for no ear but his.

Carry this letter  
Through the great gallery of the Treasure House  
Where banners of the Caliphs hang, night-coloured  
But brilliant as the night's embroidery,  
And wait war's music; pass the little gallery;  
Pass books of learning from Byzantium  
Written in gold upon a purple stain, 10  
And pause at last, I was about to say,  
At the great book of Sappho's song; but no,  
For should you leave my letter there, a boy's  
Love-lorn, indifferent hands might come upon it  
And let it fall unnoticed to the floor.  
Pause at the Treatise of Parmenides  
And hide it there, for Caliphs to world's end  
Must keep that perfect, as they keep her song,  
So great its fame.

When fitting time has passed  
The parchment will disclose to some learned man 20  
A mystery that else had found no chronicler  
But the wild Bedouin. Though I approve  
Those wanderers that welcomed in their tents  
What great Harun Al-Rashid, occupied  
With Persian embassy or Grecian war,  
Must needs neglect, I cannot hide the truth  
That wandering in a desert, featureless  
As air under a wing, can give birds' wit.  
In after time they will speak much of me  
And speak but fantasy. Recall the year 30  
When our beloved Caliph put to death



His Vizir Jaffer for an unknown reason:

'If but the shirt upon my body knew it  
I'd tear it off and throw it in the fire.'

That speech was all that the town knew, but he  
Seemed for a while to have grown young again;  
Seemed so on purpose, muttered Jaffer's friends,  
That none might know that he was conscience-struck –  
But that's a traitor's thought. Enough for me

That in the early summer of the year

40

The mightiest of the princes of the world  
Came to the least considered of his courtiers;  
Sat down upon the fountain's marble edge,  
One hand amid the goldfish in the pool;  
And thereupon a colloquy took place  
That I commend to all the chroniclers  
To show how violent great hearts can lose  
Their bitterness and find the honeycomb.

'I have brought a slender bride into the house;  
You know the saying, "Change the bride with  
spring,"

50

And she and I, being sunk in happiness,  
Cannot endure to think you tread these paths,  
When evening stirs the jasmine bough, and yet  
Are brideless.'

'I am falling into years.'

'But such as you and I do not seem old  
Like men who live by habit. Every day  
I ride with falcon to the river's edge  
Or carry the ringed mail upon my back,  
Or court a woman; neither enemy,  
Game-bird, nor woman does the same thing  
twice;

60

And so a hunter carries in the eye  
A mimicry of youth. Can poet's thought  
That springs from body and in body falls  
Like this pure jet, now lost amid blue sky,

Now bathing lily leaf and fish's scale,  
Be mimicry?'

    'What matter if our souls  
Are nearer to the surface of the body  
Than souls that start no game and turn no rhyme!  
The soul's own youth and not the body's youth  
Shows through our lineaments. My candle's bright,  
My lantern is too loyal not to show  
That it was made in your great father's reign.'

70

'And yet the jasmine season warms our blood.'

'Great prince, forgive the freedom of my speech:  
You think that love has seasons, and you think  
That if the spring bear off what the spring gave  
The heart need suffer no defeat; but I  
Who have accepted the Byzantine faith,  
That seems unnatural to Arabian minds,  
Think when I choose a bride I choose for ever;  
And if her eye should not grow bright for mine  
Or brighten only for some younger eye,  
My heart could never turn from daily ruin,  
Nor find a remedy.'

80

    'But what if I  
Have lit upon a woman who so shares  
Your thirst for those old crabbed mysteries,  
So strains to look beyond our life, an eye  
That never knew that strain would scarce seem bright,  
And yet herself can seem youth's very fountain,  
Being all brimmed with life?'

90

    'Were it but true  
I would have found the best that life can give,  
Companionship in those mysterious things  
That make a man's soul or a woman's soul  
Itself and not some other soul.'

    'That love  
Must needs be in this life and in what follows  
Unchanging and at peace, and it is right

Every philosopher should praise that love.  
 But I being none can praise its opposite.  
 It makes my passion stronger but to think  
 Like passion stirs the peacock and his mate, 100  
 The wild stag and the doe; that mouth to mouth  
 Is a man's mockery of the changeless soul.'

And thereupon his bounty gave what now  
 Can shake more blossom from autumnal chill  
 Than all my bursting springtime knew. A girl  
 Perched in some window of her mother's house  
 Had watched my daily passage to and fro;  
 Had heard impossible history of my past;  
 Imagined some impossible history  
 Lived at my side; thought time's disfiguring touch 110  
 Gave but more reason for a woman's care.  
 Yet was it love of me, or was it love  
 Of the stark mystery that has dazed my sight,  
 Perplexed her fantasy and planned her care?  
 Or did the torchlight of that mystery  
 Pick out my features in such light and shade  
 Two contemplating passions chose one theme  
 Through sheer bewilderment? She had not paced  
 The garden paths, nor counted up the rooms,  
 Before she had spread a book upon her knees 120  
 And asked about the pictures or the text;  
 And often those first days I saw her stare  
 On old dry writing in a learned tongue,  
 On old dry faggots that could never please  
 The extravagance of spring; or move a hand  
 As if that writing or the figured page  
 Were some dear cheek.

Upon a moonless night  
 I sat where I could watch her sleeping form,  
 And wrote by candle-light; but her form moved,  
 And fearing that my light disturbed her sleep 130  
 I rose that I might screen it with a cloth.  
 I heard her voice, 'Turn that I may expound

What's bowed your shoulder and made pale your  
cheek';

And saw her sitting upright on the bed;

Or was it she that spoke or some great Djinn?

I say that a Djinn spoke. A live-long hour

She seemed the learned man and I the child;

Truths without father came, truths that no book

Of all the uncounted books that I have read,

Nor thought out of her mind or mine begot,

Self-born, high-born, and solitary truths,

Those terrible implacable straight lines

Drawn through the wandering vegetative dream,

Even those truths that when my bones are dust

Must drive the Arabian host.

140

The voice grew still,

And she lay down upon her bed and slept,

But woke at the first gleam of day, rose up

And swept the house and sang about her work

In childish ignorance of all that passed.

A dozen nights of natural sleep, and then

When the full moon swam to its greatest height

She rose, and with her eyes shut fast in sleep

Walked through the house. Unnoticed and unfelt

I wrapped her in a hooded cloak, and she,

Half running, dropped at the first ridge of the desert

And there marked out those emblems on the sand

That day by day I study and marvel at,

With her white finger. I led her home asleep

And once again she rose and swept the house

In childish ignorance of all that passed.

Even to-day, after some seven years

When maybe thrice in every moon her mouth

Murmured the wisdom of the desert Djinns,

She keeps that ignorance, nor has she now

That first unnatural interest in my books.

It seems enough that I am there; and yet,

Old fellow-student, whose most patient ear

Heard all the anxiety of my passionate youth,

150

160

It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace. 170  
 What if she lose her ignorance and so  
 Dream that I love her only for the voice,  
 That every gift and every word of praise  
 Is but a payment for that midnight voice  
 That is to age what milk is to a child?  
 Were she to lose her love, because she had lost  
 Her confidence in mine, or even lose  
 Its first simplicity, love, voice and all,  
 All my fine feathers would be plucked away  
 And I left shivering. The voice has drawn  
 A quality of wisdom from her love's 180  
 Particular quality. The signs and shapes;  
 All those abstractions that you fancied were  
 From the great Treatise of Parmenides;  
 All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things  
 Are but a new expression of her body  
 Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her youth.  
 And now my utmost mystery is out.  
 A woman's beauty is a storm-tossed banner;  
 Under it wisdom stands, and I alone –  
 Of all Arabia's lovers I alone – 190  
 Nor dazzled by the embroidery, nor lost  
 In the confusion of its night-dark folds,  
 Can hear the armed man speak.

# APPENDIXES



# Appendix A

## *Yeats's Notes in*

### The Collected Poems, 1933

#### THE SPELLING OF GAELIC NAMES

In this edition of my poems I have adopted Lady Gregory's spelling of Gaelic names, with, I think, two exceptions. The 'd' of 'Edain' ran too well in my verse for me to adopt her perhaps more correct 'Etain,' and for some reason unknown to me I have always preferred 'Aengus' to her 'Angus.' In her *Gods and Fighting Men* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* she went as close to the Gaelic spelling as she could without making the names unpronounceable to the average reader.<sup>1</sup> — 1933.

#### CROSSWAYS. THE ROSE

(pages 7, 31)

Many of the poems in *Crossways*, certainly those upon Indian subjects or upon shepherds and fauns, must have been written before I was twenty, for from the moment when I began *The Wanderings of Oisín*, which I did at that age, I believe, my subject-matter became Irish. Every time I have reprinted them I have considered the leaving out of most, and then remembered an old school friend who has some of them by heart, for no better reason, as I think, than that they remind him of his own youth.<sup>2</sup> The little Indian dramatic scene was meant to be the first scene of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one woman waking when the other slept, and knowing but daylight as the other only night. It came into my head when I saw a man at Rosses Point carrying two salmon. 'One man with two souls,' I said, and added, 'O no, two people with one soul.'<sup>3</sup> I am now once more in *A Vision* busy with that thought, the antitheses of day and of night and of moon and of sun.<sup>4</sup> *The Rose* was part of my second book, *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*, 1892,<sup>5</sup> and I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as The Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar.<sup>6</sup> It must have been a thought of my generation, for I remember the mystical painter Horton, whose work had little



of his personal charm and real strangeness, writing me these words, 'I met your beloved in Russell Square, and she was weeping,' by which he meant that he had seen a vision of my neglected soul.<sup>7</sup> - 1925.

#### THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE

(page 55)

The gods of ancient Ireland, the Tuatha de Danaan, or the Tribes of the goddess Danu, or the Sidhe, from Aes Sidhe, or Sluagh Sidhe, the people of the Faery Hills, as these words are usually explained, still ride the country as of old. Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have much to do with the wind.<sup>8</sup> They journey in whirling wind, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess.<sup>9</sup> When old country people see the leaves whirling on the road they bless themselves, because they believe the Sidhe to be passing by. Knocknarea is in Sligo, and the country people say that Maeve, still a great queen of the western Sidhe, is buried in the cairn of stones upon it.<sup>10</sup> I have written of Clooth-na-Bare in *The Celtic Twilight*. She 'went all over the world, seeking a lake deep enough to drown her faery life, of which she had grown weary, leaping from hill to hill, and setting up a cairn of stones wherever her feet lighted, until, at last, she found the deepest water in the world in little Lough Ia, on the top of the bird mountain, in Sligo.' I forget, now, where I heard this story, but it may have been from a priest at Collooney. Clooth-na-Bare is evidently a corruption of Cailleac Bare, the old woman of Bare, who, under the names Bare, and Berah, and Beri, and Verah, and Dera, and Dhira, appears in the legends of many places.<sup>11</sup> - 1899-1906.

#### THE HOST OF THE AIR

(page 56)

This poem is founded on an old Gaelic ballad that was sung and translated for me by a woman at Ballisodare in County Sligo; but in the ballad the husband found the keeners keening his wife when he got to his house. - 1899.

#### HE MOURNS FOR THE CHANGE THAT HAS COME UPON HIM AND HIS BELOVED AND LONGS FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

(page 61)

My deer and hound are properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian legends, leading different knights upon adventures, and to the hounds and to the hornless deer at the beginning of, I think, all tellings of Oisín's journey to the country of the young. The hound is certainly related to the Hounds of Annwoyn or of Hades, who are white, and

have red ears, and were heard, and are, perhaps, still heard by Welsh peasants, following some flying thing in the night winds;<sup>12</sup> and is probably related to the hounds that Irish country people believe will awake and seize the souls of the dead if you lament them too loudly or too soon. An old woman told a friend and myself that she saw what she thought were white birds, flying over an enchanted place, but found, when she got near, that they had dogs' heads; and I do not doubt that my hound and these dog-headed birds are of the same family. I got my hound and deer out of a last-century Gaelic poem about Oisín's journey to the country of the young. After the hunting of the hornless deer, that leads him to the seashore, and while he is riding over the sea with Niamh, he sees amid the waters – I have not the Gaelic poem by me, and describe it from memory – a young man following a girl who has a golden apple, and afterwards a hound with one red ear following a deer with no horns.<sup>13</sup> This hound and this deer seem plain images of the desire of the man 'which is for the woman,' and 'the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man,' and of all desires that are as these. I have read them in this way in *The Wanderings of Oisín*, and have made my lover sigh because he has seen in their faces 'the immortal desire of Immortals.'<sup>14</sup>

The man in my poem who has a hazel wand may have been Aegnus, Master of Love;<sup>15</sup> and I have made the boar without bristles come out of the West, because the place of sunset was in Ireland, as in other countries, a place of symbolic darkness and death. – 1899.

#### THE CAP AND BELLS

(page 64)

I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said, 'The authors are in eternity,' and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams.<sup>16</sup> – 1899.

#### THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG

(page 65)

All over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain Valley of the Black Pig, and these prophecies are, no doubt, now, as they were in the Fenian days, a political force.<sup>17</sup> I have heard of one man who would not give any money to the Land League,<sup>18</sup> because the Battle could not be until the close of the century; but, as a rule, periods of trouble bring prophecies of its near coming. A few years before my time, an old man

who lived at Lissadell, in Sligo, used to fall down in a fit and rave out descriptions of the Battle; and a man in Sligo has told me that it will be so great a battle that the horses shall go up to their fetlocks in blood, and that their girths, when it is over, will rot from their bellies for lack of a hand to unbuckle them. If one reads Rhys' *Celtic Heathendom* by the light of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and puts together what one finds there about the boar that killed Diarmuid, and other old Celtic boars and sows, one sees that the battle is mythological, and that the Pig it is named from must be a type of cold and winter doing battle with the summer, or of death battling with life.<sup>19</sup> - 1899-1906.

### THE SECRET ROSE

(page 69)

I find that I have unintentionally changed the old story of Conchubar's death. He did not see the Crucifixion in a vision but was told of it. He had been struck by a ball made out of the dried brains of an enemy and hurled out of a sling; and this ball had been left in his head, and his head had been mended, the *Book of Leinster* says, with thread of gold because his hair was like gold.<sup>20</sup> Keeting, a writer of the time of Elizabeth, says: 'In that state did he remain seven years, until the Friday on which Christ was crucified, according to some historians; and when he saw the unusual changes of the creation and the eclipse of the sun and the moon at its full, he asked of Bucrach, a Leinster Druid, who was along with him, what was it that brought that unusual change upon the planets of Heaven and Earth. "Jesus Christ, the Son of God," said the Druid, "who is now being crucified by the Jews." "That is a pity," said Conchubar; "were I in his presence I would kill those who were putting him to death." And with that he brought out his sword, and rushed at a woody grove which was convenient to him, and began to cut and fell it; and what he said was, that if he were among the Jews, that was the usage he would give them, and from the excessiveness of his fury which seized upon him, the ball started out of his head, and some of the brain came after it, and in that way he died. The wood of Lanshraigh, in Feara Rois, is the name by which that shrubby wood is called.'<sup>21</sup>

I have imagined Cuchulain meeting Fand 'walking among flaming dew,' because, I think, of something in Mr. Standish O'Grady's books.<sup>22</sup>

I have founded the man 'who drove the gods out of their liss,' or fort, upon something I have read about Caoilte after the battle of Gabhra, when almost all his companions were killed, driving the gods out of their liss, either at Osraighe, now Ossory, or at Eas Ruaidh, now Asseroe, a waterfall at Ballyshannon, where Ilbreac, one of the children of the goddess Danu, had a liss. But maybe I only read it in Mr. Standish O'Grady, who has a fine imagination, for I find no such story in Lady Gregory's book.<sup>23</sup>

I have founded 'the proud dreaming king' upon Fergus, the son of Roigh, but when I wrote my poem here, and in the song in my early book, 'Who will drive with Fergus now?' I only knew him in Mr. Standish O'Grady, and my

imagination dealt more freely with what I did know than I would approve of to-day.<sup>24</sup>

I have founded 'him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,' upon something in 'The Red Pony,' a folk-tale in Mr. Larminie's *West Irish Folk Tales*. A young man 'saw a light before him on the high-road. When he came as far, there was an open box on the road, and a light coming up out of it. He took up the box. There was a lock of hair in it. Presently he had to go to become the servant of a king for his living. There were eleven boys. When they were going out into the stable at ten o'clock, each of them took a light but he. He took no candle at all with him. Each of them went into his own stable. When he went into his stable he opened the box. He left it in a hole in the wall. The light was great. It was twice as much as in the other stables.' The king hears of it, and makes him show him the box. The king says, 'You must go and bring me the woman to whom the hair belongs.' In the end, the young man, and not the king, marries the woman.<sup>25</sup> - 1899-1906.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES. INTRODUCTORY RHYMES

(page 101)

'Free of the ten and four' is an error I cannot now correct, without more rewriting than I have a mind for. Some merchant in Villon, I forget the reference, was 'free of the ten and four.' Irish merchants exempted from certain duties by the Irish Parliament were, unless memory deceives me again - I cannot remember my authority - 'free of the eight and six.'<sup>26</sup> - 1914.

#### POEMS BEGINNING WITH THAT 'TO A WEALTHY MAN' AND ENDING WITH THAT 'TO A SHADE'

(pages 107-10)

In the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspapers, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy. There were reasons to justify a man's joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or on the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction.<sup>27</sup> And another was the dispute over *The Playboy*. There may have been reasons for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing, though I can see the one side only, but there cannot have been any for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America.<sup>28</sup> The third prepared for the Corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures. . . .

[Note. - I leave out two long paragraphs which have been published in earlier editions of these poems. There is no need now to defend Sir Hugh Lane's pictures against Dublin newspapers. The trustees of the London National Gallery, through his leaving a codicil to his will unwitnessed, have claimed the pictures for London, and propose to build a wing to the Tate Gallery to contain them. Some that

were hostile are now contrite, and doing what they can, or letting others do unhindered what they can, to persuade Parliament to such action as may restore the collection to Ireland – Jan. 1917.]<sup>29</sup>

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. Other cities have been as stupid – Samuel Butler laughs at shocked Montreal for hiding the Discobolus in a lumber-room<sup>30</sup> – but Dublin is the capital of a nation, and an ancient race has nowhere else to look for an education. Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* describes a saintly and naturally gracious woman, who, getting into a quarrel over some trumpery detail of religious observance, grows – she and all her little religious community – angry and vindictive.<sup>31</sup> In Ireland I am constantly reminded of that fable of the futility of all discipline that is not of the whole being. Religious Ireland – and the pious Protestants of my childhood were signal examples – thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circumstance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which made its first public display during the nine years of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture. – 1914.

Lady Gregory in her *Life of Sir Hugh Lane* assumes that the poem which begins 'Now all the truth is out' (p. 109) was addressed to him. It was not; it was addressed to herself. – 1932.<sup>32</sup>

### THE DOLLS

(page 126)

The fable for this poem came into my head while I was giving some lectures in Dublin. I had noticed once again how all thought among us is frozen into 'something other than human life.' After I had made the poem, I looked up one day into the blue of the sky, and suddenly imagined, as if lost in the blue of the sky, stiff figures in procession. I remembered that they were the habitual image suggested by blue sky, and looking for a second fable called them 'The Magi' (p. 126), complementary forms of those enraged dolls. – 1914.

### 'UNPACKS THE LOADED PERN'

(page 145)

When I was a child at Sligo I could see above my grandfather's trees a little column of smoke from 'the pern mill,' and was told that 'pern' was another name for the spool, as I was accustomed to call it, on which thread was wound.<sup>33</sup> One could not see the chimney for the trees, and the smoke looked as if it came

from the mountain, and one day a foreign sea-captain asked me if that was a burning mountain. — 1919.

#### THE PHASES OF THE MOON

(page 163)

#### THE DOUBLE VISION OF MICHAEL ROBARTES

(page 170)

#### MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER

(page 175)

Years ago I wrote three stories in which occur the names of Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne. I now consider that I used the actual names of two friends, and that one of these friends, Michael Robartes, has but lately returned from Mesopotamia, where he has partly found and partly thought out much philosophy.<sup>34</sup> I consider that Aherne and Robartes, men to whose namesakes I had attributed a turbulent life or death, have quarrelled with me. They take their place in a phantasmagoria in which I endeavour to explain my philosophy of life and death. To some extent I wrote these poems as a text for exposition. — 1922.

#### SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

(Stanza IV, page 194)

I have read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE TOWER

(page 194)

The persons mentioned are associated by legend, story and tradition with the neighbourhood of Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle, where the poem was written.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. French lived at Peterswell in the eighteenth century and was related to Sir Jonah Barrington, who described the incident of the ears and the trouble that came of it.<sup>37</sup> The peasant beauty and the blind poet are Mary Hynes and Raftery, and the incident of the man drowned in Cloone Bog is recorded in my *Celtic Twilight*.<sup>38</sup> Hanrahan's pursuit of the phantom hare and hounds is from my *Stories of Red Hanrahan*.<sup>39</sup> The ghosts have been seen at their game of dice in what is now my bedroom, and the old bankrupt man lived about a hundred years ago. According to one legend he could only leave the Castle upon a Sunday because of his creditors, and according to another he hid in the secret passage.

In the passage about the Swan in Part III I have unconsciously echoed one of the loveliest lyrics of our time – Mr. Sturge Moore's 'Dying Swan.' I often recited it during an American lecturing tour, which explains the theft.

#### THE DYING SWAN

O silver-throated Swan  
 Struck, struck! A golden dart  
 Clean through thy breast has gone  
 Home to thy heart.  
 Thrill, thrill, O silver throat!  
 O silver trumpet, pour  
 Love for defiance back  
 On him who smote!  
 And brim, brim o'er  
 With love; and ruby-dye thy track  
 Down thy last living reach  
 Of river, sail the golden light –  
 Enter the sun's heart – even teach,  
 O wondrous-gifted Pain, teach thou  
 The god to love, let him learn how.<sup>40</sup>

When I wrote the lines about Plato and Plotinus I forgot that it is something in our own eyes that makes us see them as all transcendence. Has not Plotinus written: 'Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky; it is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion – and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honourable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them life or abandons them, but soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being?'<sup>41</sup> – 1928.

#### MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR (page 200)

These poems were written at Thoor Ballylee in 1922, during the civil war. Before they were finished the Republicans blew up our 'ancient bridge' one midnight. They forbade us to leave the house, but were otherwise polite, even saying at last 'Good-night, thank you,' as though we had given them the bridge.

The sixth poem is called 'The Stare's Nest by My Window.' In the west of Ireland we call a starling a stare, and during the civil war one built in a hole in the masonry by my bedroom window.

In the second stanza of the seventh poem occur the words, 'Vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.' A cry for vengeance because of the murder

of the Grand Master of the Templars seems to me fit symbol for those who labour from hatred, and so for sterility in various kinds.<sup>42</sup> It is said to have been incorporated in the ritual of certain Masonic societies of the eighteenth century, and to have fed class-hatred.

I suppose that I must have put hawks into the fourth stanza because I have a ring with a hawk and a butterfly upon it, to symbolize the straight road of logic, and so of mechanism, and the crooked road of intuition: 'For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey.'<sup>43</sup> - 1928.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND  
NINETEEN

(Sixth poem, page 210)

The country people see at times certain apparitions whom they name now 'fallen angels,' now 'ancient inhabitants of the country,' and describe as riding at whiles 'with flowers upon the heads of the horses.'<sup>44</sup> 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 Kilkenny at the start of the fourteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the Platonic Year?<sup>46</sup> See p. 208.

TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY

(page 213)

These songs are sung by the Musicians in my play 'The Resurrection.'<sup>47</sup>

AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

(Stanza V, page 216)

I have taken the 'honey of generation' from Porphyry's essay on 'The Cave of the Nymphs,' but find no warrant in Porphyry for considering it the 'drug' that destroys the 'recollection' of pre-natal freedom. He blamed a cup of oblivion given in the zodiacal sign of Cancer.<sup>48</sup>

THE WINDING STAIR AND  
OTHER POEMS

(page 233)

'I am of Ireland' (p. 267) is developed from three or four lines of an Irish fourteenth-century dance song somebody repeated to me a few years ago.<sup>49</sup> 'The sun in a golden cup' in the poem that precedes it, though not 'The moon in a silver bag,' is a quotation from somewhere in Mr. Ezra Pound's 'Cantos.'<sup>50</sup> In this book and elsewhere, I have used towers, and one tower in particular, as symbols and have compared their winding stairs to the philosophical gyres, but it is hardly necessary to interpret what comes from the main track of thought and expression. Shelley uses towers constantly as symbols, and there are gyres



in Swedenborg, and in Thomas Aquinas and certain classical authors.<sup>51</sup> Part of the symbolism of 'Blood and the Moon' (p. 237) was suggested by the fact that Thoor Ballylee has a waste room at the top and that butterflies come in through the loopholes and die against the window-panes. The 'learned astrologer' in 'Chosen' (p. 272) was Macrobius, and the particular passage was found for me by Dr. Sturm, that too little known poet and mystic. It is from Macrobius's comment upon 'Scipio's Dream' (Lib. I. Cap. XII. Sec. 5): '... when the sun is in Aquarius, we sacrifice to the Shades, for it is in the sign inimical to human life; and from thence, the meeting-place of Zodiac and Milky Way, the descending soul by its deflection is drawn out of the spherical, the sole divine form, into the cone.'<sup>52</sup> In 'The Mother of God' (p. 249) the words 'A fallen flare through the hollow of an ear' are, I am told, obscure. I had in my memory Byzantine mosaic pictures of the Annunciation, which show a line drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin. She received the Word through the ear, a star fell, and a star was born.

When *The Winding Stair* was published separately by Macmillan & Co. it was introduced by the following dedication:

DEAR DULAC,<sup>53</sup>

I saw my *Hawk's Well* played by students of our Schools of Dancing and of Acting a couple of years ago in a little theatre called 'The Peacock,' which shares a roof with the Abbey Theatre. Watching Cuchulain in his lovely mask and costume, that ragged old masked man who seems hundreds of years old, that Guardian of the Well, with your great golden wings and dancing to your music, I had one of those moments of excitement that are the dramatist's reward and decided there and then to dedicate to you my next book of verse.<sup>54</sup>

'A Woman Young and Old' was written before the publication of *The Tower*, but left out for some reason I cannot recall. I think that I was roused to write 'Death' and 'Blood and the Moon' by the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, the finest intellect in Irish public life, and, I think I may add, to some extent, my friend.<sup>55</sup> A Dialogue of Self and Soul' was written in the spring of 1928 during a long illness, indeed finished the day before a Cannes doctor told me to stop writing. Then in the spring of 1929 life returned as an impression of the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators; it seemed that but for journalism and criticism, all that evasion and explanation, the world would be torn in pieces. I wrote 'Mad as the Mist and Snow,' a mechanical little song, and after that almost all that group of poems called in memory of those exultant weeks 'Words for Music Perhaps.' Then ill again, I warmed myself back into life with 'Byzantium' and 'Veronica's Napkin,' looking for a theme that might befit my years. Since then I have added a few poems to 'Words for Music Perhaps,' but always keeping the mood and plan of the first poems.

THE WANDERINGS OF  
OISIN

(page 355)

The poem is founded upon the Middle Irish dialogues of S. Patrick and Oisín and a certain Gaelic poem of the last century.<sup>56</sup> The events it describes, like the events in most of the poems in this volume, are supposed to have taken place rather in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folktales, than in any particular century; it therefore, like the later Fenian stories themselves, mixes much that is mediaeval with much that is ancient. The Gaelic poems do not make Oisín go to more than one island, but a story in *Silva Gadelica* describes 'four paradises,' an island to the north, an island to the west, an island to the south, and Adam's paradise in the east.<sup>57</sup> — 1912.

## THE SHADOWY WATERS

(page 409)

I published in 1902 a version of *The Shadowy Waters*, which, as I had no stage experience whatever, was unsuitable for stage representation, though it had some little success when played during my absence in America in 1904, with very unrealistic scenery before a very small audience of cultivated people. On my return I rewrote the play in its present form, but found it still too profuse in speech for stage representation. In 1906 I made a stage version, which was played in Dublin in that year.<sup>58</sup> The present version must be considered as a poem only. — 1922.

# Notes to Appendix A

1. Lady Gregory's volumes were published in 1902 and 1904. The *t* in *Étain* is in fact pronounced *d*, and Yeats's "Aengus" is correct Middle Irish spelling, preferable to Lady Gregory's "Angus," a purely modern anglicization.
2. Presumably Charles Johnston (1867 – 1931), a schoolmate of Yeats at the High School in Dublin who shared his interest in the occult. See "I Became an Author" (1938), in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 507.
3. Yeats refers to "Anashuya and Vijaya" (poem 4). Rosses Point is a small seaside village near Sligo.
4. Published in January 1926, though the title page is dated 1925.
5. "The Rose" was not used as a section heading until *Poems* (1895).
6. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822) and Edmund Spenser (1552? – 99), English poets. Yeats is probably thinking of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Spenser's "Foure Hymnes."
7. Yeats is apparently recalling a letter of 6 May 1896 from the mystical painter William Thomas Horton (1864 – 1919), in which he described a vision of Yeats he had experienced that morning: "Yeats – naked and gaunt, with long black dishevelled hair falling partly over the face of a deadly whiteness, with eyes that flame yet have within them depths of unutterable sadness. He is wearily going on his way following many lights that dance in front and at side of him. Behind him follows with outstretched arms a lovely girl in long trailing white garments, weeping. Within Yeats, a knocking is heard & a Voice, 'My son, my son, open thou unto me & I will give thee Light.'" Russell Square is in London, not far from Yeats's residence at 18 Woburn Buildings.
8. *Tuatha Dé Danann*, "the people of the goddess Dana or Danu" [the nominative does not occur, so must be inferred], was the name assigned to the Irish pagan gods by learned Christians to reduce their status by including them among the early settlers of Ireland. Dana/Danu was the mother of the gods. Despite the euhemerization, the *Tuatha* were well known to be immortal beings – dwelling in islands and lakes, inside mountains, and especially inside the megalithic burial-tumuli that abound in Ireland. The word for a supernaturally inhabited mound is *sid* (Old Irish), *síodh*, *sí* (Modern Irish). *Aes Síde/Sí* (Mod. I.) means "mound folk." *Slóg/Sluag Síde* (OI), *Sluagh/Slua Síde/Sí* (Mod. I.) means "mound army." Both terms denote the supernatural beings miscalled "faeries." Old Irish *side*, *sidhe*, Mod. I. *sidhe*, *sí*, means a "blast, puff, gust," not "wind" *per se*. The word is unrelated to the word for "mound."
9. Herodias is a witch-goddess in Germanic mythology. Yeats may have read about her in Jacob Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. J. S. Stallybrass (1883 – 88), which notes that "quite early in the Mid. Ages the christian mythus of *Herodias* got mixed up with our native heathen fables" and that "Diana, Herodias, and

Holda stand for one another." Grimm also comments on the connection of Herodias with the wind.

The name Herodias comes from the story of John the Baptist, who denounced the marriage of Herod Antipas to Herodias, the divorced wife of one of his half-brothers and the daughter of another. During his birthday celebration, Herod is so impressed by the dancing of Herodias's daughter from her first marriage that he swears to give her anything she asks for; prompted by her mother, she asks for the head of John the Baptist, who is then killed (Matt. 14.1-12; Mark 6.17-29). In most of the accounts cited by Grimm, the daughter is also named Herodias; but Biblical tradition follows the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in naming her Salome.

10. In the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology, Medb (OI, pronounced "Methv"), Medhbh, Maedhbh (Mod. I., pronounced "Maiv") was queen of Connacht and instigator of the war in the epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne*.
11. *Cailleach Bhéarra*, (OI *Caillech Bérrí*), "The Veiled Woman [or, Hag] of Beare [a region in County Cork]," is what the speaker of a very long ninth-century poem calls herself. She laments her transformation from youth and beauty to decrepitude (as perhaps a nun or anchoress). The poem has been read literally, as the reminiscences of an aged nun, and allegorically, as Christian Ireland sighing for its pagan past. The figure of the old woman entered the popular imagination and became fused with "hag" folktales. She surfaces in Yeats's "The Untiring Ones" in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), which he here slightly misquotes. Lough Ia is correctly Lough Dagea (*Loch Dá Ghé*, "Two-Goose Lake"), on Slieve Deane (*Sliabh Dá Éan*, "Two-Bird Mountain") near Sligo.

Yeats's priest-informant (if he existed) was apparently familiar with W. G. Wood-Martin's *History of Sligo, County and Town* (1888-92), which tells the story of the drowning of "a giantess named Veragh," and his *Pagan Ireland: An Archaeological Sketch* (1895), which explains that "prominent in Irish folklore are two celebrated 'hags,' Aine or Aynia, and *Bhéartha* (Vera), variously styled Vera, Verah, Berah, Berri, Dirra, and Dhirra" and that "the legends surrounding Vera are widely prevalent."

12. In her edition of *The Mabinogion* (1877), Lady Charlotte Guest notes that "Anwynn, or Annwn, is frequently rendered 'Hell,' though, perhaps, 'The Lower Regions' would more aptly express the meaning of what the name conveys. The Dogs of Anwnn are the subject of an ancient Welsh superstition, which was once universally believed throughout the Principality, and which it would seem is not yet quite extinct. It is said that they are sometimes heard at night passing through the air overhead, as in full cry in pursuit of some object."
13. The poem, by the eighteenth-century poet Micheál Coimín (Michael Comyn), is *Laoidh Oisín ar Thír na n-Óg*, ed. & trans. Bryan O'Looney, *Transactions of the Ossianic Society* 4 (1859), as "Lay of Oisín on the Land of Youth." Yeats alludes to the following stanzas:

We saw also, by our sides,  
A hornless fawn leaping nimbly,  
And a red-eared white dog,  
Urging it boldly in the chase.

We beheld also, without fiction,  
 A young maid on a brown steed,  
 A golden apple in her right hand,  
 And she going on top of the waves.

We saw after her  
 A young rider on a white steed,  
 Under a purple, crimson mantle of satin,  
 And a gold-headed sword in his hand.

14. Yeats is recalling a statement from the *Table Talk* of the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834): “The man’s desire is for the woman; but the woman’s desire is rarely other than for the desire of the man” (23 July 1827). The other quotation is from poem 375, “The Wanderings of Oisín” (III.4).
15. Aengus is a god frequently associated with love and lovers in Irish mythology.
16. Describing his *Milton* in a letter to Thomas Butts on 6 July 1803, the English poet William Blake (1757 – 1827) explained that “I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the authors are in Eternity.”
17. In a note to his edition of “The Chase of the Enchanted Pigs of Aenghus an Bhrogha,” *Fenian Poems, Second Series, Transactions of the Ossianic Society* 6 (1861), John O’Daly refers to “the celebrated valley of the Black Pig in Ulster, concerning which there are so many curious old legends current among the peasantry.” By “Fenian,” Yeats presumably refers not to the *Fianna* (Finn’s war-bands in Irish mythology) but to the Fenian Brotherhood, which, taking its name from Finn’s forces, was founded in 1858 by James Stephens (1824 – 1901) to promote armed rebellion against English rule; the movement petered out after the unsuccessful Fenian Rising of 1867.
18. The Land League was formed in 1879 by Michael Davitt (1846 – 1906) to protect tenants from eviction and to win “the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland.” It was suppressed by the government in 1881.
19. In *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, 2nd ed. (1882), John Rhys discusses the boar which killed Diarmuid in Irish mythology as well as “other mythic swine.” In *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1890), James G. Frazer notes that in various cultures the pig is an embodiment of the “corn-spirit”: “the corn-spirit is conceived as embodied in an animal; this divine animal is slain, and its flesh and blood are partaken of by the harvesters. Thus . . . the pig is eaten sacramentally by ploughmen in the spring.”
20. Conchubar is king of Ulster in both the Ulster Cycle and the Mythological Cycle of Old Irish tales, and in the epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne*. The *Book of Leinster*, compiled between 1151 and 1201, is a large manuscript miscellany with various contents.
21. Geoffrey Keating (ca. 1570 – ca. 1650) wrote his *History of Ireland* between 1620 and 1634.
22. Cuchulain is the central hero of the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology, and hero of the epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne*. In the story *Serglige Con Chulaind* (“Cuchulain’s Wasting-Sickness”), Fand, wife of the god Manannán mac Lir, tempts Cuchulain to become her consort among the immortals. Yeats could have found the

- image of "fiery dew" in Standish James O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (1878 - 80) or his *History of Ireland: Critical and Philosophical* (1881).
23. Caoilte mac Rónáin was a close companion of Fionn mac Cumhail, leader of the *Fianna* (a kind of standing army drawn from all parts of Ireland) and a central figure in the Fenian Cycle of Irish heroic tales. In his *History of Ireland: Critical and Philosophical* (1881), Standish James O'Grady explains that "Coelté, after the destruction of the Fians, entered the host of the Tuatha De Danán, and lived immortal and invisible in the island. He stormed the enchanted fortress of the gods of the Erne at Assaroe, and entered himself into its possession, where he dwelt for many centuries." In *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (1873), Eugene O'Curry refers to "*Ilbhreac, a Tuath Dé Danann at Eas Ruaidh* (now the Falls of Ballyshannon, in the county Donegal)," which may explain Yeats's description of Ilbhreac as "one of the children of the goddess Danu," Danu being the mother or maternal ancestor of all the gods.
  24. Fergus mac Raoich is an important character in the Ulster Cycle of stories; in the epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne* he is the lover of Maeve, queen of Connacht. He had been king of Ulster, but as a condition of marrying him, Ness insisted that he allow her son, Conchubar, to reign for a year in his stead. During the year Ness manipulated the nobles so that when the time was up they refused to allow Fergus to reclaim his position. Yeats slightly misquotes the first line of "Who goes with Fergus?", first published in *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892). One of Yeats's sources was Standish James O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (1878 - 80), but there were others, including Sir Samuel Ferguson's poem "The Abdication of Fergus Mac Roy" in *Lays of the Western Gael* (1864), quoted by Yeats in an earlier version of this note.
  25. Summarized and misquoted from "The Red Pony," in *West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances* (1893) by the Irish writer William Larminie (1845 - 1900).
  26. Yeats mistranslates l. 22 of "Épître à ses amis" by the French poet François Villon (1431 - ?): "noblemen, free of the quarter and the tenth" (referring to different kinds of taxes). In *A book of rates inwards and outwards with the neat-duties and drawbacks payable on importation and exportation of all sorts of merchandise*, 2nd ed. (1767), Richard Eaton of the Custom-house, Dublin, explains that the earlier system, whereby wholesale merchants were not required to pay import duties until their goods had been sold to retailers, had been discontinued: "At present every importer pays down his excise at importation; with this difference, that all merchants capable of such account [i.e., wholesalers under the former system] have an allowance or discount out of the excise, of 10 per cent on all wine and tobacco, and 6 per cent on all other goods. . . ." Benjamin Yeats (1750 - 95), Yeats's great-great-grandfather and a wholesale linen merchant, enjoyed this exemption from 1783 to 1794.
  27. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846 - 91) lost his leadership of the Irish party in the British Parliament late in 1890, after he was named co-respondent in a divorce suit filed by Captain William O'Shea against his wife Katharine.
  28. *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge (1871 - 1909) opened at the Abbey Theatre on 26 January 1907. Beginning with the next performance (28 January), the play caused rioting in the theatre, some members of the audience judging it a slander upon the Irish people.

29. In 1907, Hugh Lane (1875 – 1915) founded the Dublin Municipal Gallery and offered an important collection of paintings as a gift, on the condition that a permanent building be erected. After the Dublin Corporation rejected a design by Edwin Lutyens (1869 – 1944) for a gallery over the Liffey, Lane withdrew his offer and bequeathed the collection to the National Gallery in London. On 3 February 1915, Lane wrote a codicil to his will restoring the paintings to Ireland. But Lane was drowned on the *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915 with the codicil unwitnessed, and the English government refused to honor it. The controversy dragged on until well after Yeats's death.
30. In "A Psalm of Montreal" (1878), the English writer Samuel Butler (1855 – 1902) comments on the discovery in a Montreal lumber-room of a plaster cast of the Discobolus (a statue of a discus thrower by the Greek sculptor Myron, ca. 480 – 455 B.C.).
31. Yeats apparently refers to the narrator of Book VI of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795 – 96) by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832). In Thomas Carlyle's 1824 translation, the Book is called "Confessions of a Fair Saint."
32. In *Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement* (1921), Lady Gregory prefaces Yeats's poem by explaining "And this is to Hugh, to 'A Friend whose Work has come to Nothing.'"
33. Yeats refers to William Pollexfen (1811 – 92), his maternal grandfather.
34. Robartes and Aherne, characters in the stories "Rosa Alchemica" (1896), "The Tables of the Law" (1896), and "The Adoration of the Magi" (1897), reappear in *A Vision* (1925).
35. The probable source is *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776 – 88) by Edward Gibbon (1737 – 94). The Emperor was Theophilus, who ruled from 829 until his death in 842.
36. Early in 1917, Yeats purchased "Ballylee Castle," a tower constructed by the Normans in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, with two attached cottages. He restored the property and lived there for several summers, beginning in 1919. Yeats renamed the property Thoor Ballylee, "Thoor" being his rendition of Irish *Túr*, tower.
37. The story of Mrs. French is found in the chapter on "Irish Gentry and Their Retainers" in *Personal Sketches of His Own Times* (1827 – 32) by Sir Jonah Barrington (1760 – 1834). The event dates from 1778.
38. Mary Hynes was a celebrated beauty who died in the 1840s. The blind poet Anthony Raftery (1784 – 1835) wrote of her in "Mary Hynes, or The Posy Bright," in *Songs Ascribed to Raftery*, ed. Douglas Hyde (1903). Yeats described her in "Dust Hath Closed Helen's Eye," a story added to the 1902 edition of *The Celtic Twilight*.
39. Hanrahan is a fictitious character. Yeats refers to "Red Hanrahan," the opening story in *Stories of Red Hanrahan* (1904).
40. "The Dying Swan" (1914) by Yeats's friend T. Sturge Moore (1870 – 1944). The text here follows the Collected Edition of *The Poems* (1932) except for "light . . . / Enter the sun's heart . . . even . . ."
41. Plato (ca. 429 – 347 B.C.) and Plotinus (205 – 269/70), Greek philosophers.

- Yeats quotes from *Plotinus: Being the Treatises of the Fifth Ennead*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (1926). The dash should be a colon.
42. The Knights Templar were formed in 1118 as a monastic-military order to defend the Christian kingdom and to protect pilgrims visiting the Holy Land; the Order was dissolved by Pope Clement V in 1312. Jacques de Molay (1244 – 1314) was burned at the stake after repudiating his recantation.
  43. Yeats slightly misquotes ll. 7 – 8 of “Tom O’Roughley” (poem 155).
  44. Yeats discusses the alternative explanations in his note on “The Trooping Fairies” in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888). The detail of the flowers is included in his essay “The Tribes of Danu” (1897).
  45. Robert Artisson appears in *The Historie of Ireland* (1577) by Raphael Holinshed (d. 1580?) as the incubus of Dame Alice Kyteler, who was condemned as a witch on 2 July 1324. Holinshed explains that “she was charged to have nightly conference with a spirit called Robert Artisson, to whom she sacrificed in the high way ix red cockes, & ix peacocks eies.”
  46. As Yeats explained in his 1934 introduction to *The Resurrection*, “Ptolemy thought the precession of the equinoxes moved at the rate of a degree every hundred years, and that somewhere about the time of Christ and Caesar the equinoctial sun had returned to its original place in the constellations, completing and recommencing the thirty-six thousand years, or three hundred and sixty incarnations of a hundred years apiece, of Plato’s Man of Ur [Er]. Hitherto almost every philosopher had some different measure for the Greatest Year, but this Platonic Year, as it was called, soon displaced all others. . . .”
  47. The play was first published in 1927.
  48. Porphyry (232/3 – ca. 305) is a Neoplatonic philosopher. In “Concerning the Cave of the Nymphs,” a paraphrase translation of *De Antro Nympharum* by Thomas Taylor first published ca. 1788, Porphyry notes that honey “aply represents the pleasure and delight of descending into the fascinating realms of generation.” Taylor also quotes from Macrobius (see n. 52 below) on the descent of the soul into matter: “As soon, therefore, as the soul gravitates towards body, in this first production of herself, she begins to experience a material tumult, that is, matter flowing into her essence. And this is what Plato remarks in the *Phaedo*, that the soul is drawn into the body, staggering with recent intoxication; signifying by this the new drink of matter’s impetuous flood, through which the soul becoming defiled and heavy, is drawn into a terrene situation. But the starry *cup*, placed between Cancer and Lion, is a symbol of this mystic truth, signifying that descending souls first experience intoxication in that part of the heavens, through the influx of matter.”
  49. “Ichaum of Irlande,” an anonymous lyric dating from 1300 – 1350 and included in St. John D. Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature, 1200 – 1582* (1929). The friend was the Irish writer Frank O’Connor (1903–66).
  50. The phrase is from Canto XXIII by Ezra Pound (1885 – 1972), which Yeats read in *A Draft of the Cantos 17 – 27* (1928).
  51. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822), English poet; Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 – 1772), Swedish mystical philosopher; St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 74), Italian scholastic theologian.



52. Frank Pearce Sturm (1879 – 1942), a doctor and a devoted student of Yeats's work, wrote to him on 22 January 1926: "Every book I pick up seems to speak with the voice of W. B. Giralduus, of cones & gyres. The other night it was Aquinas, tonight it is Macrobius, in his commentary on *Scipio's Dream*, where he says (Lib I Cap xii Sec 5): ' . . . when the Sun is in Aquarius, we sacrifice to the Shades, for it is in the sign inimical to human life; and from thence, the meeting place of Zodiac & Milky Way, the descending soul by its defluxion is drawn out of the spherical, the sole divine form, into a cone.' " Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius is a fifth-century Neoplatonist, best known for his commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.).
53. *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) was dedicated to Yeats's friend Edmund Dulac (1882 – 1953), who had designed many of the covers for his books as well as the ring mentioned in his note on "Meditations in Time of Civil War."
54. Characters in *At the Hawk's Well*, first published in 1917. The Peacock theatre was used primarily for experimental plays.
55. Kevin O'Higgins (1892 – 1927), Minister for Justice and External Affairs in the Irish Free State, was assassinated on 10 July 1927.
56. The "certain Gaelic poem" is that by Michael Comyn cited above (n. 13). Yeats would have come across dialogues between St. Patrick and Oisín in a wide variety of sources.
57. Although not published until three years after "The Wanderings of Oisín," the story referred to is "The Adventures of Cian's son Teigue" in *Silva Gadelica* (1892) by the Irish scholar Standish Hayes O'Grady (1832 – 1915).
58. *The Shadowy Waters* was first published not in 1902 but in 1900. It was performed by the Irish National Theatre Society at Molesworth Hall in Dublin on 14 January 1904. The revised version was first published in *Poems, 1899 – 1905* (1906) and was produced at the Abbey Theatre on 8 December 1906.

# Appendix B

## *Music from New Poems, 1938*

MUSIC FOR 'THE THREE BUSHES.'  
BY EDMUND DULAC'

The musical score consists of four staves of music, all in a 2/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first three staves contain a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The fourth staff begins with a measure marked "whistle" above it, featuring a half note with a fermata, followed by eighth notes and a final half note with a fermata. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

MUSIC FOR 'THE CURSE OF CROMWELL.'  
TRADITIONAL IRISH AIR<sup>2</sup>

Musical score for 'The Curse of Cromwell', a traditional Irish air. The score is written in treble clef, 2/4 time, and B-flat major. It consists of four staves. The first two staves contain the main melody. The third staff is labeled 'Chorus' and features a more rhythmic, repetitive pattern. The fourth staff continues the melody. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

MUSIC FOR 'COME GATHER ROUND ME  
PARNELLITES.'  
TRADITIONAL IRISH AIR<sup>3</sup>

Musical score for 'Come Gather Round Me Parnellites', a traditional Irish air. The score is written in treble clef, 2/4 time, and B-flat major. It consists of four staves. The first two staves contain the main melody. The third and fourth staves continue the melody with some rhythmic variations. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

## MUSIC FOR 'THE PILGRIM.'

## TRADITIONAL IRISH AIR'

Musical score for 'The Pilgrim', a traditional Irish air. The score consists of four staves of music in treble clef, 3/4 time, and B-flat major. The first staff begins with a key signature change from B-flat major to E-flat major. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with a repeat sign in the second measure of the first staff.

## MUSIC FOR 'COLONEL MARTIN.'

TRADITIONAL IRISH AIR<sup>5</sup>

Musical score for 'Colonel Martin', a traditional Irish air. The score consists of five staves of music in treble clef, 3/4 time, and D major. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with a repeat sign in the second measure of the first staff. The fifth staff is labeled 'Chorus' and ends with a double bar line.

## Notes to Appendix B

1. Yeats's friend Edmund Dulac had previously composed some music for the play *At the Hawk's Well*.
2. The body of the song is a version of *An Smachdaoin Crón*, variously translated as "The Little Brown Mallet" or "The Copper-colored Stick of Tobacco." The use of the final musical phrase as a chorus is not traditional.
3. The song is that provided by Richard Michael Levey (1811–99) for the lyric "Limerick is Beautiful" in the play *The Colleen Bawn* by Dion Boucicault (1820–90). Levey's song is a 6/8 version of *Fáinne Geal an Lae*, usually translated as "The Dawning of the Day."
4. The song is a loose adaptation of *Bruach na Carraige Báine*, literally "The Brink of the White Rock" but usually known as "To Plough the Rocks of Bawn." The addition to the chorus is not traditional.
5. This song has not yet been traced. When published in *A Broadside* (December 1937), it was ascribed to Art O'Murnaghan, a composer and stage-manager at the Gate Theatre. The source was changed to "Traditional Irish Air" in *New Poems* (1938). It has been suggested that the song is an adaptation of the tune which William Percy French (1854–1920) wrote in 1889 for his comic poem "Slattery's Mounted Fut," but there are only some similarities in rhythm to support such a claim.

## Explanatory Notes

The purpose of these notes is to annotate all specific allusions in the poems in as brief a compass as possible. Annotation of other kinds, as well as interpretive commentary, has been avoided. Thus, for example, information on Yeats's sources has usually been offered only when Yeats called attention to them (whether in the poem or in a note), as with "Imitated from the Japanese" (poem 323). Cross-references to Yeats's other works or to his correspondence are given only when such material provides a particularly concise annotation. Unnamed individuals are normally not identified, except in poems explicitly presented as autobiographical statements, as with the work beginning "Pardon, old fathers" (poem 112). Yeats's own annotations to his poetry – other than the notes from the *Collected Poems* (1933), reproduced in Appendix A – have been quoted from only sparingly. Readers interested in this material will usually find the final version of Yeats's note to a particular poem in the revised edition of *The Poems* (1989) in the Macmillan Collected Works of W. B. Yeats (Volume 1); all versions of his notes are available in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (1957; corrected third printing, 1966). *The Poems* also provides full documentation for the quotations from Yeats and other writers.

The spelling of Gaelic names has not been regularized in quotations, whether from Yeats or from others. However, a standard spelling is usually offered in the annotations themselves: for instance "Maev," as more familiar to Yeats's readers than either the Old Irish "Medb," the Modern Irish "Medhbh" or "Maedhbh," or the variants found in Yeats and others, "Maev," "Maiv," or "Maive."

Cross-references (other than between these notes and Yeats's notes in Appendix A) have been held to a minimum, in the hope that most readers will prefer some repetitive entries rather than frequent instructions to look elsewhere for the information they may be seeking.

The above policy is of course far easier to state than to implement to the satisfaction of any individual reader. First, given the texture of Yeats's verse, this edition may be silent on what some would consider a definite "specific allusion," while in other cases it may well be thought that the allusion is the creation of the editor. This problem is, I think, inevitable. Second, given the long tradition of the biographical interpretation of Yeats's poetry, the lack of glosses on the order of "you = Maud Gonne" will be disappointing to some. Such annotation has been excluded partly because of the (generally unrecognized) tenuous basis for many of those glosses, but primarily because it seems

clear that Yeats preferred such poems to be read as universal rather than autobiographical statements. Finally, a few of these notes will strike some readers as quite superfluous. However, Yeats has a worldwide readership, so it should perhaps be remembered that what is "common knowledge" in say, Dublin, may not be in, say, Tokyo. Moreover, since these notes are placed at the end of the volume and are not indicated in the texts themselves, the assumption is that a reader not requiring any information on a particular allusion can continue his reading without interruption.

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Although in one sense these notes are indebted to all of Yeats scholarship, I have drawn most extensively on three works: George Brandon Saul, *Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats's Poems* (1957); A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1968) – a revised version, *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1984), incorporates most (but not all) of the additions and corrections offered in the first edition of *The Poems* (1983) – and James P. McGarry, *Place Names in the Writings of William Butler Yeats*, ed. Edward Malins (1976). For readers interested in the kind of annotation and interpretation not offered in the following notes, the *New Commentary* is the most extensive guide available, though it is not free from errors and omissions, some of which are noted in *Review*, 7 (1985): 163–89.

\*

*Lyrical*: a heading used for poems 1–303 in the *Collected Poems* (1933).

*Crossways*: see pp. 453–4 for Yeats's note. Title and date first used in *Poems* (1895) for lyrics selected from two earlier collections. Epigraph from "Night the Ninth" (l. 653) of *Vala* by the English poet William Blake (1757–1827); the 1893 edition of Blake by Yeats and Edwin John Ellis reads "And all the Nations were threshed out, and the stars threshed from their husks." A.E. is George W. Russell (1867–1935), Irish writer and painter and friend of Yeats.

1.1: Arcadia, a region in Greece, imaged in the pastoral tradition as an ideal realm of rustic contentment.

1.9: Greek word for "time"; personified by Pindar as "the father of all."

1.12: in the Christian religion, the Rood is the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified.

4: in Hindu mythology, Anasūyā ("uncomplaining") is a daughter of Daksha; there are several figures named Vijayā ("victorious"). The Golden Age is traditionally the earliest age of man, characterized by peace and happiness.

4.14: a supreme god in Hinduism, associated with the creation of the universe.

4.26: god of love in Hindu mythology.

4.66–68: in Hinduism, Kaśyapa is a great progenitor; his wives include the thirteen daughters of Daksha. Hemakūta ("Golden Peak") is a sacred mountain

- imagined as lying north of the Himalayas and often identified with the mountain Kailāsa.
- 9: in Yeats's source, Eugene O'Curry's *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (1878), Gall is the son of the king of Ulster. In the oldest version of the tale, Gall dies heroically in combat, but O'Curry uses a later variant which has him flee in frenzy.
- 9.2-3: Magh Itha ("The Plain of Corn"), County Donegal. *Emain Macha* ("The Twins of Macha" [a horse-goddess]), capital of heroic-age Ulster; *Inber Amergin* ("Amergin's Estuary"), mouth of the Avoca River in County Wicklow.
- 9.9: an *ollamh* was the highest degree among the learned caste in the ancient Irish system of learning.
- 9.11: Yeats glossed "Northern cold" by noting the northern origin of the Fomorians, demons or evil gods in pagan Irish mythology, converted by the euhemerizing *Book of Invasions* into a race of pirates preying on early settlers of Ireland.
- 9.55: an ancient Irish stringed instrument, played with a bow.
- 9.62: in Standish James O'Grady's *The Coming of Cuculain: A Romance of the Heroic Age* (1894), Orchil is "a great sorceress who ruled the world under the earth."
- 9.68: an *aililiú* is a cry or exclamation of wonder or mourning.
- 10.2-3: more usually "Slish [*slis*, 'sloped'] Wood," on the south shore of Lough Gill, County Sligo. The island is Innisfree (see note to poem 24).
- 10.15: Rosses Point, a small seaside village near Sligo. Yeats explained that it was "a very noted locality. There is here a little point of rocks where, if anyone falls asleep, there is a danger of their waking silly, the fairies having carried off their souls."
- 10.29: *Gleann an Chairte* ("Valley of the Monumental Stone"), a lake near Sligo.
- 12: Yeats claimed that the poem "is an attempt to reconstruct an old song from three lines imperfectly remembered by an old peasant woman in the village of Ballysodare, Sligo, who often sings them to herself," though the text follows closely the first two stanzas of an Anglo-Irish ballad of the same name. Yeats also glossed "salley" as "willow."
- 13: Yeats said that the poem "is founded upon some things a fisherman said to me when out fishing in Sligo Bay."
- 14: Yeats explained that Father O'Hart (d. 1739) "was greatly beloved. These lines accurately record the tradition. No one who has held the stolen land has prospered. It has changed owners many times." In another note he cited his source, T. O'Rorke, *History, Antiquities, and Present State of the Parishes of Ballysodare and Kilvarnet, in the County of Sligo* (1878).
- 14.2: the penal laws against Roman Catholics were enacted from 1695-1727. Some Catholics evaded the law against owning landed property by giving nominal possession of their holdings to Protestants.
- 14.3: a *Séoinín* is one who apes Englishmen, though Yeats glosses it as "upstarts and 'big' farmers, who ape the rank of gentlemen."
- 14.6: *slibhín*, "a sly person, a schemer," glossed by Yeats as a "mean fellow."



- 14.22: professional keeners were hired to cry aloud and recite extempore verses in praise of the deceased.
- 14.27: Colloney, a village in County Sligo.
- 14.30: Knocknarea, a mountain in County Sligo.
- 14.31: Knocknashee, a round hill near Achroy, County Sligo.
- 14.35: Tireragh, a barony in County Sligo.
- 14.36: Ballinafad, a village in County Sligo.
- 14.37: Inishmurray, an island off the coast of County Sligo.
- 15: Yeats claimed that the poem was based on "a sermon preached in the chapel at Howth if I remember rightly." Yeats lived at Howth, a fishing village on the north side of Dublin Bay, from 1881–83.
- 15.24: a seaport in County Cork.
- 15.32: a boreen (*bóithrín*, "little road, lane") is Hiberno-English for a narrow road or lane.
- 16: Yeats claimed that "this ballad is founded on an incident – probably in turn a transcript from Tipperary tradition – in Kickham's 'Knocknagow,'" referring to *Knocknagow or the Homes of Tipperary* (1879) by the Irish writer Charles J. Kickham (1828–82).
- 16.7: apparently the horse, unnamed in Kickham's *Knocknagow* and called "Dermot" in some printings of the poem, is called after the Lollards, followers of the English ecclesiastical reformer John Wycliffe (ca. 1320–84).
- 16.10: Rody is the name of the huntsman in *Knocknagow*.

*The Rose*: for Yeats's note, see p. 453–4. Title and date first used in *Poems* (1895) for works selected from *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892) and one later poem. "Who goes with Fergus?", added in the 1912 edition of *Poems*; "To Some I have Talked with by the Fire" in the 1933 *Collected Poems*. Epigraph from St. Augustine's *Confessions* (X.27): "Too late I loved Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! too late I loved Thee!" (trans. E. B. Pusey). Lionel Johnson (1867–1902), English scholar-poet and critic and friend of Yeats.

- 17: in the Christian religion, the Rood is the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. Yeats explained that "the Rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets" and that it is used "not merely in love poems, but in addresses to Ireland. . . . I do not, of course, use it in this latter sense."
- 17.3: Cuchulain is the most important warrior in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales. The episode mentioned is recounted in poem 19.
- 17.4–5: Fergus is a king of Ulster in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales.
- 17.23: *Éire* is the normal Irish word for "Ireland"; in Old Irish it was *Ériu*.
- 18: Fergus is a king of Ulster in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales; druids are ancient Celtic priests and medicine men. Yeats follows the adaptation of the story by Ferguson, in which Fergus is a poet-king who voluntarily relinquishes his throne. See Yeats's note on "The Secret Rose," pp. 456–7.
- 18.10: Conchubar was Fergus's stepson and successor.
- 19: Cuchulain is the most important warrior in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales.
- 19.2: as Yeats indicated, he was following the story as recounted in *Myths and*

*Folk-Lore of Ireland* (1890) by the American folklorist Jeremiah Curtin (1838–1906); Emer (the name of Cuchulain's wife) is apparently an error for Aoife, the Amazon on whom Cuchulain begot his son, Conlaech.

- 19.45: in Irish mythology, Conchubar is a king of Ulster.  
 20.4: in Greek mythology, Troy is destroyed by the Greeks during the Trojan War, fought over the abduction of Helen by Paris.  
 20.5: in Irish mythology, Usna was the father of Naoise, Ainnle, and Ardan. Accompanied by his brothers, Naoise elopes with Deirdre, whom Conchubar had selected to become his queen; eventually lured back to Ireland, the three brothers are killed by Conchubar's forces.  
 21.1: in Christian tradition, the archangel Michael is the conqueror of Satan.  
 23: in the Fenian Cycle of Irish tales, Grania flees with Diarmuid to escape the love of the aged Finn. Yeats explains that they "fled from place to place over Ireland, but at last Dermot was killed upon the seaward point of Benbulbin, and Finn won her love and brought her, leaning upon his neck, into the assembly of the Fenians, who burst into inextinguishable laughter." Of the forty-one extant manuscripts of the tale, only one eighteenth-century manuscript uses Yeats's ending; in the two oldest manuscripts, Grania exhorts her children to wreak vengeance on Finn.

A cromlech is a prehistoric stone structure consisting of a large flat stone resting on three or more horizontal stones; in many parts of Ireland cromlechs are known as "beds" of Diarmuid and Grania, where they are supposed to have spent a night while in flight from Finn.

- 24: *Inis Fraoigh* ("Heather Island"), a small island in Lough Gill, County Sligo.  
 25.7: possibly the planets known to the ancient Greeks (earlier printings read "The old planets seven") or the seven stars of the Pleiades, named after the daughters of Atlas and Pleione in Greek mythology.  
 27.7: Odysseus is the central figure in Homer's *Odyssey*, which tells of his adventures from the fall of Troy until his return to Ithaca ten years later.  
 27.8: Priam, king of Troy, was killed by Neoptolemus during the fall of Troy.  
 29: Yeats explained that "the birds of fairyland are white as snow. The 'Danaan shore' is, of course, *Tier-nan-oge*, or fairyland."  
 29.3: presumably Venus, if a specific star is intended.  
 29.9: for the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, see Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.  
 31: the poem was first a song in the 1892 text of Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen*.  
 31.9: in the Christian religion, the Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ.  
 32: Fergus is a king of Ulster in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales. Yeats follows the adaptation of the story by Ferguson, in which Fergus is a poet-king who voluntarily relinquishes his throne. See Yeats's note on "The Secret Rose," p. 456–7.  
 33.1: Dromahair, a village in County Leitrim.  
 33.13: Lissadell, a barony in County Sligo.  
 33.25: the Well of Scanavin is in County Sligo.  
 33.37: *Lug na nGall* ("The Hollow of the Foreigners"), a townland in Glencar valley in County Sligo.

- 34: first published in Yeats's edition of *Representative Irish Tales* (1891). In a 1924 note, Yeats called the poem "even in its re-written form . . . a sheaf of wild oats."
- 34.1: in Irish mythology, the shaking of the bell-branch casts men into an enchanted sleep.
- 34.2: *Éire* is the normal Irish word for "Ireland"; in Old Irish it was *Ériu*.
- 34.24: Munster is one of the four provinces of Ireland, Connemara a district in County Galway.
- 35: Yeats described the first version of this poem as "little more than a translation into verse of the very words of an old Wicklow peasant." Wicklow is a town in County Dublin.
- 36: Yeats explained that "this ballad is founded on the Kerry version of an old folk tale." Kerry is a county in Ireland.
- 36.25: *mo bhrón*, "my grief."
- 38.1: for the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, see Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe," P. 454.
- 39.4: Irish *rann*, a quatrain, verse, or stanza.
- 39.18: Thomas Davis (1814-45), Irish political leader and writer; James Clarence Mangan (1803-49), Irish poet; Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-86), Irish poet and antiquary.

*The Wind Among the Reeds*: first published in 1899; the order of the poems here first used in *Poems, Second Series* (1909).

- 40: see Yeats's note, p. 454, for the Sidhe, Knocknarea, and Clooth-na-Bare.
- 40.3: in Irish mythology, Caoilte is a companion of Finn. Yeats explains that "years after his death he appeared to a king in a forest, and was a flaming man, that he might lead him in the darkness."
- 40.4: in Irish mythology, Niamh is a woman of the Sidhe who entices Oisín into her realm, an event described in poem 375.
- 44: see Yeats's note, p. 454.
- 44.4: a small lake in County Sligo.
- 46: in a note to this poem and poem 61, Yeats commented that "I use the wind as a symbol of vague desires and hopes, not merely because the Sidhe are in the wind, or because the wind bloweth where it listeth, but because wind and spirit and vague desire have been associated everywhere."
- 46.1: for Danaan, see Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe" (p. 454).
- 46.3: usually "gier-eagle," a bird described in the Bible as unclean (Lev. 11.18; Deut. 14.17); probably the Egyptian vulture.
- 46.12: in the Christian religion, the Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ.
- 47.5: *Éire* is the normal Irish word for "Ireland"; in Old Irish it was *Ériu*.
- 48: Yeats described Aengus as "The god of youth, beauty, and poetry. He reigned in Tir-nan-Oge, the country of the young." He noted that "the Tribes of the Goddess Danu can take all shapes, and those that are in the water take often the shape of fish" and also explained that the poem "was suggested to me by a Greek folk song," probably referring to "The Three Fishes" in *New Folklore Researches. Greek Folk Poesy*, trans. Lucy M. J. Garnett (1869).

- 48.1: in a note to poem 75, Yeats commented that "The hazel tree was the Irish tree of Life or of Knowledge, and in Ireland it was doubtless, as elsewhere, the tree of the heavens."
- 49.2: Yeats explained that "The 'seed of the fire' is the Irish phrase for the little fragment of burning turf and hot ashes which remains in the hearth from the day before."
- 52: see Yeats's note, pp. 454-5.
- 53: Yeats commented that "I follow much Irish and other mythology, and the magical tradition, in associating the North with night and sleep, and the East, the place of sunrise, with hope, and the South, the place of the sun when at its height, with passion and desire, and the West, the place of sunset, with fading and dreaming time."
- 59: see Yeats's note, p. 455.
- 60: see Yeats's note, p. 455-6.
- 60.5: A cromlech is a prehistoric stone structure consisting of a large flat stone resting on three or more horizontal stones.
- 61: see note to poem 46.
- 61.13: in Irish mythology, Niamh is a woman of the Sidhe who entices Oisín into her realm, an event described in poem 375.
- 61.16: in Egyptian mythology, the Phoenix lives for 500 years, is consumed in fire by its own act, and rises in youthful freshness from its own ashes.
- 64.4: Yeats explained that the "axle-tree" was "another ancient way of representing" "the pole of the heavens, the ancient Tree of Life in many countries."
- 66.1: "Cumhal the king" in the first printing of the poem; apparently not related to the pagan gleeman of that name in Yeats's story "The Crucifixion of the Outcast" (1894).
- 66.2: "Dathi the Blessed" in the first printing of the poem; apparently not related to the fifth-century Irish king Nath Í mac Fiachrach, also mentioned in "The Crucifixion of the Outcast."
- 67: see Yeats's note, p. 456-7.
- 67.3: the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.
- 67.9: the Magi were a priestly caste of ancient Persia; in Christian tradition, the wise men who journey from the East to see the infant Christ are Magi.
- 67.15: Emer is Cúchulain's wife.
- 67.16: a liss (*lios*; Old Irish *les*) was originally an enclosed space, a courtyard, but in popular usage denotes a (usually small) mound believed to be inhabited by supernatural beings.
- 69.3-5: the imagery suggests the crucifixion of Christ. Yeats presumably refers to the Brook Kidron (the spelling in many of the earlier printings), which flows south between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. (The Kedron is the unnamed stream referred to in I Mac. 16.5-10.)
- 71.6: presumably the Virgin Mary, as earlier versions of the line read "Mary of the wounded heart."
- 72.2: Yeats explained that "the Rose has been for many centuries a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty" and also noted its use in Irish and Anglo-Irish poetry as "a religious symbol, . . . a symbol of woman's beauty, . . . and a symbol of Ireland."

- 72.3-4: Yeats explained that "I have made the Seven Lights, the constellation of the Bear, lament for the theft of the Rose, and I have made the Dragon, the constellation Draco, the guardian of the Rose, because these constellations move about the pole of the heavens, the ancient Tree of Life in many countries, and are often associated with the Tree of Life in mythology."
- 75.1-3: Yeats explained that "'The Country of the Young' is a name in the Celtic poetry for the country of the gods and of the happy dead. The hazel tree was the Irish tree of Life or of Knowledge, and in Ireland it was doubtless, as elsewhere, the tree of the heavens."
- 75.4: Yeats explained that the "Crooked Plough" and the "Pilot Star" are what "Gaelic-speaking Irishmen sometimes call the Bear and the North Star."
- 76: Dooney Rock on the shore of Lough Gill in County Sligo.
- c76.3: a townland near the village of Ballinacarrow, County Sligo.
- 76.4: *Machaire Búí* ("Yellow Plain" or "Yellow Battlefield"), the townland of Magheraboy, on the southwest outskirts of Sligo.
- 76.8: Sligo, in northwestern Ireland, was the home of Yeats's maternal grandparents; he spent a considerable part of his childhood there.
- 76.10: in Christian tradition, Saint Peter is depicted as the gate-keeper of Heaven.

*In the Seven Woods*: first published in 1903, including "The Old Age of Queen Maeve," "Baile and Aillinn," and the play *On Baile's Strand*. The revised order and contents here first used in the 1908 *Collected Works in Verse and Prose*. The 1904 date, which corresponds to no edition, first appears in *Later Poems* (1922).

77: the Seven Woods are part of Coole Park, the estate of Yeats's close friend Lady Gregory.

77.6: Tara, in County Meath, inaugural place of kings of the Uí Néill dynasty of the fifth century and later, who aspired to rule all Ireland and encouraged a literary cult of Tara as a primordial capital.

77.14: *Páirce na Laoi* ("the field of the calves"), one of the Seven Woods.

82.6: Slieve Aughty (*Sliabh Echtge*, "Echtge's Mountain"), a range of mountains in County Galway and County Clare. Echtge is said to have been a woman of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, hence a goddess.

82.12: for Danaan, see Yeats's note to "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.

82.17-18: in a note to poem 377, Yeats explained that "when Baile and Aillinn take the shape of swans linked with a golden chain, they take the shape that other enchanted lovers took before them in the old stories."

83.22: Adam, the first man in the Bible, was expelled from the Garden of Eden because of disobedience (Gen. 2.15-3.24).

84: Red Hanrahan, a fictitious character depicted by Yeats in several early stories. For Knocknarea, Maeve, and Clooth-na-Bare (here presumably used as the name of a mountain), see Yeats's note to "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.

84.1: Cummen Strand in County Sligo, on the road from Sligo to Strandhill.

84.5: a personification of Ireland, as in Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902).

84.14: in the Christian religion, the Rood is the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified.

- 86.1: in Arthurian legend, the Forest of Brocéliande in Brittany is the home of Merlin.
- 86.2-3: in Arthurian legend, Avalon is the island to which the mortally wounded Arthur is carried to be cured of his wounds. Lancelot lived on the Joyous Isle for several years with Elayne, having been cured of his madness by Elayne and her friend Dame Brysen.
- 86.4: Uladh, Ulster. In Irish mythology, Naoise elopes with Deirdre, whom Conchubar had chosen as his wife.
- 86.6: *Tír-fá-Thonn* ("Land-under-Wave"), a beautiful country in Irish mythology.
- 86.8: Aengus was described by Yeats as "The god of youth, beauty, and poetry" in Irish mythology. "Land-of-the Tower" may refer to Tory Island, described by the Welsh writer Nennius (fl. 796) as having a tower of glass.
- 86.9-10, 13: incidents from the "Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway," in Douglas Hyde's edition and translation of *Giolla an Fhiughá or, The Lad of the Ferule [and] Eachtra Cloinne Rígh na h-Iorúaidhe or, The Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway* (1899).
- 86.11: Branwen, daughter of Llyr, is the title character of the Second Branch of the Welsh *Mabinogi*, and wife of Matholwch, king of Ireland. Guinevere is the wife of King Arthur.
- 86.12: in Irish mythology, Niamh is a woman of the Sidhe who entices Oisín into her realm, an event described in poem 375. Fand is the wife of the god Manannán mac Lir. Liban (*Lí Ban*, "Woman's Beauty"), the sister of Fand, is transformed into an otter when she neglects her care of a magic well.
- 86.14: *dún*, a fort.
- 86.18: the hunter's moon is the full moon following the harvest moon, which itself falls within a fortnight of the autumnal equinox on 22/23 September.
- 89: a psaltery is a stringed instrument originating in the Near East and used in Europe from the twelfth century to the late Middle Ages. Yeats had the musician Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940) construct a psaltery for use in his experiments in speaking verse to music.
- 89:14: the "Three in One" presumably refers to the Trinity in the Christian religion.
- 90.41, 45: Yeats departs from the usual Christian tradition, in which the archangel Gabriel sounds the trumpet which heralds the Last Judgment and the archangel Michael is the warrior angel, the conqueror of Satan. Yeats also noted that "Gabriel is the angel of the Moon in the Cabbala and might, I considered, command the waters at a pinch."

*The Green Helmet and Other Poems*: first published in 1910, including the play *The Green Helmet*. The order and contents here first established in *Responsibilities* (1916).

- 91: Yeats commented that "a few days ago I dreamed that I was steering a very gay and elaborate ship upon narrow water with many people upon its banks, and that there was a figure upon a bed in the middle of the ship. The people were pointing to the figure and questioning, and in my dream I sang verses

- which faded as I awoke, all but this fragmentary thought, 'We call it, it has such dignity of limb, by the sweet name of Death.' I have made my poem out of my dream, and the sentiment of my dream, and can almost say, as Blake did, 'The Authors are in Eternity.'" For the Blake quotation, see Yeats's note to "The Cap and Bells," p. 455.
- 92: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature. The "woman" is Helen, whose abduction by Paris led to the Trojan War.
- 94: Troy was destroyed during the Trojan War, fought over the abduction of Helen by Paris.
- 96: the first seven lines draw on *A King and no King* (1619) by the English playwrights Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625). Arbaces, king of Iberia, falls in love with his supposed sister, Panthea, who has grown to womanhood during his long absence. It is then learned that Arbaces is not the son of the former king but of the Lord Protector. Arbaces is unrelated to her, and the lovers can be united.
- 97.2: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature.
- 99.4: the colt is presumably Pegasus, in Greek mythology a winged horse connected with poetry.
- 99.6: the highest mountain on the Greek peninsula and the home of the gods in Greek mythology.
- 102: University College, Dublin, founded in 1854 as the Catholic University of Ireland; in 1908 it became one of the three Constituent Colleges of the National University of Ireland. The contrast is with Trinity College, Dublin, founded in 1591.
- 106: the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, an outgrowth of earlier theatrical enterprises, was founded by Yeats and others in 1904. The poem is based on "Tyard, on me blasmoit, à mon commencement" by the French poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85).
- 106.1: *An Craoibhín Aoibhinn* (usually translated "the Pleasant Little Branch," perhaps more correctly, "the Delightful Shrub"), the pen-name of Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), Gaelic scholar and folklorist.
- 106.11: a minor sea-god in Greek mythology, Proteus is noted for his power to take all manner of shapes.
- 108: the Galway races are held each summer.

*Responsibilities*: first published in 1914, including "The Two Kings" and the play *The Hour-Glass*. Contents and order here first established in *Later Poems* (1922). The first epigraph remains untraced and may be the work of Yeats and/or Ezra Pound. The second epigraph is from the *Analects* of the Chinese sage Confucius (ca. 551–479? B.C.), Book VII, Chapter V: "The Master said, 'Extreme is my decay. For a long time I have not dreamed, as I was wont to do, that I saw the duke of Châu,'" referring to Châu-kung (d. 1105 B.C.), Chinese author and statesman.

- 112: see Yeats's note, p. 457.
- 112.3: Benjamin Yeats (1750–95), Yeats's great-great-grandfather, a wholesale linen merchant.

- 112.5: Yeats's great-grandfather, John Yeats (1774–1846), Rector of Drumcliff Church in County Sligo and friend of the Irish patriot Robert Emmet (1778–1803).
- 112.10: in 1773 Benjamin Yeats married Mary Butler (1751–1834), who was connected with the Irish Ormondes, the Butler family of great wealth and power that had settled in Ireland in the twelfth century. In 1835 William Butler Yeats (1806–62), Yeats's grandfather, married Jane Grace Corbet (1811–76), daughter of William Corbet (1757–1824) and Grace Armstrong Corbet (1774–1864). Both the Corbets and especially the Armstrongs had a long history of military service.
- 112.11–12: at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, William III (1650–1702), who was Dutch, defeated James II (1633–1701).
- 112.13–14: William Middleton (ca. 1770–1832), Yeats's maternal great-grandfather, a ship-owner, merchant, and possibly smuggler. Biscay Bay is between Spain and France.
- 112.15: William Pollexfen (1811–92), Yeats's maternal grandfather, a ship-owner and merchant.
- 112.20: Yeats was born on 13 June 1865; the poem first appeared in the Cuala Press *Responsibilities*, published on 25 May 1914.
- 113: the Grey Rock is *Craig Liath* in County Clare, the home in Irish fairy lore of Aoiheall, usually depicted as a *leannán sídhe*, or fairy mistress. Before the Battle of Clontarf, fought against the Danes in 1014, Aoiheall offers her favorite, Dubhlaing O'Hartagan, two hundred years of pleasant life in her company if he would refrain from joining his friend Murchadh, son of King Brian Boru, in the battle. He refuses and is killed in the battle, along with Murchadh and Brian Boru. Whether by changing "Aoiheall" (spelled in various ways, such as Lady Gregory's "Aoihell") to "Aoife" Yeats meant to substitute the mother of Cuchulain's son is uncertain but improbable.
- 113.2: a chop-house in London, the meeting place of the Rhymers' Club, a group of poets who met together in the early 1890s.
- 113.10: Goibniu the Smith, a member of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, renowned for his ale, which gave immortality to those who drank it.
- 113.15: *Sliabh na mBan* ("The Mountain of the Women"), a mountain in County Tipperary, headquarters of the Bodb Derg, a king of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*.
- 113.62: Ernest Dowson (1867–1900) and Lionel Johnson (1867–1902), poets and members of the Rhymers' Club.
- 114: see Yeats's note, pp. 457–8.
- 114.2: generic names for the people, especially the poor. *Páidín* (dim. of *Pádraig*), "Paddy."
- 114.4: quotation not yet traced. In a letter Yeats stated that "The 'correspondent' to whom the poem is addressed is of course an imaginary person."
- 114.9: Ercole d'Este I (1431–1505), Duke of Ferrara, depicted in *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) as a patron of the arts.
- 114.12: Titus Maccius Plautus (ca. 254–184 B.C.), Roman playwright, much favored by the Duke of Ferrara.
- 114.14: Guidobaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, also highly praised in *The Book of the Courtier*.



- 114.20: Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464), first of the Medici family to rule Florence and a patron of the arts; exiled to Venice in 1433 but returned in triumph a year later.
- 114.23: Michelozzo de Bartolommeo (1396–1472), architect, accompanied Cosimo de Medici into exile and designed for him the Library in St. Mark's, Florence.
- 115: see Yeats's note, pp. 457–8.
- 115.8: Irish patriot (1830–1907), banished from Ireland in 1874, returned in 1885, an important influence on the young Yeats.
- 115.17: the "wild geese" are Irishmen who emigrated to the Continent after the Treaty of Limerick (1691) and during the time of the Penal Laws (1695–1727).
- 115.20: Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763–98), leader of the 1798 Rising.
- 115.21: Robert Emmet (1778–1803) was executed for his part in an abortive revolution. Wolfe Tone (1763–98) was involved in the 1798 Rising; he took his own life while under sentence of death.
- 116: Yeats's note (pp. 457–8) identifies the friend as Lady Gregory.
- 117: see Yeats's note, pp. 457–8. *Páidín* (dim. of *Pádraig*), "Paddy."
- 118: see Yeats's note, p. 457–8. The "Shade" is Parnell.
- 118.9: the "man" is Hugh Lane.
- 118.19: Parnell is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.
- 119.9–11: in Greek mythology, the abduction of Helen by Paris led to the Trojan War.
- 120: see Yeats's note on poems 114–18, p. 457–8.
- 120.4: Don Juan, legendary hero of numerous literary and musical works, sentenced to hell for his libertine activities.
- 121.5: *libín* is a term for the minnow (*Phoxinus phoxinus*), and *lón* means "provision, food, fare," so *libín-lón* could be intended as a calque on "minnow-fare," although the attempt violates Irish syntax and Irish grammar. Dinneen's *Irish-English Dictionary* offers *libín leamhan* as meaning "a minnow," but this is attested nowhere else and it is difficult to know how Dinneen would analyze its literal sense ("moth minnow?").
- 121.6: a small town in County Galway.
- 121.8: Guaire Aidne (d. 663), king of Connacht, celebrated for his generosity.
- 124.1: there are many places throughout Ireland called "Windy Gap" (*Bearna na Gaoithe*). The reference here may be to the one opposite Carrroe Church in County Sligo.
- 124.9: "skelping" is a dialect word meaning "striking," "slapping," or "beating."
- 125.4: Cruachan, in County Roscommon, the ancient capital of Connacht.
- 125.8: the Maini, who traditionally number either seven or eight, are usually understood as the children of Maeve and Ailill, queen and king of Connacht in Irish mythology.
- 125.25: a cave near Cruachan, fabled as the mouth of the underworld.
- 125.50: Goibniu the Smith, a member of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, renowned for his ale, which gave immortality to those who drank it.
- 125.58: 24 June, the feast of the nativity of St. John the Baptist and about the time of the summer solstice.

- 125.86: in the Christian religion, Easter is the annual celebration of the resurrection of Christ; the date varies between 22 March and 25 April.
- 125.98–100: Yeats departs from the usual Christian tradition, in which the archangel Gabriel sounds the trumpet which heralds the Last Judgment and the archangel Michael is the warrior angel, the conqueror of Satan.
- 126: *The Player Queen* was first produced in 1919 and first published in 1922.
- 129.5: a mountain near the County Dublin border.
- 130.4: according to the *Fama Fraternalitatis* (1614) of Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), Christian Rosenkreuz (1378–?) was the founder of the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross; many years after his death, his body was discovered undecayed in his tomb. Rosicrucian materials were used in the Order of the Golden Dawn, the occult society to which Yeats belonged for much of his life.
- 139: the Magi were a priestly caste of ancient Persia; in Christian tradition, the wise men who journey from the East to see the infant Christ are Magi. See also Yeats's note on "The Dolls," p. 458.
- 139.7: Christ was crucified on Calvary, outside the wall of Jerusalem.
- 140: see Yeats's note, p. 458.
- 142.6: from the Epilogue to *Poetaster* (acted 1601) by the English playwright Ben Jonson (1572–1637), also printed as "An Ode to Himself" in *Underwoods* (1640): "Leave me. There's something come into my thought / That must and shall be sung high and aloof, / Safe from the wolf's black jaw, and the dull ass's hoof."
- 142.7: *Coill na gCnó* ("The Wood of the Nuts"), one of the Seven Woods at Coole.

*The Wild Swans at Coole*: first published in 1917, the volume including the play *At the Hawk's Well*. Contents and order here follow the 1919 edition, which added seventeen poems.

- 143: Coole Park was the estate of Lady Gregory in County Galway.
- 144: Robert Gregory (1881–1918), Lady Gregory's only child. A pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, he was killed in action in Italy on 23 January 1918.
- 144.1: see Yeats's note on "The Tower," pp. 459–60.
- 144.17: Lionel Johnson (1867–1902), English scholar-poet and critic.
- 144.25: John Millington Synge (1871–1909), Irish playwright and friend of Yeats.
- 144.33: George Pollexfen (1839–1910), a maternal uncle of Yeats.
- 144.34: a county in Ireland.
- 144.39: astrological terms for heavenly bodies that are separated by 180°, 90°, and 120°, respectively. Pollexfen was a student of astrology.
- 144.47: Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86), English writer, statesman, and soldier.
- 144.58: Castle Taylor, in County Galway, home of the Taylor family. Roxborough, in County Galway, the childhood home of Lady Gregory.
- 144.59: Esserkelly, near Ardahan, County Galway.
- 144.60: Moneen, adjoining Esserkelly.
- 144.66: Clare, a county in Ireland.
- 145.5: the crossroads in Kiltartan, a barony near Coole Park.
- 146.2: in Greek mythology, the Tritons are mermen.

- 148.4: presumably a descendant of Billy Byrne of Ballymanus, a Wicklow hero of the 1798 Rising, executed in July of that year.
- 148.8: *Gleann Da Loch* ("The Valley of Two Lakes"), near Laragh in County Wicklow; renowned for its round tower, it is the site of a monastic center founded by St. Kevin (d. 618).
- 148.9: the most famous member of the O'Byrnes of Wicklow was Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne (ca. 1544–97), who fought against the English until his execution by the forces of Sir William Russell.
- 149: several books of the Old Testament are traditionally ascribed to Solomon (ca. 972–ca. 932 B.C.), king of the Hebrews. The visit of the queen of Sheba (an area in Arabia) to Solomon is described in I Kings 10.1–13. Yeats may also draw on Arabic traditions about Solomon and Sheba.
- 152.11: for the cherubim of the prophet Ezekiel (fl. 592 B.C.), see especially Ezek. 10.1–22.
- 152.12: Jacques Firmin Beauvarlet (1731–97), French painter and engraver.
- 152.18: Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), John Donne (1571 or 1572–1631), English authors.
- 154.12: Gaius Valerius Catullus (84?–54? B.C.), Roman poet.
- 155: apparently Tom O'Roughley is an invented character. Roughley is a promontory north of Sligo.
- 155.13: Yeats departs from the usual Christian tradition, in which the archangel Gabriel sounds the trumpet which heralds the Last Judgment and the archangel Michael is the warrior angel, the conqueror of Satan.
- 156.97: see Yeats's note, pp. 458–9.
- 157.7: in Greek mythology, the Centaurs are usually depicted as having the upper part of a human body and the four-legged body of a horse.
- 158.3–4: in Irish mythology, the capital of Ulster is *Emain Macha* ("The Twins of Macha"). Macha was a horse-goddess who bore twins on the site, near Armagh. Yeats follows the spurious story of Macha measuring the town with the pin of a brooch, based on a folk-etymology of *Emain* as *éó main*, "precious pin."
- 158.6: in *A Vision* (1925), Yeats associates the rise of astrology in Babylon, an ancient city in Mesopotamia, with the development of exact science and a corresponding reduction in man's status in relation to the universe.
- 158.10–12: in classical mythology, Helios, the sun-god, is often conceived as driving a chariot across the sky each day, from east to west.
- 159.11–16: several books of the Old Testament are traditionally ascribed to Solomon (ca. 972–ca. 932 B.C.), king of the Hebrews. The visit of the queen of Sheba (an area in Arabia) to Solomon is described in I Kings 10.1–13. Solomon was renowned for his wisdom.
- 159.30: the pestle is a traditional symbol of fertility and birth.
- 160.4: an area in County Galway.
- 163.11: the "long war" is presumably World War I.
- 164.9–13: Ercole d'Este I (1431–1505), Duke of Ferrara, Guidobaldo di Montefeltro (1472–1508), Duke of Urbino, and Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526), Duchess of Urbino, are favorably depicted in *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529).

- 165.4: the "girl" is Leda, whose contact with the god Zeus is described in poem 220.
- 165.9: Gaby Deslys (1884–1920), French actress and dancer.
- 165.10: Ruth St. Denis (1878–1968), American dancer.
- 165.11: Anna Matveyevna Pavlova (1885–1931), Russian ballerina.
- 165.12–13: probably Julia Marlowe (1866–1950), born in England but raised in America; well known for her roles in Shakespeare's plays, as in *Romeo and Juliet*.
- 166: Sextus Propertius (ca. 50–ca. 16 B.C.), Roman poet. The poem is loosely based on the second poem of Book II.
- 166.6: in Greek mythology, the Olympian goddess of wisdom, patron of the arts of peace, ruler of storms, and a guardian of cities; usually understood as a virgin goddess.
- 166.7: in Greek mythology the Centaurs are usually depicted as having the upper part of a human body and the four-legged body of a horse.
- 171: *Coill na gCnó* ("The Wood of the Nuts"), one of the Seven Woods at Coole.
- 173: Alfred Pollexfen (1854–1916), the youngest of Yeats's maternal uncles.
- 173.2–4: William Pollexfen (1811–92) and Elizabeth Middleton Pollexfen (1819–92), Yeats's maternal grandparents. William died six weeks after the death of Elizabeth.
- 173.8–10: George Pollexfen (1839–1910) was a member of the Freemasons, a secret fraternal order. Acacia is a woody shrub or tree of the mimosa family.
- 173.15: a street and school in Sligo.
- 173.17: John Pollexfen (1845–1900), who died and was buried in Liverpool.
- 173.24–31: Alfred Pollexfen returned to Sligo from Liverpool in 1910, to take the place of his brother George in the family firm of W. & G. T. Pollexfen and Company.
- 174.8: Petronius Arbitrator (1st century A.D.), Roman writer.
- 176.7: Pietro Longhi (1702–62), Italian painter.
- 179.4–6: in the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, Grania flees with Diarmuid to escape the love of the aged Finn.
- 179.8: Giorgione (ca. 1478–1510), Venetian painter.
- 179.9: in Greek mythology, Achilles was an important warrior in the Trojan War. Tamerlane, also Timur (ca. 1336–1405), Mongol conqueror. Babar, popular name of Zahir-ud-din-Mohammed (1480–1530), founder of the Mogul empire of India. "Barhaim" is apparently an error for Bahram V, king of Persia 420–38, renowned for his courage.
- 181: in his *Vita Nuova* (ca. 1292–93), the Italian writer Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) recounts the vision of "a lord of terrible aspect to such as should gaze upon him, but who seemed therewithal to rejoice inwardly that it was a marvel to see. Speaking he said many things, among the which I could understand but few; and of these, this: *Ego dominus tuus* ['I am thy master']."
- 181.1: the speakers' names are Latin pronouns for "this" and "that." Used in combination, *hic* usually refers to "the latter" and *ille* to the former, though the meanings are sometimes reversed.
- 181.4: for Michael Robartes, see Yeats's note on poems 183 and 188–89, p. 459.

- 181.22: Jesus Christ, son of God in the Christian religion.
- 181.26: Guido Cavalcanti (ca. 1230–1300) and probably Lapo Gainni (ca. 1270–ca. 1330), poets and friends of Dante.
- 181.29: Bedouin, Arabic for “tent-dwellers,” nomad peoples of interior Arabia.
- 181.37: Beatrice, Dante’s beloved, probably Beatrice Portinari (1266–90).
- 181.52: John Keats (1795–1821), English poet.
- 182: see Yeats’s note to “The Tower,” pp. 459–60.
- 182.4: a region in Palestine associated with the life of Christ.
- 182.10–11: “Sinbad the Sailor” is one of the tales in the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*, a collection of Arabic stories translated into English in the nineteenth century, most notably by Sir Richard Burton in 1885–88. Sinbad’s ship is wrecked against a loadstone mountain on his sixth voyage.
- 182.16: a long narrow sea between Africa and Arabia.
- 183: see Yeats’s note, p. 459.
- 183.4: an area in County Galway.
- 183.15: title character of “Il Penseroso” by the English poet John Milton (1608–74).
- 183.16: title character of “Prince Athanase” by the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).
- 183.17: “The Lonely Tower,” an engraving by the English artist Samuel Palmer (1805–81) used to illustrate “Il Penseroso” in *The Shorter Poems of Milton* (1889).
- 183.27: Walter Pater (1839–94), English writer and critic.
- 183.28: the death of Robartes is alluded to in Yeats’s story “The Adoration of the Magi” (1897).
- 183.30: presumably from Milton’s *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644), l.vi: “Thus mine author sung it to me. . . .”
- 183.45: in Greek mythology the Olympian goddess of wisdom, patron of the arts of peace, ruler of storms, and a guardian of cities; Achilles was a leading Greek warrior in the Trojan War. Yeats refers to the *Iliad* (I:197 and XXII:330).
- 183.46: in Greek mythology, Hector, eldest son of Priam and Hecuba, is killed by Achilles in the Trojan War. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher.
- 183.67: Mt. Sinai, on the Sinai peninsula between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea; in the Bible, the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments.
- 184.5: a cat belonging to Yeats’s close friend Maud Gonne (1866–1953).
- 185.4: Caesar was a title given to the Roman emperor, stemming from the cognomen of Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.).
- 185.10: Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.), king of Macedonia and conqueror of much of Asia.
- 185.11: Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (63 B.C.–A.D. 14), first Roman emperor.
- 185.12: Alcibiades (ca. 450–404 B.C.), Athenian statesman and general.
- 186.6: in the Christian religion, Providence is the foreknowing and beneficent care and government of God.
- 188: see Yeats’s note, p. 459.
- 188.1: Rock of Cashel, County Tipperary, ancient site of the kings of Munster; noted for its ecclesiastical ruins, particularly the Chapel constructed by Cormac Mac Carrthaig (d. 1138).

- 188.18: in Greek mythology, a sphinx has typically the body of a lion; the head and bust of a woman; and wings. Originally a monster, in later Greek art the sphinx becomes an enigmatic messenger of the gods.
- 188.19: Gautama Siddhartha (ca. 563–ca. 483 B.C.), known as the Buddha (“the enlightened one”), Indian philosopher, founder of Buddhism.
- 188.56: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature. His “Paragon” was Helen of Troy, whose abduction by Paris led to the Trojan War.

*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*: first published in 1921. For Michael Robartes, see Yeats's note on poems 183 and 188–89, p. 459.

189: see Yeats's note, p. 459.

189.19: in Greek mythology the Olympian goddess of wisdom, patron of the arts of peace, ruler of storms, and a guardian of cities.

189.26: Paolo Veronese (1528–88), Italian painter.

189.32–33: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), Italian artist. He painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome in 1508–12. *Morning* (more usually *The Dawn*) and *Night* are statues in the Medici Chapel in Florence.

189.39–40: presumably an allusion to Christ's Last Supper (see Luke 22.14–20).

190: several books of the Old Testament are traditionally ascribed to Solomon (ca. 972–ca. 932 B.C.), king of the Hebrews. The visit of the queen of Sheba (an area in Arabia) to Solomon is described in I Kings 10.1–13. Yeats may also draw on Arabic traditions about Solomon and Sheba.

190.11: in Christian theology, the Fall of Man occurs when Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil (traditionally imaged as an apple).

191: in a long note, Yeats has one of his fictional characters explain that “no lover, no husband has ever met in dreams the true image of wife or mistress. She who has perhaps filled his whole life with joy or disquiet cannot enter there. Her image can fill every moment of his waking life but only its counterfeit comes to him in sleep. . . . They are the forms of those he has loved in some past earthly life, chosen from *Spiritus Mundi* by the subconscious will, and through them, for they are not always hollow shades, the dead at whites outface a living rival.” Yeats defines *Spiritus Mundi* as “a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit.”

192.7–9: presumably William Pollexfen (1811–92), Yeats's maternal grandfather; William Middleton (1820–82), Yeats's maternal great-uncle; the Reverend William Butler Yeats (1806–62), Yeats's paternal grandfather.

192.12: Sligo, in northwestern Ireland, was the home of Yeats's maternal grandparents; he spent a considerable part of his childhood there.

193: on 24 April 1916, the day after Easter Sunday, an Irish Republic was proclaimed, and a force of approximately 700 Irish Volunteers occupied parts of Dublin. The rebellion was suppressed by the British forces, the final surrender occurring on 29 April 1916.

193.17: presumably Constance Gore-Booth (1868–1927), whom Yeats had known since the 1890s. In 1900 she married Count Casimir Dunin-Markievicz.

- 193.24-25: presumably Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Irish writer and founder of St. Enda's School in County Dublin. The "winged horse" is Pegasus, connected with poetry in Greek mythology.
- 193.26: presumably Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), Irish writer.
- 193.31: presumably Major John MacBride (1865-1916), Irish revolutionary and the estranged husband of Maud Gonne.
- 193.68-69: Home Rule for Ireland had passed into law in September 1914 but had been simultaneously suspended for the duration of World War I, the English government promising to implement it thereafter.
- 193.76: James Connolly (1868-1916), military leader of the Irish forces during the rebellion.
- 194: fifteen of the leaders of the Easter Rebellion were executed by the English from 3-12 May 1916. To their number Yeats has apparently added Sir Roger Casement (1864-1916), executed on 3 August 1916 by the English for attempting to bring arms to Ireland from Germany.
- 194.10: Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Irish writer.
- 194.12: Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), Irish writer.
- 194.16: Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-98) and Wolfe Tone (1763-98), two of the leaders of the 1798 Rising.
- 195.2: Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Irish writer; James Connolly (1868-1916), military leader of the Irish forces during the rebellion.
- 195.4: particularly in nineteenth-century poetry, such as "Dark Rosaleen" by James Clarence Mangan (1803-49), the Rose was used as a personification of Ireland.
- 196: presumably Countess Markievicz (1868-1927), born Constance Gore-Booth, imprisoned for her role in the Easter Rebellion.
- 196.14: a mountain north of the town of Sligo.
- 197.6: a mountain in Boeotia, in Greek mythology sacred to the Muses.
- 198.5: probably *Sruth-in-aghaidh-an-aird* ("the stream against the height"), which falls from the slope of Ben Bulbin into Glencar Lake near Sligo.
- 198.23: the stag is a common image in Arthurian legend, a group of tales about a mythical early king of Britain (probably loosely based on a chieftain or general named Arthur of the fifth to sixth centuries). Mrs. Yeats claimed (*New Commentary*, p. 198) that the source was the white stag in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* which appears at the wedding feast of Arthur and Guinevere and is hunted and killed by Sir Gawain; but there is also a white stag hunted and killed by Arthur in "Geraint the Son of Erbin" in *The Mabinogion*.
- 199.5: "to pern" is to move with a circular, spinning motion; see also Yeats's note on "unpacks the loaded pern," pp. 458-9. A gyre is one-half of a symbol which consists of two intertwined cones, the base of each being the apex of the other. The movement of the gyres in opposite directions suggests the inherent conflict in existence.
- 199.10: a portrait of Luke Wadding (1588-1657), an Irish Franciscan, by the Spanish painter José Ribera (1588-1652).
- 199.11: portraits of prominent members of the Irish Ormondes, the Butler

- family of great wealth and power that had settled in Ireland in the twelfth century.
- 199.13: Sir Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford (1593–1641) and Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1632/33–40.
- 199.17: the National Gallery in Dublin, the location of the above portraits.
- 199.23: presumably the lake in St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, near the National Gallery.
- 199.44: the territory of upper Egypt, belonging to the Egyptian Thebes.
- 199.45: Lake Mareotis, south of Alexandria.
- 199.46: St Anthony of Egypt (251?–ca. 350), a founder of Christian monasticism, lived much of his life in the desert near Thebes.
- 199.50: Caesar was a title given to the Roman emperor, stemming from the cognomen of Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.)
- 200: in Christian tradition, the Second Coming is the return of Christ at the apocalypse (Matt. 24, esp. 31–46). In a long note, Yeats explains that “the end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment the life gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion. The revelation which approaches will however take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre. All our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not the continuation of itself but the revelation as in a lightning flash, though in a flash that will not strike only in one place, and will for a time be constantly repeated, of the civilization that must slowly take its place.” A gyre is one-half of a symbol which consists of two intertwined cones, the base of each being the apex of the other. The movement of the gyres in opposite directions suggests the inherent conflict in existence.
- 200.12: Yeats defines *Spiritus Mundi* as “a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit.”
- 200.22: a town near Jerusalem, the birthplace of Christ in Christian tradition.
- 201: Anne Butler Yeats, born 26 February 1919.
- 201.4: the poem is set at Thoor Ballylee (see Yeats's note on “The Tower,” pp. 459–60), near the estate of Lady Gregory.
- 201.6: the Atlantic Ocean, to the west of Thoor Ballylee.
- 201.27: in Greek art, Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, is often depicted being born out of the sea.
- 201.29: in Homer, Aphrodite is married to Hephaestus, god of fire (especially the smithy fire), usually depicted as lame.
- 201.32: in Greek mythology, the horns of Amalthea, the goat that nursed Zeus, flowed with nectar and ambrosia; one of them broke off and was filled with fruits and given to Zeus. The cornucopia thus became a symbol of plenty.
- 203: see Yeats's note on “The Tower,” pp. 459–60.
- 203.3: a village in County Galway, near Thoor Ballylee.



- 203.4: Yeats had married Bertha Georgie Hyde-Lees (1892–1968) on 20 October 1917.
- The Tower*: first published in 1928, including "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid."  
The contents and order here were first established in the *Collected Poems* (1933).
- 204: the ancient city of Byzantium was rebuilt as Constantinople by the Roman emperor Constantine I (287?–337). In *A Vision* (1925), Yeats argues that Byzantium, especially in the sixth century, offered an ideal environment for the artist.
- 204.19: "to perne" is to move with a circular, spinning motion; a gyre is one-half of a symbol which consists of two intertwined cones, the base of each being the apex of the other. The movement of the gyres in opposite directions suggests the inherent conflict in existence. See also Yeats's note on "unpacks the loaded pern," pp. 458–9.
- 204.27–29: see Yeats's note, p. 459.
- 205: for the allusions not glossed below, see Yeats's note, pp. 459–60.
- 205.9: a mountain north of the town of Sligo.
- 205.11: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 205.48: Cloone Bog is in County Galway, near Gort.
- 205.52: by tradition, the epic poet Homer was blind.
- 205.53: in Greek mythology, the abduction of Helen by Paris led to the Trojan War.
- 205.65: a bawn (*bán*) is a pasture or yard (sometimes fortified).
- 205.85: the Great Memory, which Yeats explains is passed on "from generation to generation," is essentially a repository of archetypal images.
- 205.132: Edmund Burke (1729–97), political writer; Henry Grattan (1746–1820), political leader.
- 205.162: presumably a Paradise beyond the moon and thus timeless.
- 205.181: although "make my soul" is sometimes glossed as an Irish expression meaning "prepare for death," Yeats also used it in a wider sense.
- 206: the Irish Civil War was fought in 1922–23 between the Free State Government and the Republicans, the latter not accepting the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which had been signed in London on 6 December 1921 and accepted by the Irish parliament on 7 January 1922. For the allusions not glossed below, see Yeats's note, pp. 460–1.
- 206.9: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature.
- 206.27: in Roman mythology, Juno is queen of the gods and a protector of women.
- 207.1: the poem is set at Thoor Ballylee (see Yeats's note on "The Tower," pp. 459–60).
- 207.14: title character of "Il Penseroso" by the English poet John Milton (1608–74).
- 208.2: Junzo Sato presented Yeats with a ceremonial Japanese sword in March 1920.
- 208.8: the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer was born ca. 1340.
- 208.32: in Roman mythology, Juno is queen of the gods and a protector of

- women. As a symbol of immortality, the peacock was sacred to her. No source has yet been traced for Yeats's reference in *A Vision* (1925) to the peacock's scream symbolizing the end of a civilization.
- 209.3: Anne Yeats (b. 26 Feb. 1919) and Michael Butler Yeats (b. 22 Aug. 1921).
- 209.17: in Ptolemaic astronomy, the Primum Mobile is the outermost concentric sphere, carrying the spheres of the fixed stars and the planets in its daily revolution.
- 209.21: presumably Lady Gregory (1852–1932), a close friend of Yeats and a collaborator on many of his plays.
- 209.22: presumably Georgie Yeats, whom Yeats married on 20 October 1917.
- 210.1: the Irregulars were members of the Irish Republican Army.
- 210.2: Falstaff is a comic character in several plays by William Shakespeare.
- 210.6: members of the army of the Free State Government.
- 213: during 1919, armed conflicts between the English-controlled government of Ireland and the Irish Republican Army became more frequent.
- 213.6: probably the olive-wood statue of Athena Polias in the Erechtheum, one of the central buildings (constructed 421–407 B.C.) on the Athenian Acropolis.
- 213.7: Phidias (ca. 490–ca. 432 B.C.), Athenian sculptor, best known for his chryselephantine statues of Athena and Zeus.
- 213.8: in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431–404 B.C.), Thucydides mentions the Athenian fashion of “fastening up their hair in a knot held by a golden grasshopper as a brooch.” The bees, also ascribed to Phidias in early printings of the poem, may derive from a reference in Walter Pater's *Greek Studies* (1895) to “the golden honeycomb of Daedalus.”
- 213.19–20: cf. Isaiah 2.4: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”
- 213.46: the most important section of ancient Athens was the Acropolis, a hill with a flat oval top; the “stump” is the statue mentioned in l. 6.
- 213.49: Loïe Fuller (1862–1928), American dancer best known for her serpentine dance. Her troupe of dancers were in fact Japanese.
- 213.54: see Yeats's note on part VI, p. 461.
- 213.59–60: if a specific allusion, probably to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) by Percy Bysshe Shelley: “My soul is like an enchanted boat / Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float / Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing. . . .” (II.v.72–74).
- 213.72: probably not intended as a specific allusion, though Yeats may be thinking of Thomas Taylor in his translation of Porphyry's *De Antro Nympharum* (see his note to “Among School Children,” p. 461).
- 213.118: see Yeats's note to “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” p. 454.
- 213.128–29: see Yeats's note, p. 461.
- 217: Michael Butler Yeats, born 22 August 1921.
- 217.17 ff.: “You” is God, seen later in the stanza as Christ. In Christian tradition, Christ is taken to Egypt by the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph to escape the wrath of King Herod, who was afraid of the prophecy that Christ would supplant him (see Matt. 2.1–18).
- 218: see Yeats's note, p. 461.

- 218.1.1-8: this stanza recounts the death and, implicitly, the resurrection of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility in Greek mythology. Though there are varied and sometimes conflicting legends, the essentials are the birth of Dionysus from the god Zeus and a mortal woman; the jealousy of Hera, Zeus' wife, leading to Dionysus being torn to pieces and devoured by the Titans; the saving of his heart by Athena, who carries it to Zeus; and Zeus's swallowing of the heart, leading to the rebirth of Dionysus, in common legend by Semele.
- 218.1.6: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 218.1.7: "Magnus Annus" ("Great Year") is the Platonic Year, mentioned by Yeats in his note on poem 213 (p. 461).
- 218.1.9-16: this stanza recounts the birth of Christ though reference to the *Fourth Eclogue* of the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 B.C.). At the end of the Golden Age, Astraea, daughter of Zeus and Themis and goddess of justice, withdraws from the earth and is transformed into the constellation Virgo. Virgil prophesies the return of Astraea and the start of a new Golden Age. Beginning with the Council of Nicea in 325, the *Fourth Eclogue* was seen as foretelling the birth of Christ, Astraea being equated with the Virgin Mary; and the star Spica (Alpha Virginis), the most prominent star in the constellation Virgo, with the Star of Bethlehem. A passage in *A Vision* (1925) suggests that Yeats also parallels Athena/Dionysus with Virgin Mary/Christ and Virgo/Spica.
- In the *Fourth Eclogue* Virgil also prophesies another Trojan War and another journey by Jason and the Argonauts on the ship *Argo* in search of the Golden Fleece.
- 218.1.16: in *Select Passages Illustrating Neo-Platonism* (1923), E. R. Dodds notes that "it was in Plato's city that Greek thought made its last stand against the Church which it envisaged as 'a fabulous and formless darkness mastering the loveliness of the world.'" Dodds is loosely paraphrasing *The Lives of the Sophists* by the Greek sophist Eunapius (ca. 347-ca. 420).
- 218.11.2: in *The Resurrection*, "that room" is the site of Christ's Last Supper.
- 218.11.3: Galilee, a region in Palestine, was the chief scene of the ministry of Christ.
- 218.11.4: in *A Vision* (1925), Yeats associates the rise of astrology in Babylon, an ancient city in Mesopotamia, with the development of exact science and a corresponding reduction in man's status in relation to the universe.
- 218.11.7-8: the classical world epitomized by the philosophy of Plato and the Doric style of architecture.
- 219.1.1: John Locke (1632-1704), English philosopher and the founder of British empiricism.
- 219.1.2-4: a parody of the creation of Eve from one of Adam's ribs in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2.18-23). The spinning-jenny, a device capable of spinning many threads at once, was invented ca. 1765 by James Hargreaves (d. 1778), an Englishman.
- 219.11.6: an ancient city, capital of the Assyrian Empire; fell in 612 B.C.
- 220: in classical mythology, the god Zeus comes to the mortal Leda in the form of a swan. The result of the union varies in different accounts. In the 1937

- text of *A Vision* Yeats adopts the version in which the off-spring are Helen, Clytemnestra, and the Dioscuri (Castor and Polydeuces). However, a typescript for the 1925 *A Vision* suggests that he was then following the common variant in which Clytemnestra is a daughter of Leda by her husband, Tyndareus. The abduction of Helen by Paris caused the Trojan War and the destruction of Troy. The Greek forces were commanded by Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus, Helen's first husband. On his return from the war, Agamemnon was murdered by Aegisthus, lover of his wife, Clytemnestra.
- 221: Edmund Dulac (1882–1953), artist and illustrator, friend of Yeats. In Greek mythology, the Centaurs are usually depicted as having the upper part of a human body and the four-legged body of a horse.
- 221.7: describing a particular variety of wheat in *A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians* (1854). J. Gardner Wilkinson explains that "this is the kind which has lately been grown in England, and which is *said* to have been raised from grains found in the tombs in Thebes."
- 221.11–12: in Christian legend, seven martyrs were immured in a cave near the ancient city of Ephesus during the persecution of Decius (d. 251). Two centuries later they awoke and were taken before Theodosius II (401–50), their story confirming his wavering faith. Alexander the Great captured Ephesus in 334 B.C.; his empire quickly dissolved after his death in 323 B.C.
- 221.13: in Roman mythology, the god Saturn (identified with the Greek Kronos) ruled the world in the Golden Age of peace and plenty.
- 222.9: the contact between the mortal Leda and the god Zeus in Greek mythology is described in poem 220.
- 222.15–16: in Plato's *Symposium*, the Greek playwright Aristophanes (ca. 450–ca. 385 B.C.) argues that primal man was double, in a nearly spherical shape, until Zeus divided him in two, like a cooked egg divided by a hair. Love is seen as an attempt to regain the lost unity.
- 222.26: an artist of fifteenth-century Italy.
- 222.34: see Yeats's note, p. 461.
- 222.41: Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.), Greek philosopher.
- 222.43: Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), Greek philosopher, here described as tutor to Alexander the Great.
- 222.45: Pythagoras (ca. 582–ca. 507 B.C.), Greek philosopher; discover of the mathematical basis of musical intervals. The detail of his golden thigh is reported by Iamblichus in his *Life of Pythagoras*.
- 222.47: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 223: a chorus from Yeats's translation of *Oedipus at Colonus* by the Greek playwright Sophocles (ca. 496–406 B.C.), first published in the *Collected Plays* (1934).
- 223.1: Colonus, a district just north of Athens, connected with horses because of the worship there of the god Poseidon, who gave the gift of horses to men.
- 223.8: Semele was the mother of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility in Greek mythology.
- 223.9–16: the "gymnasts' garden" is the Academy, a park and gymnasium on the outskirts of Athens, adjoining Colonus, and the site of the school founded

- by Plato (ca. 385 B.C.). The olive was the gift of the goddess Athena to mankind; an olive in the Academy is said to have sprung up next after the primal olive on the Acropolis.
- 223.19: Demeter, a corn-goddess in Greek mythology; her daughter, Persephone, is carried off to the underworld by Hades.
- 223.23: a river flowing past the west side of Athens.
- 223.28: Poseidon taught men to row as well as to ride.
- 224.7: probably Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary.
- 224.11: the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ.
- 224.13: Jesus Christ, son of God in the Christian religion.
- 224.14: in *A Vision* (1925), Yeats associates the rise of astrology in Babylon, an ancient city in Mesopotamia, with the development of exact science and a corresponding reduction in man's status in relation to the universe.
- 224.15: in Biblical tradition, the Flood covered the entire world; only Noah and the others aboard the ark survived (Gen 6.5-7.19).
- 224.16-17: an allegorical account of the incarnation of Christ by God through the Virgin Mary.
- 226: for Owen Aherne, see Yeats's note on poems 183, 188, and 189, p. 459.
- 226.2: Normandy, a region in France.
- 232.5: in Greek mythology, Hector, eldest son of Priam and Hecuba, is killed by Achilles in the Trojan War.
- 236.3: in Greek mythology, Paris, a son of Priam and Hecuba, abducts Helen to Troy.
- 237: a chorus from Yeats's translation of *Oedipus at Colonus* by the Greek playwright Sophocles (ca. 496-406 B.C.), first published in the *Collected Plays* (1934).
- 237.6: Oedipus and his daughters, Antigone and Ismene.
- 238: monuments on O'Connell Street in Dublin to the English hero Horatio Nelson (1758-1805) and the Irish political leaders Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) and Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91). Nelson's Pillar, between the others, was the highest of the three.
- 239: in the Roman Catholic Church, All Souls' Day (usually 2 November) is the feast on which the church on earth prays for the souls of all the faithful departed still suffering in Purgatory. Yeats included the poem at the end of both versions of *A Vision* (1925, 1937).
- 239.1: Christ Church, one of the colleges of Oxford University.
- 239.21: William Thomas Horton (1864-1919), mystical painter and illustrator.
- 239.25: Amy Audrey Locke (1881-1916), Horton's beloved.
- 239.41: Florence Farr Emery (1869-1917), English actress.
- 239.46ff.: Emery left England in 1912 to teach at a school in India.
- 239.53: probably Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851-1930), who founded the school where Emery taught.
- 239.61: MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918), occultist and one of the founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Yeats met him perhaps as early as 1887 but certainly no later than 1890; they became estranged after a quarrel over Order matters in 1900.

- The Winding Stair and Other Poems*: first published in 1933. See Yeats's note, pp. 461-2.
- 240: Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926), poet, and Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz (1868-1927), Irish nationalist and politician. Countess Markievicz was sentenced to death for her part in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, but the sentence was later commuted to penal servitude for life; she was released in the general amnesty of June 1917 and remained active in Irish politics and labor affairs. Yeats had known the sisters since 1894.
- 240.1: Lissadell (*Lios a' Dail*, "The Courtyard of the Blind Man"), the Gore-Booth family home in County Sligo.
- 240.11: Utopia, an ideal state.
- 240.16: the Georgian style of architecture dates from 1714-1820. Lissadell was constructed in 1832.
- 241: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.
- 242.10: Junzo Sato presented Yeats with a ceremonial Japanese sword in March 1920.
- 242.45: Bishū Osafune Motoshigé, or Motoshigé of the later generation, flourished in the Era of Ōei (1394-1428).
- 243: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.
- 243.13: the lighthouse (constructed ca. 280 B.C.) on Pharos at Alexandria was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In *A Vision* (1925), Yeats associates the rise of astrology in Babylon, an ancient city in Mesopotamia, with the development of exact science and a corresponding reduction in man's status in relation to the universe.
- 243.15: Percy Bysshe Shelley refers to "Thought's crowned powers" in *Prometheus Unbound* (IV.303), published in 1820.
- 243.18: Oliver Goldsmith (1728-94), writer; Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), writer and Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin from 1713; George Berkeley (1685-1753), philosopher; Edmund Burke (1729-97), political writer and orator. All were born in Ireland.
- 243.28: a phrase from the epitaph on Swift's tomb in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin; translated by Yeats as "savage indignation" (poem 256).
- 245: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, p. 461-2. In Christian legend, the Veronica is a handkerchief or veil which a woman gave Christ to wipe his face as he was on the way to Calvary; when he returned it, it bore the imprint of his face.
- 245.1: "The Heavenly Circuit" is the title of one of the sections (II.2) of the *Enneads* of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (205-69/70): God is placed at the center of the universe, with all things circling around him. According to legend, the hair of Berenice II (ca. 273-221 B.C.), offered for the safe return of her husband Ptolemy III (ca. 284-221 B.C.), king of Egypt, became a constellation, *Coma Berenices*.
- 245.2: the "Tent-pole of Eden" may be what Yeats described in a note to poem 64 as "the pole of the heavens, the ancient Tree of Life in many countries."

- 245.7: the "pole" is the Cross on which Christ was crucified.
- 249.1: followers of the Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.).
- 250.1: William Shakespeare (1564–1616), English playwright.
- 250.2: the Romantic movement began in the late eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth.
- 251.1: Edmund Burke (1729–97), political writer and orator, born in Ireland.
- 251.2: Henry Grattan (1746–1820), Irish patriot and orator.
- 251.3: Oliver Goldsmith (1728–94), writer, born in Ireland.
- 251.5: the "Bishop of Cloyne" is the philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753), born in Ireland, who believed in the medicinal properties of tar-water.
- 251.6: the name used by the Irish-born writer Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) for Esther Johnson (d. 1728), the recipient of the letters in his *Journal to Stella* (published 1766–68).
- 251.7: the Whig Party in English politics derived from the liberal aristocrats who supported the Protestant William III against the Catholic James II; it was opposed by the Tories, conservative country gentlemen and merchants.
- 253: Coole Park was the estate of Lady Gregory in County Galway.
- 253.9: Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), Irish scholar and translator.
- 253.10: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 253.11: according to his account in *Autobiographies*, the "one" is Yeats.
- 253.13: John Millington Synge (1871–1909), Irish playwright.
- 253.14: John Shawe-Taylor (1866–1911), active in the land reform movement; Hugh Lane (1875–1915), art collector and critic. Both were nephews of Lady Gregory.
- 254: Coole Park is the estate of Lady Gregory in County Galway; for Thoor Ballylee, see Yeats's note on "The Tower", pp. 459–60.
- 254.1–7: Yeats mistakenly suggests that the river which runs past Thoor Ballylee flows into Coole Lake. The Irish poet Raftery (1784–1835), who was blind (thus "dark"), described a deep pool in the river near Thoor Ballylee as the "cellar." Mary Hynes lived at Ballylee. See also Yeats's note to "The Tower," pp. 459–60.
- 254.47: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature.
- 255: Anne Gregory (b. 1911), a grandchild of Lady Gregory.
- 256: except for the first line and "world-besotted," a close translation of the Latin epitaph on the tomb of Jonathan Swift in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.
- 257: Algeciras is a city in southern Spain, opposite Gibraltar.
- 257.3–4: Morocco is on the African side of the Strait of Gibraltar.
- 257.11: the English scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) once commented that "I do not know how I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only a boy, playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding another pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."
- 257.12: Rosses Point, a small seaside village near Sligo.
- 257.16: presumably God.
- 259: Yeats met Mohini Chatterjee, (1858–1936), an Indian Brahmin, or sage, in Dublin in 1885 or 1886.

- 260: the ancient city of Byzantium was rebuilt as Constantinople by the Roman emperor Constantine I (287?–337). In *A Vision* (1925), Yeats argued that Byzantium, especially in the sixth century, offered an ideal environment for the artist.
- 260.4: presumably Hagia Sophia, also known as Santa Sophia, a church constructed in Byzantium in 532–37 by the emperor Justinian I (483–565).
- 260.11: in Greek mythology, Hades, a son of Kronos, is lord of the lower world, the abode of the dead. The “bobbin” may be analogous to what Yeats calls “Plato’s spindle” in poem 281.
- 260.25: in *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*, 2nd ed. (1912), William Gordon Holmes describes “the Forum of Constantinople, which presents itself as an extension of the Mese [the main street of the city]. This open space, the most signal ornament of Constantinople, is called prescriptively the Forum; and sometimes, from its finished marble floor, ‘The Pavement.’”
- 260.33: in classical mythology, dolphins escort the dead to paradise.
- 261: see Yeats’s note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461–2.
- 262.11ff: *The Mabinogi*, a collection of Welsh romances, describes “a tall tree by the side of the river, one half of which was in flames from the root to the top, and the other half was green and in full leaf.”
- 262.16ff.: in Greek mythology, Attis is a vegetation god; to prevent his marriage to another, Cybele, an earth-goddess, causes him to castrate himself. After his death he is transformed into a pine tree. During his festival (22–27 March) an effigy of a young man was attached to a ceremonial pine tree to symbolize his transformation. The high priest of Cybele, called Attis, was traditionally a eunuch.
- 262.27: in classical mythology, Lethe is a river in Hades; drinking its waters causes forgetfulness of the past.
- 262.35: Yeats’s “fiftieth year” would have been the period when he was 49 years old, i.e., 13 June 1914–12 June 1915.
- 262.59: presumably Cháu-kung (d. 1105 B.C.), Chinese author and statesman, known as the “Duke of Chou.”
- 262.63: ancient cities in Mesopotamia.
- 262.74: in the Bible, the prophet Isaiah is purified by an angel who touches a live coal to his lips (Isa. 6.6–7).
- 262.77: Homer is the most important poet in ancient Greek literature. In Christian tradition, original sin refers to the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2.15–3.24).
- 262.78: Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925), Catholic religious philosopher, author of *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in St. Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (1908).
- 262.80: Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–82), Spanish Carmelite nun and one of the principal saints of the Catholic Church. Her body was said to have remained undecayed in her coffin.
- 262.84: after death, the Pharaohs, ancient kings of Egypt, were mummified.
- 262.88: in the Bible, Samson kills a lion and later extracts honey from its carcass;



from this experience he forms a riddle, "Out of the eater came what is eaten, and out of the strong came what is sweet." Samson later tells his wife the answer and thereby discovers her infidelity (Judg. 14.5-20).

267: *Gleann Da Loch* ("The Valley of Two Lakes"), near Laragh in County Wicklow; renowned for its round tower, it is the site of a monastic center founded by St. Kevin (d. 618).

*Words for Music Perhaps*: many of the poems in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* had been included in *Words for Music Perhaps* (1932). See Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.

268-74: Crazy Jane is a fictitious character, based in part on "Cracked Mary," a woman who lived near Gort in County Galway.

268.5: "Jack the Journeyman" is a fictitious character.

269.5: in Greek mythology, Europa, daughter of Aegnor, king of Tyre, is carried off by the god Zeus, who comes to her in the form of a bull.

270: in Christianity, the Day of Judgment is the apocalypse, when the good and evil are judged and sent to either heaven or hell.

274.18: Irish *tráithnín*, a blade of grass.

280.8: according to legend, the hair of Berenice II (ca. 273-221 B.C.), offered for the safe return of her husband Ptolemy III (ca. 284-221 B.C.), king of Egypt, became a constellation, *Coma Berenices*.

281.1: in Plato's *Republic*, the universe revolves on the "spindle of Necessity."

281.5: fictitious names.

283.4-6: in Greek mythology, the abduction of Helen by Paris led to the Trojan War.

283.8: in the medieval romance of Tristan and Isolde, Tristan is sent to Ireland to bring Isolde to Cornwall to be the bride of King Mark. A potion which they unknowingly drink makes their love irresistible.

283.13-18: the contact between the mortal Leda and the god Zeus in Greek mythology is described in poem 220. Sparta is located on the west bank of the Eurotas river.

285: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.

285.7: Horace (65-8 B.C.), Roman writer; Homer, the most important poet in ancient Greek literature.

285.8, 16: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Roman orator.

286: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.

287: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461-2.

288: Cruachan, in County Roscommon, the ancient capital of Connacht. Craogh Patrick (*Cruach Phadraig*, "Patrick's Heap"), a mountain in County Mayo, is a center for Christian pilgrimage, associated with the life of St. Patrick.

289: Tom the Lunatic is apparently a fictitious character. Yeats draws on "Tom o' Bedlam," a term applied to inmates of Bedlam Hospital, a London insane asylum, who were released periodically to beg for money to pay their keep.

289.7: characters in "Donald and his Neighbours," in *The Royal Hibernian Tales*

- (n.d.). Yeats included the story in his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888).
- 289.8: probably not a specific reference. "Holy Joe" colloquially identifies someone excessively and ostentatiously pious.
- 290: Cruachan, in County Roscommon, the ancient capital of Connacht.
- 292: the Delphic Oracle is the supreme oracle in Greek mythology; Plotinus (205–269/70.) is a Greek philosopher. In the *Life of Plotinus*, the philosopher Porphyry has Amelius consult the Oracle to learn the fate of Plotinus' soul after his death.
- 292.3: a son of Zeus and Europa in Greek mythology, Rhadamanthus is a ruler and judge of Elysium, to which certain favored heroes are translated by the gods and are exempt from death.
- 292.4: the immortals.
- 292.8: Plato, Greek philosopher (ca. 429–347 B.C.). Minos, another son of Zeus and Europa, is a judge in Elysium.
- 292.9: Pythagoras (ca. 582–ca. 507 B.C.), Greek philosopher.

*A Woman Young and Old*: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461–2.

- 295.14: an imaginary zone, or belt, in the sky, which in ancient thought included the orbits of the sun, the moon, and the known planets. See also note to poem 298.
- 296.10: the killing of a dragon has a prominent place in the legends surrounding both St. George (d. 303), patron saint of England, and the Greek mythological hero Perseus, the son of Zeus and Danaë.
- 298: see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461–2, which identifies the "learned astrologer" as Macrobius. In another note on this poem as well as poems 295 and 299, Yeats explained that "I have symbolized a woman's love as the struggle of the darkness to keep the sun from rising from its earthly bed." Further, in the last stanza here, "I change the symbol to that of the souls of man and woman ascending through the Zodiac. In some Neoplatonist or Hermetist – whose name I forget – the whorl changes into a sphere at one of the points where the Milky Way crosses the Zodiac."
- 299: see note to poem 298.
- 300.19: an artist of fifteenth-century Italy.
- 300.20: Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), Italian painter.
- 303: a chorus from *Antigone* by the Greek playwright Sophocles (ca. 496–ca. 406 B.C.).
- 303.6: in Greek mythology, the mountain Parnassus is sacred to Apollo and Dionysus as well as the Muses.
- 303.7: the Empyrean is the highest heaven, in ancient cosmology a sphere of fire.
- 303.10: Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, die at each other's hands.
- 303.15: Oedipus is Antigone's father. At the end of the play, Antigone commits suicide after being entombed in a vault by Creon.

- [*Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems*]: this section includes the poems from *A Full Moon in March* (1935) except for "Three Songs to the Same Tune," later revised as "Three Marching Songs" (poem 360).
- 304: the Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91) was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin on 11 October 1891. Parnell had been the dominant figure in Irish politics from 1879 until November 1890, when his liaison with Mrs. Katherine O'Shea (1845–1921) became public knowledge and the majority of his party repudiated his leadership.
- In a lengthy "Commentary" to this poem, Yeats traces the course of Irish history from the sixteenth century forwards.
- 304.I.1: Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), Irish political leader.
- 304.I.4: Yeats notes that according to Maud Gonne, a star "fell in broad daylight as Parnell's body was lowered into the grave."
- 304.I.7–15: in his *Autobiographies*, Yeats recounts a vision of "a naked woman of incredible beauty, standing upon a pedestal and shooting an arrow at a star," interpreting it as analogous to "the Mother-Goddess whose representative priestess shot the arrow at the child whose sacrificial death symbolized the death and resurrection of the Tree-spirit, or Apollo."
- 304.I.15: no such coin has yet been traced, though ancient coins often depict incidents from myth.
- 304.I.17: Robert Emmet (1778–1803), Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763–98), and Wolfe Tone (1763–98), Irish nationalists. Emmet was executed; Fitzgerald died of his wounds; Tone took his own life on the morning of his execution.
- 304.I.20: hysteria, causing suffocation or choking.
- 304.I.28: Irish bards were supposed to have the power of rhyming rats to death.
- 304.II.2: Eamon de Valera (1882–1975) became President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State after the general election of February 1932 and maintained that position during Yeats's lifetime.
- 304.II.5: William Cosgrave (1880–1965), first President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State.
- 304.II.8: for O'Higgins, see Yeats's note on *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461–2.
- 304.II.9: Eoin O'Duffy (1892–1944), first Commander of the Civic Guard; after his dismissal by de Valera early in 1933, he formed the "Blueshirts" movement and eventually became President of the Fine Gael party, before suddenly resigning from politics (although not permanently) on 22 September 1934.
- 304.II.11: Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), born in Ireland, writer and Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.
- 305: Yeats's play *The King of the Great Clock Tower* was first published in 1934.
- 305.2: mountains in County Sligo. In Irish mythology, Ben Bulbin is associated with some of the events in the Fenian Cycle, and Knocknarea is the burial site of Queen Maeve of the Ulster Cycle.
- 305.5: Rosses Point, a small seaside village near Sligo.
- 305.9: Cuchulain is the most important warrior in the Ulster Cycle of Irish tales.

- 305.11: in Irish mythology, Niamh is a woman of the Sidhe who entices Oisín into her realm, an event described in poem 375.
- 305.11–12: in Yeats's play *Deirdre* (1907), Deirdre and Naoise play chess while awaiting their fate at the hands of Conchubar.
- 305.15: in Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen*, first published in 1892, the poet Ael is in love with the Countess.
- 305.15–16: see Yeats's note to "The Tower," pp. 459–60.
- 305.19–20: the main character in Yeats's story "The Wisdom of the King" (1895).
- 305.credit: Arthur Duff composed the music for *The Pot of Broth*.
- 306.I: a song added to the 1902 version of Yeats's play *The Pot of Broth*, though the refrain was not included until 1935. *Páistín Fíonn* ("Fair-haired little child," i.e., "Fair Maid") is a popular Irish folksong.
- 304.II: lines 1 and 6–12 were first published in Yeats's play *The Player Queen* (1922); lines 2–5 were added in *A Full Moon in March* (1935) but never included in the play itself.
- 306.II.5: "dreepy," a dialectical word used in Ireland, means "drooping, droopy, spiritless" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
- 308.11–12: the wine and bread presumably refer to the Christian Eucharist ceremony.
- 309–20: Yeats described Ribh as "an imaginary critic of St. Patrick. His Christianity, come perhaps from Egypt like much early Irish Christianity, echoes pre-Christian thought."
- 309: the story of Baile and Ailinn is summarized in the "Argument" to poem 377.
- 310.2: the Christian Trinity consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
- 310.6: one of the Hermetic works ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus ("Thoth the very great"), a name given to the Egyptian god of writing.
- 316.4: "the characters in the play."
- 316.7: not a specific allusion.
- 316.11–12: Charlemagne (742–814), son of Pepin the Short (ca. 715–68) and Bertha, daughter of Count Charibert of Laon, was crowned Emperor of the West by Pope Leo III in 800.
- 318: in a letter of 25 August 1934, Yeats associated the astrological conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn with an "Antithetical or subjective" dispensation, that of the planets Mars and Venus ("the goddess," unfaithful to her husband Vulcan with Mars) with a "Christian or objective" dispensation.
- 318.2: describing a particular variety of wheat in *A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians* (1854), J. Gardner Wilkinson explains that "this is the kind which has lately been grown in England, and which is said to have been raised from grains found in the tombs in Thebes."
- 318.3: "He" is Christ, son of God in the Christian religion.
- 320: in Hindu mythology, Mount Meru (identified with Mount Kailāsa in Tibet) is located in the center of Paradise.
- 320.9: Mount Everest, on the border of Tibet and Nepal in the Himalayas.

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321: the "gyres" are a symbol which consists of two intertwined cones, the base

- of each being the apex of the other. The movement of the gyres in opposite directions suggests the inherent conflict in existence.
- 321.1: "Old Rocky Face" is probably not intended as a specific allusion.
- 321.6: Empedocles (ca. 493–ca. 433 B.C.), Greek philosopher.
- 321.7: in Greek mythology, Hector, eldest son of Priam and Hecuba, is killed by Achilles in the Trojan War.
- 322: on 4 July 1935, Yeats received a lapis lazuli carving, dating from the Ch'ien Lung period (1739–95), as a seventieth birthday present from Henry (Harry) de Vere Clifton (b. 1908), who by then had published two volumes of poetry.
- 322.6: Zeppelins, rigid airships designed by Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin (1838–1917), were used to bomb London in World War I, the war which also involved the first military use of airplanes.
- 322.7: a pun on William III (1650–1702) at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), in which his forces defeated those of James II (1633–1701); and Kaiser Wilhelm (1859–1941), German emperor and king of Prussia during World War I. "The Battle of the Boyne," an anonymous ballad, describes how "King James he pitched his tents between / The lines for to retire; / But King William threw his bomb-balls in, / And set them all on fire."
- 322.10–11: Hamlet and Ophelia are characters in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603–04), Lear and Cordelia in his *King Lear* (1608).
- 322.29: the Greek sculptor Callimachus (fl. late fifth century B.C.) refined the employment of the running drill. For the Erechtheum in Athens he made a golden lamp with a long chimney, shaped like a palm tree, that reached to the roof, described by Pausanias (fl. ca. 150) in his *Description of Greece*.
- 323: the probable source is "My Longing After Departed Spring" by Gekkyo (1745–1824): "My longing after the departed spring / Is not the same every year." Yeats could have found the poem in *An Anthology of Haiku Ancient and Modern*, trans. Asatarō Miyamori (1932).
- 325: the source which Yeats cites is fictitious; the invented title means "History of my Times." The author's name is apparently based on Pierre de Bourdeilles (ca. 1527–1614), lord of the Abbey of Brantôme in France and prolific author. Yeats may have used "Bourdeille" because of the possible puns on *bourde* ("a fib or humbug") and *bordel* ("a brothel"); and he may have taken "Michel" from Michel Bourdaille (d. 1694), a theologian and religious writer.
- 328.10: in the Biblical story of the Fall of Man, Satan takes the form of a serpent when he tempts Adam and Eve (Gen. 3.1–24).
- 332.15: a semi-legendary Greek misanthrope (fl. after 450 B.C.), Timon is a character in William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (1623); Lear is a character in his *King Lear* (1608).
- 332.16: William Blake (1757–1827), English poet and engraver.
- 332.19: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), Italian artist.
- 333.5: Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.), Greek philosopher.
- 334.1: John O'Leary (1830–1907), Irish patriot.
- 334.2: Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats (1839–1922), defended John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* during a public debate in the Abbey Theatre on 4 February 1907.

- 334.5: Standish James O'Grady (1846–1928), Irish historian and novelist, presumably at the dinner given by T. P. Gill of *The Daily Express* in honor of the Irish Literary Theatre on 11 May 1899.
- 334.7: Lady Gregory (1852–1932), Yeats's close friend and collaborator. Writing in her Journal on 11 April 1922 about a threat by one of her tenants to take over some land from Coole Park by force, Lady Gregory notes that she "showed how easy it would be to shoot me through the unshuttered window if he wanted to use violence."
- 334.10: Maud Gonne (1866–1953), Yeats's beloved, presumably on 4 August 1891, the day after she had rejected his first proposal of marriage. Howth is a fishing village north of the center of Dublin.
- 334.11: in Greek mythology, the Olympian goddess of wisdom, patron of the arts of peace, ruler of storms, and a guardian of cities; usually understood as a virgin goddess.
- 334.12: in Greek mythology, the Olympians are the dynasty of gods headed by Zeus.
- 335.14: the quotation is adapted from a song which appears in the essay "Almost I Tasted Ecstasy" in *The Lemon Tree* (1937) by the English poet and actress Margot Ruddock (1907–51). Having suffered a mental breakdown in Barcelona and broken her knee-cap in a fall from a window, Ruddock "crept into the hold" of a ship and began to sing "Sea-starved, hungry sea . . ."
- 336: Dorothy Wellesley (1889–1956), English poet and friend of Yeats since 1935.
- 336.14–16: in Greek mythology, the Furies are the Erinyes, avenging spirits who punish wrongs, especially those done to kindred. Yeats apparently draws on Jane Ellen Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (1922), which objects to the personification of the Erinyes in Homer and their transformation into "ministers of Justice" in Heraclitus. Yeats may have taken the detail of the torches from Harrison's description of the Semnae.
- 337: in 1649–50, Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), later Lord Protector of England, led a punitive expedition to Ireland.
- 337.6: a quotation from the "Last Lines" of the Irish poet Egan O'Rahilly (1670–1726), following the translation of Frank O'Connor in *The Wild Bird's Nest: Poems from the Irish* (1932) except for "served" rather than "followed." Literally, "The princes under whom my ancestor was before the death of Christ."
- 337.12: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 337.18: a story included in *Lives of the ten orators*, spuriously assigned to the Greek philosopher and biographer Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120): having hidden a stolen fox under his clothes, a Spartan boy allows it to gnaw him to death rather than be detected in his crime.
- 338: during the trial and subsequent appeals of Sir Roger Casement (1864–1916), accused of bringing arms to Ireland from Germany, rumors were circulated about the existence of certain diaries by Casement depicting his homosexual activities. In *The Forged Casement Diaries* (1936), the Irish-American physician and writer William J. Maloney (1881–1952) claimed that the diaries had been forged by the British and that Sir Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice (1859–

- 1918), British Ambassador to America, had helped to circulate the rumors to turn public opinion against Casement.
- 339: see note to poem 338.
- 339.4: John Bull is a popular name for the English nation personified.
- 339.21: the establishment of the British Empire in India is traditionally dated 1757; India did not achieve dominion status until 1947.
- 339.31: the Casements were established in County Antrim in the early eighteenth century.
- 340: the O'Rahilly (1875–1916) – that is, the head of the O'Rahilly clan – was killed during the Easter Rebellion against British rule in Ireland.
- 340.12: Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) and James Connolly (1868–1916), described in some detail in poem 193, were among the leaders of the Easter Rebellion.
- 340.14: the O'Rahilly was from County Kerry.
- 340.31: the O'Rahilly was shot in Henry Street (alongside the General Post Office), the scene of some of the heaviest fighting during the Easter Rebellion.
- 341: Parnellites are followers of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91), who was the dominant figure in Irish politics from 1879 until November 1890, when his liaison with Mrs. Katherine O'Shea (1845–1921) became public knowledge and the majority of his party repudiated his leadership.
- 341.27: Captain William Henry O'Shea (1840–1905). Yeats claimed that *Parnell Vindicated: The Lifting of the Veil* by the Irish writer and nationalist Henry Harrison (1867–1954) “proved beyond controversy . . . that Captain O'Shea knew of their liaison from the first; that he sold his wife for money and for other substantial advantages; that for £20,000, could Parnell have raised that sum, he was ready to let the divorce proceedings go, not against Parnell, but himself. . . .”
- 344: see note to poem 341.
- 348.6: Lough Derg, a small lake on the borders of County Donegal and County Fermanagh, is known as “St. Patrick's Purgatory,” as St. Patrick is alleged to have fasted there and received a vision of the next world. It is the site of the most important pilgrimage in Ireland.
- 348.7: a series of representations (usually fourteen) of the stages of Christ's passion and crucifixion.
- 348.13: in Catholic theology, Purgatory is the state after death in which the soul destined for heaven is purified of taint.
- 349: based on a story about Richard Martin (1754–1834), member of the Irish Parliament (1776–1800) and Colonel of the Galway Volunteers.
- 349.1–3: in the version included by Lady Gregory in *The Kiltartan History Book* (1926), the Colonel “went travelling through England and France and Spain and Portugal.”
- 349.43: the “rich man” was John Petrie of Soho, a district in London.
- 349.46: presumably a circuit court in Galway, though in fact the case was decided by Lord Kenyon in the Guildhall in London in 1797.
- 349.49: Martin was awarded £10,000.

- 350: Poet Laureate is the title given to the poet who receives a stipend as an officer of the English Royal Household; he is expected to provide poems for official occasions, such as coronations and weddings. The Poet Laureate at the time was John Masefield (1878–1967), who had composed “A Prayer for the King’s Reign” (*The Times* [London], 28 April 1937) to celebrate the accession of George VI (1895–1952). George became king when his brother Edward VIII (1894–1972) abdicated to marry Mrs. Wallis Simpson (1896–1986), who was divorced.
- 350.17: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 351.7–8: if a specific allusion, possibly to Denadhach, whom Yeats mentions in the story “Drumcliff and Rosses” (1889): “At Drumcliff there is a very ancient graveyard. The *Annals of the Four Masters* have this verse about a soldier named Denadhach, who died in 871: ‘A pious soldier of the race of Conn lies under hazel crosses at Drumcliff.’ Not very long ago an old woman, turning to go into the churchyard at night to pray, saw standing before her a man in armour, who asked her where she was going. It was ‘the pious soldier of the race of Conn,’ says local wisdom, still keeping watch, with his ancient piety, over the graveyard.”
- 352.6: “to perne” is to move with a circular, spinning motion; see also Yeats’s note on “unpacks the loaded pern,” pp. 458–9.
- 353.8: in Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the patrons of arts and sciences.
- 354: the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin. Yeats described the poem as “about the Ireland that we have all served, and the movement of which I have been a part,” noting that “in those rooms of the Municipal Gallery I saw Ireland in spiritual freedom. . . .” Some of the identifications of specific paintings offered below are less than certain, and the extent to which Yeats intended to describe a particular work is also open to question, as in ll. 8–10.
- 354.2: the first painting is probably *The Men of the West* by Sean Keating (1889–?); the second is *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* by Sir John Lavery (1856–1941).
- 354.3–4: *The Court of Criminal Appeal* by Lavery; Sir Roger Casement (1864–1916) was executed on 3 August 1916 by the English for attempting to bring arms to Ireland from Germany.
- 354.4: probably *Arthur Griffith* by Lavery; Griffith (1871–1922) was an Irish political leader.
- 354.5–7: *Kevin O’Higgins* by Lavery; for O’Higgins, see Yeats’s note to *The Wind-ing Stair and Other Poems*, pp. 461–2.
- 354.8–10: *The Blessing of the Colours* by Lavery, though the stanzaic division and the punctuation suggest two pictures, not one.
- 354.13–16: perhaps *Lady Charles Beresford* by John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), an American artist who worked mainly in England. Lady Beresford (ca. 1853–1922) was the wife of Charles William de la Poer, Baron Beresford of Metemmeh and Curraghmore, County Waterford.
- 354.21: *Robert Gregory* by the English artist Charles Shannon (1863–1937). Robert Gregory (1881–1918) was Lady Gregory’s only child; a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, he was killed in action in Italy on 23 January 1918.



- 354.21-22: probably *Sir Hugh Lane* by Sargent. Hugh Lane (1875-1915), a nephew of Lady Gregory, was an art collector who founded the Municipal Gallery in 1907.
- 354.22: the quotation is from the dedication in the first edition of William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609): "To the onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets Mr. W.H. all happinesse and that eternite promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth."
- 354.23: the "living" Hazel Lavery (d. 1935) is probably Lavery's *Portrait of Lady Lavery*, though Yeats may also be thinking of his *Hazel Lavery* and *Lady Lavery*; the "dying" portrait is Lavery's *The Unfinished Harmony*.
- 354.25: *Lady Gregory* by Antonio Mancini (1852-1930); Lady Gregory (1852-1932) was a close friend of Yeats's who collaborated on many of his plays.
- 354.26: Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-69), Dutch painter and etcher.
- 354.39-40: cf. ll. 216-17 of "The Ruins of Time" by the English poet Edmund Spenser (1552?-99), included by Yeats in his *Poems of Spenser* (1906): "He is now gone, the whiles the Foxe is crept / Into the hole, the which the badger swept." Yeats printed ll. 183-224 of "The Ruins of Time" under the title "The Death of the Earl of Leicester."
- 354.44: in Greek mythology, the giant Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Earth, grows stronger when in contact with the earth.
- 354.48-49: *John M. Synge* by Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats (1839-1922); John Millington Synge (1871-1909) was an Irish playwright and friend of Yeats. The quotation is apparently based on Synge's poem "Prelude," especially l. 7 ("did but half remember human words").
- 355.9-10: Yeats's great-grandfather, John Yeats (1774-1846), Rector of Drumcliff Church in County Sligo.
- 355.11-13: In 1835 William Butler Yeats (1806-62), Yeats's grandfather, married Jane Grace Corbet (1811-76), daughter of William Corbet (1757-1824) and Grace Armstrong Corbet (1774-1864). Robert Corbet (?-1872), Yeats's great-uncle, lived at Sandymount Castle on the outskirts of Dublin with his mother (Grace Armstrong Corbet) and his aunt, Jane Armstrong Clendenin. Yeats was born at Sandymount.
- 355.14: William Pollexfen (1811-92), Yeats's maternal grandfather, a ship-owner and merchant.
- 355.15: William Middleton (ca. 1770-1832), Yeats's maternal great-grandfather, a ship-owner, merchant, and possibly smuggler. In 1773 Benjamin Yeats (Yeats's great-great-grandfather) married Mary Butler (1751-1834), who was connected with the Irish Ormondes, the Butler family of great wealth and power that had settled in Ireland in the twelfth century.
- 355.22-23: in *Pauline* (1883), the English poet Robert Browning (1812-89) refers to "an old hunter / Talking with gods" (ll. 323-34).

[*Last Poems*]: eight of these poems were published in periodicals during Yeats's lifetime. Together with poems published posthumously in periodicals and unpublished poems, they were collected in *Last Poems and Two Plays* (1939).

- which also included the plays *The Death of Cuchulain* and *Purgatory*. The different contents and order of *Last Poems & Plays* (1940) were not authorized by Yeats.
- 356: Ben Bulbin is a mountain in County Sligo, north of the town of Sligo. It is associated with some of the events in the Fenian cycle of Irish mythology, especially the death of Diarmuid.
- 356.1-2: the area around Lake Mareotis (in Egypt, south of Alexandria) is associated with the rise of Christian monasticism in the fourth century.
- 356.3: the titular character in "The Witch of Atlas" (1824) by the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822).
- 356.25-26: in his *Jail Journal* (1854), the Irish nationalist John Mitchel (1815-75) asked, "Give us war in our time, O Lord!"
- 356.43: the Greek philosopher Plotinus (205-269/70), said by Eunapius to have been born in Egypt. Plotinus argued that art imitates not "natural objects" but the "Ideas from which Nature itself derives."
- 356.44: Phidias (ca. 490-ca. 432 B.C.), Greek sculptor.
- 356.45-47: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Italian artist. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel includes a depiction of Adam about to be touched into life by God.
- 356.53: artists of fifteenth-century Italy.
- 356.64: Edward Calvert (1799-1883), English artist; possibly George Wilson (1848-90) but probably Richard Wilson (1714-82), English artists; William Blake (1757-1827), English poet and engraver; Claude Lorrain (1600-82), French artist.
- 356.66: Samuel Palmer (1805-81), English artist. Describing Blake's illustrations to Thornton's *Virgil* and alluding to Hebrews 4.9, Palmer wrote that "they are like all that wonderful artist's work the drawing aside of the fleshly curtain, and the glimpse which all the most holy, studious saints and sages have enjoyed, of that rest which remaineth to the people of God."
- 356.84-87: Yeats's great-grandfather, the Reverend John Yeats, "Parson John" (1774-1846), Rector of Drumcliff Church in County Sligo, 1841-46. Yeats was reinterred in Drumcliff on 17 September 1948, the tombstone bearing the epitaph of ll. 92-94.
- 357.1: a fictitious character.
- 357.2: in Irish mythology, Manannán mac Lir is a god associated with the sea and the Land of the Young.
- 357.I.19: Crazy Jane is the persona of poems 268-74.
- 357.II.1: Henry Middleton, a cousin of Yeats, lived alone in a supposedly haunted house called Elsinore at Rosses Point in County Sligo.
- 357.II.20: the Green Lands are the unfenced part of Rosses Point from Deadman's Point inland, in County Sligo.
- 357.III.2, 5-6: during the 1916 Easter Rebellion, much of the fighting took place around the City Hall and especially the General Post Office.
- 357.III.11: the actor Seán Connolly had first appeared at the Abbey Theatre in 1913.
- 357.III.24-26: the idea of blood sacrifice is common in the writings of Patrick

- Pearse (1879–1916), Irish writer and patriot, executed for his part in the Easter Rebellion.
- 358.7: as P. W. Joyce notes in *A Social History of Ancient Ireland* (1903), “occasionally the bodies of kings and chieftains were buried in a standing posture, arrayed in full battle costume, with the face turned toward the territories of their enemies.”
- 359: Cuchulain is the chief hero of the Ulster Cycle of Irish stories.
- 359.7–9: probably not a specific allusion, but reminiscent of the Myth of Er in Plato’s *Republic*, in which unborn souls have placed before them “lots and samples of life.”
- 360.1.23: presumably Red Hugh O’Donnell (ca. 1571–1602), who fought against the English in the rebellion which ended with the Battle of Kinsale (1601–02).
- 360.1.24: presumably Hugh O’Neill (1550–1616), who led the Irish forces in the rebellion and whose departure from Ireland along with his followers in 1607 became known as “The Flight of the Earls”; and his nephew Owen Roe O’Neill (ca. 1590–1649), who commanded the Confederation of Kilkenny and defeated the Scots in the Battle of Benburb in 1646.
- 360.1.25: Robert Emmet (1778–1803), Irish patriot executed for his part in an abortive rebellion in 1803. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91), Irish political leader; he lost power in 1890 after the discovery of his liaison with Mrs. Katharine O’Shea.
- 360.11.4: in Greek mythology, Troy is destroyed by the Greeks during the Trojan War, fought over the abduction of Helen by Paris.
- 361: Tara, in County Meath, inaugural place of kings of the Uí Néill dynasty of the fifth century and later, who aspired to rule all Ireland and encouraged a literary cult of Tara as a primordial capital.
- 362.2: the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (ca. 582–ca. 507 B.C.) developed a theory of numbers.
- 362.14: the Greeks defeated the Persians at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C.
- 362.15: Phidias (ca. 490–ca. 432 B.C.), Greek sculptor.
- 362.17–18: as he indicated in a letter of 28 June 1938, Yeats suggests that the conquest of northwest India by Alexander the Great in 326 B.C. resulted in a Greek influence on the traditional representations of Buddha.
- 362.19: the titular character in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603–04).
- 362.24: Grimalkin is a name for a cat, often with fiendish connotations. Gautama Siddhartha (ca. 563–ca. 483 B.C.), known as the Buddha (“the enlightened one”), Indian philosopher, founder of Buddhism.
- 362.25–26: Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) was one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rebellion; the Irish forces had their headquarters in the General Post Office. Cuchulain is the major hero of the Ulster cycle of Irish stories.
- 363: the Delphic Oracle is the supreme oracle in Greek mythology.
- 363.1: “There” is Elysium, to which in Greek mythology certain favored heroes are translated by the gods and are exempt from death.
- 363.5–6: in Irish mythology, Niamh is a woman of the Sidhe who entices Oisín into her realm, an event described in poem 375.

- 363.8: Pythagoras (ca. 582–ca. 507 B.C.), Greek philosopher.
- 363.9: Plotinus (205–269/70), Greek philosopher. His journey to Elysium is described in poem 292.
- 363.15: in the final text, “Those Innocents” presumably refers to the immortals described in the first stanza, re-living their journey to Elysium. However, most commentators have preferred the reading of the penultimate typescript in the National Library of Ireland, “The Holy Innocents” – the children of Bethlehem murdered by order of Herod the Great in an attempt to kill the infant Christ (Matt. 2.16–18).
- 363.20: in classical mythology, dolphins escort the dead to paradise.
- 363.25: in Greek mythology, nymphs are female nature spirits.
- 363.26: in Greek mythology, Peleus captures and weds Thetis, one of the Nereids (sea-nymphs).
- 363.31: in Greek mythology, the god Pan is associated with fertility; he is often depicted as loving caverns and is traditionally half-goatish in shape.
- 363.35: in Greek mythology, satyrs are masculine, bestial spirits of woods and hills.
- 364.5: Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (63 B.C.–A.D. 14), first Roman emperor.
- 364.11ff.: given the allusion to *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (1604) by the English playwright Christopher Marlowe (1564–93) – “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” (V.i.94–95) – this stanza presumably describes Helen of Troy, whose abduction by Paris led to the Trojan War and the destruction of Troy.
- 364.21–26: one of the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) depicts God about to touch into life Adam, the first man in the Bible.
- 365.7: hysteria, causing suffocation or choking.
- 365.13: in *The Nature of Existence* (1921), the philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart (1866–1925) argues that “all substances are compound.”
- 366.2: the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ in the Christian religion.
- 366.3: St. Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary.
- 368: fictitious characters.
- 368.21: Irish *craiceann a chur ar scéal*, “to put a skin on a story”: to put a finish or polish on it, to make it plausible.
- 368.26–27: Adam, the first man in the Bible, was expelled from the Garden of Eden because of disobedience (Gen. 2.15–3.24).
- 368.33: a halfpenny, a small amount of money.
- 369.9: Malachi (“my messenger”) is the supposed author of the last book of the Old Testament in the Bible; St. Malachy (1095–1148) is an Irish saint, known for his reforms; Malachi Mulligan is the name applied to Yeats’s friend Oliver St. John Gogarty (1878–1957) by James Joyce (1882–1941) in *Ulysses* (1922).
- 371.1–2: a description of the birth of Christ. See Yeats’s note on “The Mother of God,” p. 462.
- 371.4: Ferdinand-Victor-Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), French painter.
- 371.6: Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), English writer.

- 371.8: Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905), English actor, best known for his Shakespearean roles.
- 371.10: François Joseph Talma (1763–1826), French actor.
- 372.1: a glen on the side of Knocknarea, a mountain in County Sligo.
- 372.11–12: *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, first produced by the Irish National Dramatic Company in Dublin on 2 April 1902. Yeats refers to the 1916 Easter Rebellion. In *Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language* (1936), the Irish writer Stephen Gwynn noted that “the effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out and shoot and be shot.”
- 372.14: presumably the English poet and actress Margot Ruddock (1907–51), whose breakdown is alluded to in “A Crazy Girl” (poem 335).
- 372.16: probably Coole, the home of Lady Gregory. After her death in 1932, the house (owned by the Irish Forestry Department) fell into disrepair; it was sold to a contractor and demolished after Yeats’s death, in 1942.
- 373.10–16: “The Wanderings of Oisín” (poem 375) recounts the Irish myth of Oisín’s sojourns in her realm with Niamh, a woman of the Sidhe.
- 373.18: in *The Countess Cathleen*, first produced by the Irish Literary Theatre on 8 May 1899 (with Maud Gonne in the title role), the Countess sells her soul to the devil to ransom the souls of her starving people but is saved at the end.
- 373.25: at the end of *On Baile’s Strand*, first produced by the Irish National Theatre Society on 27 December 1904, Cuchulain, having unknowingly killed his son, fights the waves while the Fool and the Blind Man go off to steal from the ovens.
- 374: Yeats found the quotation from the German writer Thomas Mann (1875–1955) in “Public Speech and Private Speech in Poetry,” an article in the *Yale Review* (March 1938) by the American writer Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982) that also commented on Yeats’s works.

*Narrative and Dramatic*: a heading for poems 375–82 in the *Collected Poems* (1933).

- 375: see Yeats’s note, p. 463. Yeats described Oisín, the son of Finn, as “the poet of the Fenian cycle of legend.” The epigraph is presumably attributed to the Czech painter Josef Tůma (1846–?), although the source for the statement remains untraced. Edwin J. Ellis (1848–1916) collaborated with Yeats on an edition of Blake in 1893.
- 375.I.1: St. Patrick (ca. 385–ca. 461) was primarily responsible for introducing Christianity into Ireland.
- 375.I.13: Fionn mac Cumhail is the central figure in the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, which also depicts Caoilte and Conán Mail (“the bald” or “crop-headed”). For Caoilte, see Yeats’s note on “The Secret Rose,” pp. 456–7.
- 375.I.15: hounds of Finn, although Bran and Sceolan are also his cousins, his maternal aunt Uirne having been transformed into a hound while pregnant.
- 375.I.16: in Irish mythology, the Fírbolgs are a race of invaders.
- 375.I.18: for Maeve’s burial site, see Yeats’s note on “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” p. 454.

- 375.I.21: *fondruine*, from Old Irish *find-bruine*, literally "white bronze"; apparently an amalgam of either copper or gold with silver.
- 375.I.41-43: Oscar, son of Finn, was killed at the battle of Gabhra (297), called by Yeats "the great battle in which the power of the Fenians was broken."
- 375.I.47: the imagined union of Aegnus, described by Yeats as "the god of youth, beauty, and poetry" in Irish mythology, and the mortal Edain was constructed out of the fragments that until 1930 were all that was known of *Tochmarc Étaíne* ("The Wooing of Etain").
- 375.I.48: Niamh, whose name means "luster" or "brilliance," is a woman of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*.
- 375.I.53: in Irish mythology, Aengus' kisses are transformed into birds.
- 375.I.63: Yeats explained that the *Tuatha Dé Danann* "were the powers of light and life and warmth, and did battle with the Fomoroh, or powers of night and death and cold. Robbed of offerings and honour, they have gradually dwindled in the popular imagination until they have become the Faeries." See also Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.
- 375.I.116: Yeats noted that the Fenians were "the great military order of which Finn was chief."
- 375.I.156: the Hill of Allen in County Kildare, the home of Finn and the headquarters of the Fenians.
- 375.I.219: Druids were ancient Celtic priests and medicine men.
- 375.II.84: Yeats explained that "there was once a well overshadowed by seven sacred hazel trees, in the midst of Ireland. A certain lady plucked their fruit, and seven rivers arose out of the well and swept her away. In my poems this well is the source of all the waters of this world, which are therefore sevenfold." Yeats's source for this legend has not yet been traced, though in Irish mythology nine hazels grow over the fountains at the heads of the chief rivers of Ireland.
- 375.II.87: in Irish mythology, Aedh is a god of death, whose harp-playing is fatal.
- 375.II.95: in Irish mythology, Heber is one of the sons of Mile, leader of the Milesians, a race of early invaders of Ireland. Yeats explained that Heber and his brother Heremon "were the ancestors of the merely human inhabitants of Ireland."
- 375.II.128: Ogham script, which represents twenty letters of the alphabet by slashes and notches, preserves the earliest recorded form of the Irish language, dating to as early as the third century. In Irish mythology, Manannán mac Lir is a god associated with the sea and the Land of the Young; he possessed two famous swords. /
- 375.II.134-35: the absent figure is presumably Christ.
- 375.III.53: Yeats described the bell-branch as "a legendary branch whose shaking casts all men into a gentle sleep." A sennachie (*seanchai*) is a reciter of ancient lore.
- 375.III.80: in Irish mythology, Conchubar mac Nessa is king of Ulster and a central figure in the Ulster Cycle. The "demon" is the smith Culann.

- 375.III.89-90: Yeats describes Blanaid as "the heroine of a beautiful and sad story." In Irish mythology, Curaoi assists Cuchulain in the sack of Manainn and claims as his prize Blanaid, daughter of the lord of Manainn. Cuchulain refuses him, but Curaoi carries off Blanaid and defeats Cuchulain when he attempts to retrieve her. Later, Blanaid conspires with Cuchulain to murder Curaoi. Curaoi's harper, Feircheirtne, avenges him by killing Blanaid, committing suicide in the process. Fergus was king of Ulster before Conchubar mac Nessa. Barach entices Fergus to a feast, during which Naoise and his brothers are murdered by Conchubar's forces so that he may win back Deirdre. Fergus was under oath never to refuse an invitation to a feast.
- 375.III.91: in Irish mythology, Balor was a leader of the Fomorians, a race of early invaders of Ireland; a glance from one of his eyes was deadly. Yeats described him as "the leader of the hosts of darkness at the great battle of good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, which was fought out on the strands of Moytura, near Sligo," referring to the Second Battle of Moytura, in which the *Tuatha Dé Danann* defeated the Fomorians.
- 375.III.94: in the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, Grania flees with Diarmuid to escape the love of the aged Finn. See also note to poem 23.
- 375.III.117: an imaginary island in the center of the earth,
- 375.III.160: Rathlin Island, off the coast of County Antrim. Beare or Bere Island, County Cork, said to be named after Béara, supposedly a Spanish princess, the wife of Eoghan Mór ("the Great"), legendary king of Munster.
- 375.III.163: a rath is an ancient Irish fort or dwelling.
- 375.III.167: a "straw death" is "a natural death in one's bed" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
- 375.III.179: *Croabh Ruadh* ("Red Branch"), the building at Emain Macha in which Conchubar and the heroes of the Ulster Cycle lived. Or perhaps Creeveroe in County Antrim. Knocknefin has not been identified, but might be Cnoc Femein ("The Hill of Femen"), for *Síd Femen* ("The Mound of Femen"), headquarters of the supernatural people of Munster, near Slievenamon ("The Mountain of the Women of Femen").
- 375.III.184: for Maeve's burial site, see Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.
- 375.III.198: in Christian tradition, Hell is the abode of the damned.
- 375.III.222: presumably (though anachronistically), the "chain of small stones" is a rosary.
- 376: Maeve, queen of Connacht, is a central figure in the Irish epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne*.
- 376.2: the ancient city of Byzantium was rebuilt as Constantinople by the Roman emperor Constantine I (287?-337).
- 376.11: Maeve's palace was at Cruachan in County Roscommon.
- 376.40: Druids were ancient Celtic priests and medicine men.
- 376.41: for the Sidhe, see Yeats's note on "The Hosting of the Sidhe," p. 454.
- 376.57-58: in the "Pillow Talk" prelude added to the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* in the eleventh century, Maeve, angered that her great white-horned bull had gone

- over to her husband's herds, invades Ulster to try to capture a great brown bull.
- 376.71: in Irish mythology, Fergus is the husband of Ness as well as Maeve's lover.
- 376.77: Magh Ai is a large plain in County Roscommon, dominated by Cruachan.
- 376.78: a note by Yeats to poem 377 refers to the "Great Plain" of the Otherworld.
- 376.84: Yeats described Aengus as "The god of youth, beauty, and poetry. He reigned in Tir-nan-Oge, the country of the young."
- 376.92: the Maini, who traditionally number either seven or eight, are usually understood as the children of Maeve and Ailill, queen and king of Connacht in Irish mythology.
- 376.93: Ethal Anbual, from the Sidhe of Connacht, father of Caer.
- 376.101: in Irish mythology, Aengus' kisses are transformed into birds.
- 377.5: Baile was the son of Buan, an Ulster goddess, and Mesgedra, king of Leinster. Uladh is Ulster.
- 377.7: Lugaid was the son of Curaoi, king of Munster.
- 377.13: Jesus Christ, son of God in the Christian religion.
- 377.14-15: in the "Pillow Talk" prelude added to the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* in the eleventh century, Maeve, angered that her great white-horned bull had gone over to her husband's herds, invades Ulster to try to capture a great brown bull.
- 377.16-17: in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), Lady Gregory explains that although Baile "had but little land belonging to him, he was the heir of Ulster, and every one that saw him loved him, both man and woman, because he was so sweet-spoken; and they called him Baile of the Honey Mouth."
- 377.18: Emain Macha, the capital of heroic-age Ulster.
- 377.21: Cuchulain's homeland, a plain in County Louth.
- 377.35: fictitious characters.
- 377.73: in Irish mythology, Cuchulain's original name was Setanta. After he killed the ferocious hound of the smith Culann and offered to take its place, he was named "the Hound of Culann," or Cuchulain.
- 377.76: in Irish mythology, Deirdre (daughter of Fedlimid, Conchubar's storyteller) elopes with Naoise, choosing him over Conchubar; lured back to Ireland, Naoise and his brothers are killed by Conchubar's forces.
- 377.117: Ogham script, which represents twenty letters of the alphabet by slashes and notches, preserves the earliest recorded form of the Irish language, dating to as early as the third century.
- 377.118: *Clanna Rudraige* ("descendants of Rudraige") is a term for the Ulster heroes other than Cuchulain, used in later Ulster tales, after genealogists had invented a pedigree for them, through Rudraige, from Ír, son of Mil.
- 377.123: in a note to this poem, Yeats indicates that "'The Great Plain' is the Land of the Dead and of the Happy; it is also called 'The Land of the Living Heart,' and many beautiful names besides."
- 377.130: Dun Ailinne, a hill-fort in County Kildare, one of the seats of the kings of Leinster; Leighin (*Laighin*) is Leinster.



- 377.142-43: in Irish mythology, Midhir, a king of the Sidhe, brought a second wife, Edain, home to his first wife, Fuamnach, who transformed Edain into a purple fly, which was carried by a wind to the house of Aengus, the god of love. In a note to this poem, Yeats explains that Edain "took refuge once upon a time with Aengus in a house of glass, and there I have imagined her weaving harp-strings out of Aengus' hair."
- 377.161-65: in Irish mythology, the four cities from which the *Tuatha Dé Danann* come to Ireland. In a note to this poem, Yeats calls them "cities of learning out of sight of the world, where they found their four talismans, the spear, the stone, the cauldron, and the sword."
- 377.182: in Irish mythology, Aengus' kisses are transformed into birds.
- 377.194: the battle between Cuchulain and Ferdidad in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*.
- 378-80: see Yeats's note, p. 463. Lady Gregory (1852-1932) was a close friend of Yeats and collaborated on many of his plays.
- 378.1: Coole Park, the estate of Lady Gregory, near Gort, County Galway.
- 378.2: probably *Sean-bhalla*, "old wall"; perhaps *Sean-bhealach*, "old road."
- 378.4: *Coill Dorcha*, "Dark Wood"; *Coill na gCnó*, "The Wood of the Nuts."
- 378.7: *Páirc na Laoi*, "The Field of the Calves."
- 378.9: *Páirc na Carraige*, "The Field of the Rock," or *Páirc na gCarraig*, "The Field of the Stones."
- 378.11: *Páirc na dTarbh*, "The Field of the Bulls."
- 378.13: [*Coill na*] *n-Insí*, "The Wood of the Watermeadows."
- 378.15: described by Yeats as "a famous Clare witch," Biddy Early died ca. 1880.
- 378.22: characters in *The Shadowy Waters*.
- 378.29-30: in Christian tradition, Adam and Eve live in Eden before the Fall of Man.
- 379: in Irish mythology, Midhir, a king of the Sidhe, brought a second wife, Edain, home to his first wife, Fuamnach, who transformed Edain into a purple fly, which was carried by a wind to the house of Aengus, the god of love. In a note to poem 377, Yeats explains that Edain "took refuge once upon a time with Aengus in a house of glass, and there I have imagined her weaving harp-strings out of Aengus' hair." The reference to a "house of glass" ("tower of glass" in the poem) may derive from a kind of cage which Aengus used to hold Edain in her metamorphosed form; in *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, 2nd ed. (1892), John Rhys describes it as "a glass *grianan* or sun-bower, where she fed on fragrance and the bloom of odoriferous flowers."
- 379.4: Druids were ancient Celtic priests and medicine men.
- 380.9: a fictitious character.
- 380.129: a fictitious character.
- 380.162: Druids were ancient Celtic priests and medicine men.
- 380.169: the Irish game of hurling.
- 380.404: a mythical early king of Britain (probably loosely based on a chieftain or general named Arthur of the fifth to sixth centuries).
- 380.406-08: in "Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway," in Douglas

Hyde's edition and translation of *Giolla an Fhiughra or, The Lad of the Ferule (and) Eachtra Cloinne Righ na h-Ioruaidhe or, The Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway* (1899), "Golden-armed Iollan, son of the King of Almain," attempts to win the love of "the daughter of the King-Under-Wave"; he and his twelve foster-brothers are enchanted by a "little man [with] a gentle-stringed harp" and behead each other.

- 381: in Irish mythology, Midhir, a king of the Sidhe, brought a second wife, Edain, home to his first wife, Fuamnach, who transformed Edain into a purple fly, which was carried by a wind to the house of Aengus, the god of love. Aengus contrived a crystal house to carry Edain about in, but Fuamnach, learning where Edain was hidden, conjured a second wind to blow the fly out of the house. After blowing about in the winds for 1,012 years, the fly was swallowed by a woman who became pregnant and bore a reincarnated Edain. This reborn Edain married Eochaid Airem (Echoaid the Ploughman), king of Tara, but Midhir in a board-game with Eochaid won the right to embrace Edain. Midhir and Edain, in the shape of birds, flew out through the smoke-hole of the king's house and returned to the mounds. Eochaid dug up the mounds to regain her, but was duped into accepting her identical daughter as his wife, while Edain remained with Midhir.
- 381.2: Tara, in County Meath, inaugural place of kings of the Uí Néill dynasty of the fifth century and later, who aspired to rule all Ireland and encouraged a literary cult of Tara as a primordial capital.
- 381.20: the Ruwenzori, a mountain range in central Africa.
- 381.83: Ogham script, which represents twenty letters of the alphabet by slashes and notches, preserves the earliest recorded form of the Irish language, dating to as early as the third century.
- 381.113: Loughlan (*Lochlann*) is Scandinavia.
- 382: Hārūn al-Rashid (766–809) was Caliph of Baghdad from 786 until his death. Yeats described the poem as "part of an unfinished set of poems, dialogues and stories between John Ahern and Michael Robartes, Kusta ben Luka, a philosopher of Bagdad, and his Bedouin followers." In a longer note, Yeats related the poem to the fictional frame of *A Vision* (1925). For Aherne and Robartes, see Yeats's note on poems 183 and 188–89, p. 459.
- 382.1: Ḳuṣṭā ben Lūḳā (d. ca. 912–13) was a doctor and a translator.
- 382.2: Abd Al-Rabban, called "Faristah" in the first printing of the poem, remains untraced.
- 382.6: The Abbasid Caliphs ruled from 750–1258. Yeats explained that their banners "were black as an act of mourning for those who had fallen in battle at the establishment of the dynasty."
- 382.9: the ancient city of Byzantium was rebuilt as Constantinople by the Roman emperor Constantine I (287?–337).
- 382.12: Sappho (fl. ca. 610–ca. 580 B.C.), Greek poet.
- 382.16: Parmenides (ca. 514 B.C.–?), Greek philosopher.
- 382.22: Bedouin, Arabic for "tent-dwellers," nomad peoples of interior Arabia.
- 382.30–32: Hārūn al-Rashid's vizier from 786–803 was Yahyā, of the Barāmika,



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