

## **William Butler Yeats and the Landscapes of Galway and Sligo**

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As part of the description for our trip, I promised we would read poetry and other literary excerpts “on location.” Something quite special happens when you do this—the literature comes alive in a new way, no matter how well you know the excerpt. The poetry of William Butler Yeats works especially well when read on site; on the student trips to Ireland, there are often two or three students vying for the right to read a Yeats poem on site, to read “Under Ben Bulbin” “Under Ben Bulbin the mountain, or to read “The Wild Swans at Colle” at Coole Park (Yeats’s friend Lady Augusta Gregory’s estate) by the lake with “nine and fifty swans” in the background.

“Yeats Country” includes both County Sligo and County Galway. Here is a collection of poems by Yeats that are connected with the landscapes we will visit in both locations. I’ve also included a few poems by other people who were part of Yeats’s and Lady Augusta Gregory’s circle or who wrote about these places in another era.

Some of you have expressed fear or even dislike of poetry, but are eager to try again. Read these poems the first time for pleasure: enjoy the words and sounds, rhythms, and repetitions. Try reading them aloud to yourself. You may not get much in the way of meaning at first, but enjoy a phrase or image that speaks to you. If you want to go further, look up some of the people and place names. Note where sentences begin and end. Look for repetitions or other means of emphasizing a word or an image. I loved “The Wild Swans at Coole” for decades before I ever learned anything about its origins or possible interpretations. Poetry should work that way—it should speak to you, even if only in a phrase or image at first.

### **Galway**

In the 1890s, Yeats met Lady Augusta Gregory who would become his friend, patron, and business partner in the founding of the Abbey Theatre, the world’s first national theatre. Lady Gregory was also a fine writer and translator of Gaelic. Her Galway estate, Coole Park, was a gathering place for the writers and thinkers of the day, including Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Sean O’Casey, George Moore, J. M. Synge, and others, many of whom inscribed their names on the famous “Autograph Tree.” The house is no longer standing, but the estate is now a beautiful park, where we will make sure to see “The Wild Swans at Coole” and the “Seven Woods” that Yeats made famous in poetry. Yeats eventually bought and restored a Norman tower, “Thoor Ballylee,” a couple of miles away where he lived with his family and wrote some of his most famous poems. We will read works by Yeats and Gregory that were inspired by this landscape and visit Coole Park and Thoor Ballylee, along with other places in nearby County

Clare such as the Cliffs of Moher and The Burren that make this area one of the most stunning in Ireland.

### **Sligo**

Some of Yeats's most memorable poems explore the mythology and landscape of County Sligo, where he spent many happy months as a child and young man and where he was buried at his request in Drumcliff Churchyard "Under bare Ben Bulbin's head" in the shadow of the great mountain. We'll read these poems and visit some of the places that inspired them: the "Lake Isle of Innisfree," Dooney Rock where "The Fiddler of Dooney" dances "like a wave of the sea," Glencar Waterfall and Sleuth Woods that are part of the magical landscape of "The Stolen Child," and the elegant Lissadell House, "that old Georgian mansion," where Yeats met the Gore-Booth sisters Constance and Eva, one a future revolutionary, the other a future poet and suffragist.

### **Yeats in Galway at Coole Park and Thoor Ballylee**

Coole Park was the name of Lady Augusta Gregory's home near Gort in County Galway. Her husband died in 1881, leaving her to manage the considerable estate on behalf of their only child, Robert Gregory. Lady Gregory (1852-1932) was Yeats' friend and patron and collaborated with him on many writing projects. She learned Irish from the locals and became a scholar and advocate for the language. She wrote plays and poetry in English and with Yeats and others founded the Irish National Theatre, The Abbey, the first national theatre in the world.



From the 1890s until the 1920s, Coole was a gathering place for writers and artists, including George Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey, J. M. Synge, and many others whose names can still be seen carved in the bark of the "Autograph Tree" in the walled garden. The "Seven Woods" were areas of the parkland and are marked as such today. The house is no longer standing, but the beautiful and extensive grounds are now a park, and wild swans still gather on Coole Lake.

Yeats wrote "The Wild Swans at Coole" in 1916 right after finishing "Easter, 1916" while staying at Coole with Lady Gregory. Besides being a beautiful and moving poem about swans, it is thought to be a "turning point" poem, a poem that marks a transition in his style, imagery, subject matter, thinking, love life, and politics.

### 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.

### 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  
 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,  
 Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
 They paddle in the cold,  
 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?



In 1917 Yeats purchased a dilapidated Norman tower a few miles from Coole and set about restoring it as he was getting ready to marry Georgie Hyde-Lees. He called it Thoor Ballylee. Over the coming years, he would write many important poems here, some of them reflecting the landscape and architecture of his home. Consequently, the poet Seamus Heaney has called Thoor Ballylee “the most important public building in Ireland.” In Yeats time and our own, the low-lying land here, heavy rains, and the river that runs by the castle have caused extensive flooding. The tower was lovingly restored for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Yeats’s birth in 2015, but in the winter of 2016, more flooding occurred. I hope we will be able to visit this historic and beautiful place, the home Yeats lived in more than any other.



Yeats wrote the following poem “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.

### Coole Park 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,  
 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;  
 And is so lovely that it sets to right  
 What knowledge or its lack had set awry,  
 So atrogantly 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  
 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  
 We shift about - all that great glory spent -  
 Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent.

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.

Lady Gregory's son, Major Robert Gregory, was a talented artist and member of the circle that formed around his mother. When World War I broke out, he joined the Connaught Rangers and eventually transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. He was shot down by friendly fire in Italy and died in 1918 just as the war was ending, leaving a wife and three children. He and Yeats did not get along—Robert resented Yeats imposing on his mother's hospitality and Yeats thought Robert wasted his considerable talent—yet Yeats wrote four poems about him, three of which are included below.

### **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 man, nor cheering crowds,  
 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.  
 1919

### 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.

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.

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,  
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.

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  
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  
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.  
 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.

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  
 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.  
 (1919)

**Reprisals**

Some nineteen German planes, they say,  
 You had brought down before you died.  
 We called it a good death. Today  
 Can ghost or man be satisfied?  
 Although your last exciting year  
 Outweighed all other years, you said,  
 Though battle joy may be so dear  
 A memory, even to the dead,  
 It chases other thought away,  
 Yet rise from your Italian tomb,  
 Flit to Kiltartan cross and stay  
 Till certain second thoughts have come  
 Upon the cause you served, that we  
 Imagined such a fine affair:  
 Half-drunk or whole-mad soldiery  
 Are murdering your tenants there.  
 Men that revere your father yet  
 Are shot at on the open plain.  
 Where may new-married women sit  
 And suckle children now? Armed men  
 May murder them in passing by  
 Nor law nor parliament take heed.  
 Then close your ears with dust and lie  
 Among the other cheated dead.



Yeats eventually abandoned Thoor Ballylee. Coole Parke proved too expensive for the Gregory family to maintain, and as Lady Gregory aged, it fell into ruin and was torn down. These late poems reflect decaying houses and old age. He died in 1939 in France and was buried there temporarily because of the war.

### Coole Park

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,  
 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;  
 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,  
 Back turned upon the brightness of the sun  
 And all the sensuality of the shade—  
 A moment's memory to that laurelled head

“The Black Tower” was Yeats’s last poem, another reimagining of the “tower” metaphor and evidence of his preoccupation with death and reputation in his later years.

### **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.

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.

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.  
(1939)

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's "tower" poem takes a very different view of life in a castle. Was she writing back to Yeats when she created "The Lady's Tower"?

### **Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin 1942-**

#### **The Lady's Tower**

Hollow my high tower leans  
Back to the cliff; my thatch  
Converses with the spread sky,  
Heronries. The grey wall  
Slices downward and meets  
A sliding flooded stream  
Pebble-banked, small diving  
Birds. Downstairs my cellars plumb.

Behind me shifting oblique veins  
 Of the hill; my kitchen is damp,  
 Spiders shaded under brown vats.

I hear the stream change pace, glance from the stove  
 To see the punt is now floating freely  
 Bobs square-ended, the rope dead-level.

Opening the kitchen door  
 The quarry brambles miss my hair  
 Sprung so high their fruit wastes.

And up the tall stairs my bed is made  
 Even with a sycamore root  
 At my small window.

All night I lie sheeted, my broom chases down treads  
 Delighted spirals of dust: the yellow duster glides  
 Over shelves, around knobs: bristle stroking flagstone  
 Dancing with the spiders around the kitchen in the dark  
 While cats climb the tower and the river fills  
 A spoonful of light on the cellar walls below.

Austin Clarke was a poet and visitor at Coole Park. He wrote this poem about Coole. The Autograph tree and the bust of Maecenas are still in place in the walled garden.

### **Austin Clarke 1896-1974**

#### **The Echo at Coole**

I stood one day in the great Pleasure Garden  
 At Coole, where the catalpa blossom – handing  
 Out pods in Autumn, long as cigars that George Moore  
 And Edward Martyn smoked after their dinner  
 At Tulira. Sad wilderness of panicles,  
 Roses gone thorning, seven leaves instead  
 Of five, gay, sportive blooms that had lost their seed  
 And names in lengthy Latin. I stared awhile  
 Beneath the copper beech where a railing guarded

Initials, wintered in the bark deep-cut,  
 Of W.B. and Y., A G., A.J.,  
 A.E., and S. O’C.: thinking again  
 How Lady Gregory would drive twelve miles  
 Day after day, sun-reining in a phaeton, along  
 Her avenues—with Phaeton—through the Seven Woods,  
 By alleys of wild privet, lake-lingering,  
 To count the Swans for Willie.

I came to the bust:  
 Maecenas crumbling on his pedestal,  
 Obeyed the clear instructions in that unfinished  
 Poem of Yeats, calling to find the Echo  
 That lives by the high wall at the left-hand corner  
 In private:

‘Echo, whereabouts can you hear  
 From?’

*Here.*

‘My task in the future, can I know?’

*No.*

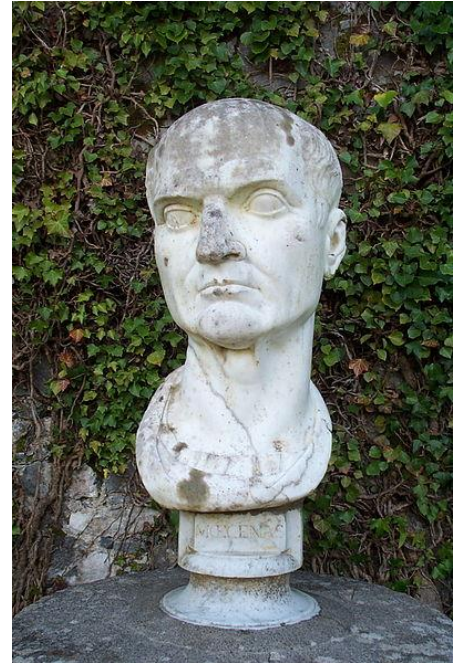
“Must I still hope, still body on?”

*On.*

‘Yet how can I be certain my way is right?  
 Write.

‘Tell me what thoughts had Carroll O’Daly, Swift,  
 Who called on other echoes, lonely as you?’

*Yew.*



### Yeats in County Sligo

As a child and young man, Yeats spent many summer months in Sligo. The landscape in this area is very unusual, with strangely shaped mountains, waterfalls, holy wells, and other natural features as well as manmade earthworks that have never been excavated. It is a landscape rich in mythological associations, especially those pertaining to Queen Maeve, who is said to be buried in a conspicuous mound on top of the mountain or mesa called Knocknarea. The influence of his Sligo days led Yeats to develop an interest in Celtic mythology and folk tales in general. Many of his early great poems focus on such subjects. On our trip, we will visit Dooney Rock, the Lake Isle of Innisfree, and Glencar Waterfall, all mentioned in the poems below.

### Down by the Sally Gardens

It was down by the Sally Gardens, my love and I did meet.  
 She crossed the Sally Gardens with little snow-white feet.  
 She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree,  
 But I was young and foolish, and with her did not agree.

In a field down 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.

Down by the Sally Gardens, my love and I did meet.  
 She crossed the Sally Gardens with little snow-white feet.  
 She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree,  
 But I was young and foolish, and with her did not agree.  
 (1889)

### 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 Moharabuiee.

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,  
 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!'  
 And dance like a wave of the sea.  
 (1899)

### The Stolen Child

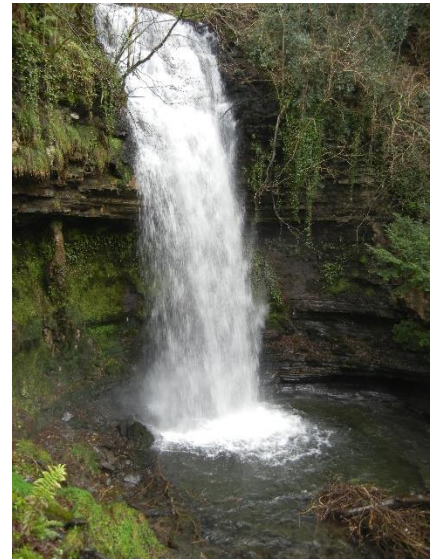
Where dips the rocky highland  
 Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
 There lies a leafy island  
 Where flapping herons wake  
 The drowsy water-rats;  
 There we've hid out faery vats,  
 Full of berries  
 And the reddest stolen cherries.  
*Come away, O human child!*  
*To the waters and the wild*  
*With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

Where the 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  
 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 of 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  
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,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.*



Glen Car Waterfall, setting for *The Stolen Child*

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.  
*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.*  
(1889)

### **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.

\*"Sidhe" means "fairies" or "people of the mounds," where fairies are said to live in a universe parallel to our own

### **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.

### **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;

While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

(1893)

### 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 a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And someone called me by my name:  
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.  
(1899)

\*Allegorical name for Ireland

Lissadell House was the home of the Gore-Booth sisters, Constance and Eva. AS a young man Yeats visited the house and was friends with the two sisters remembered in this poem, both of whom would become famous. Constance married a Polish count, becoming Countess Markievicz. She was active in radical politics, participated in the Easter Rising in Dublin, and was

actually condemned to death until the British authorities thought better of executing a woman. She continued to be a prominent figure in the independence movement. Eva was a widely published writer and artist. She lived most of her life in Britain, where she also participated in radical causes, particularly the women's suffrage movement. Yeats had a difficult time seeing a role for women in politics, as is clear in this poem and in "Easter 1916," where he also criticizes Constance.

### In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz

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 --  
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.



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.  
(1933)

In "The Circus Animals' Desertion" the older Yeats talks about his youthful fascination with myth and legend and his later turn towards more personal, more introspective subject matter for his poems.

### 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  
 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 faery 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.  
 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  
 Cúchulain 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.  
 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.  
 (1939)

Another poem written late in life, "Man and the Echo" examines youthful predilections and ponders the poet's reputation. The "cleft that's christened Alt" is an actual place, a narrow rocky crevice or canyon at the base of the mountain Knocknarea. The subsequent poems all come from this period of self-reflection.

### 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.  
 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,  
 And shirk it in vain. There is no release

In a bodkin or disease,  
 Nor can there be 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  
 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?  
 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.

### **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.

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.  
 (1933)

“Under Ben Bulben” is Yeats’s call to arms for poets and artists. Throughout his life he advocated an expanded role for art in society, seeing it as a source of value and morality. The last four lines of the poem are indeed engraved on a Yeats’s headstone “of limestone quarried near the spot.”

### 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 air in immortality  
 Completeness of their passions won;  
 Now they ride the wintry dawn  
 Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.  
 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 die in his bed  
 Or the rifle knocks him dead,  
 A brief parting from those dear  
 Is the worst man has to fear.  
 Though grave-digger's toil is long,  
 Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,  
 They but thrust their buried men  
 Back in the human mind again.

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,  
 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,  
 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  
 Before the secret working mind:  
 Profane perfection of mankind.  
 Quattrocento put in print  
 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,  
 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  
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 clay  
Through seven heroic centuries;  
Cast your mind on other days  
That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.

VI

Under bare Ben Bulbin'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:  
*Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by!\**  
(1939)