

William Butler Yeats

June 13, 1865-January 28, 1939



Protestant Ascendancy: Privileged Background, favored some sort of Irish independence from England

Studied Irish history and legends; immersed himself in traditional poetic techniques; along with Lady Gregory, founded Abbey Theater

Early works very lyrical, showing influences of English Romantic Poets like William Blake, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley

Protestant by birth, but drawn to Neo-Platonists, Swedenborg, Transcendentalists, spiritualism, the occult, especially as per Madame Blavatsky and Theosophical Society, later leaving the Theosophists to found his own group, The Golden Dawn

First volume, *Crossways*: Irish legend in folk ballads, lyric poems emphasizing landscapes; some written before Yeats was twenty

Sound

What You Hear:

- ▶ Rhyme
- ▶ Meter
- ▶ Alliteration—consonant sounds
- ▶ Assonance—vowel sounds

Sense

How You Understand the Poet's Meaning

- ▶ Diction
- ▶ Connotation
- ▶ Imagery
- ▶ Symbols
- ▶ Allusions
- ▶ Tone



Symbols are vehicles to express a hidden reality.

Through symbols, the artist hopes his reader will transcend to this hidden reality.

This symbolist attitude dovetails with what Yeats has been studying up to this point: Blake, Thoreau, Hindu scriptures, Madame Blavatsky

Down By the Salley Gardens (*Crossways*, 1899)

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (*The Rose* 1893)

By

William Butler Yeats

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 grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.



The Lake Isle of Innisfree, uninhabited, at south end of Lough Gill

The Falling of the Leaves (*Crossways* 1899)

by
William Butler Yeats

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.

The second stanza of Keats' *Ode to Melancholy*:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
 And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
 Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
 Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

The Wild Swans at Coole

(from *The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1919)

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.

- ▶ Unweari'd 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?