

W. B. YEATS

COLLECTED
POEMS

Edited and with an Introduction by
Augustine Martin

ARENA

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.

Your open hand but shows our loss,
For he knew better how to live.
Let Paudecens 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!
December 1912

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.

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.

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,
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

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
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.

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.

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,
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.

Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
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
Upon some lofty rock to stare
Upon the cloudy canopy,
While under its storm-beaten breast
Cried out the hollows of the sea.

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,
Fit to Kiltartan cross and stay
Till certain second thoughts have come
Upon the cause you served, that we

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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.

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 fantasy invent
And murmur it with bated breath, as though
The bounding 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.
They have loud music, hope every day renewed
And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.

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

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Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Tasty delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come –
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
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

I

Ancestral Houses

Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planed 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 wills
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
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.

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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,
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 case
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?

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;

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The stilted water-hen
Crossing stream again
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;

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.

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.

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

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When it was forged. In Sato's house,
Curved like new moon, moon-luminous,
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

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,

Had waking wits; it seemed

Juno's peacock screamed.

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.

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And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
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,
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.

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.

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.

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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.

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.

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.

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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 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,
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,
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.
1923

UNDER BEN BULBEN

I

Swear by what the sages spoke
Round the Marcoic 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 knock 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 muscles strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again.

III

You that Mitchell'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 gender 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 pain
 On backgrounds for a God or Saint
 Gardens where a soul's at ease;

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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 the clay
 Through seven heroic centuries;
 Cast your mind on other days
 That we in coming days may be
 Still the indomitable Irishy.

VI

Under bare Ben Bulbin's head
 In Drumcliff churchyard Years is laid.
 An ancestor was rector there

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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!*

September 4, 1938

THREE SONGS TO THE ONE BURDEN

1

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 ranning
Best please a wandering man.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.
Could Crazy Jane put off old age
And ranning time renew,

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.

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 stilled boys, that burnished chariot,

Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

II

What can I but enumerate old themes?

First that sea-rider Oisin 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;

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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 intervented 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

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.

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.

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