

# The Collected Poems

William Butler Yeats

1889-1939



# Contents

<b>LYRICAL</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CROSSWAYS</b>	<b>5</b>
THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD . . . . .	5
THE SAD SHEPHERD . . . . .	6
THE CLOAK, THE BOAT, AND THE SHOES . . . . .	7
ANASHUYA AND VIJAYA . . . . .	8
THE INDIAN UPON GOD . . . . .	11
THE INDIAN TO HIS LOVE . . . . .	11
THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES . . . . .	12
EPHEMERA . . . . .	13
THE MADNESS OF KING GOLL . . . . .	13
THE STOLEN CHILD . . . . .	16
TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER . . . . .	17
DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS . . . . .	18
THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN . . . . .	18
THE BALLAD OF FATHER O'HART . . . . .	19
THE BALLAD OF MOLL MAGEE . . . . .	20
THE BALLAD OF THE FOXHUNTER . . . . .	22
<b>THE ROSE</b>	<b>26</b>
TO THE ROSE UPON THE ROOD OF TIME . . . . .	26
FERGUS AND THE DRUID . . . . .	26
CUCHULAIN'S FIGHT WITH THE SEA . . . . .	28
THE ROSE OF THE WORLD . . . . .	31
THE ROSE OF PEACE . . . . .	31
THE ROSE OF BATTLE . . . . .	32
A FAERY SONG . . . . .	33
THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE . . . . .	34

A CRADLE SONG . . . . .	34
THE PITY OF LOVE . . . . .	35
THE SORROW OF LOVE . . . . .	35
WHEN YOU ARE OLD . . . . .	36
THE WHITE BIRDS . . . . .	36
A DREAM OF DEATH . . . . .	37
THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN IN PARADISE . . . . .	37
WHO GOES WITH FERGUS? . . . . .	38
THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND . . . . .	38
THE DEDICATION TO A BOOK OF STORIES SELECTED FROM THE IRISH NOVELISTS . . . . .	40
THE LAMENTATION OF THE OLD PENSIONER . . . . .	41
THE BALLAD OF FATHER GILLIGAN . . . . .	41
THE TWO TREES . . . . .	43
TO SOME I HAVE TALKED WITH BY THE FIRE . . . . .	44
TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES . . . . .	45
<b>THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS</b>	<b>49</b>
THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE . . . . .	49
THE EVERLASTING VOICES . . . . .	49
THE MOODS . . . . .	50
THE LOVER TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS HEART . . . . .	50
THE HOST OF THE AIR . . . . .	50
THE FISH . . . . .	52
THE UNAPPEASABLE HOST . . . . .	52
INTO THE TWILIGHT . . . . .	53
THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS . . . . .	53
THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER . . . . .	54
THE HEART OF THE WOMAN . . . . .	54
THE LOVER MOURNS FOR THE LOSS OF LOVE . . . . .	55
HE MOURNS FOR THE CHANGE THAT HAS COME UPON HIM AND HIS BELOVED, AND LONGS FOR THE END OF THE WORLD . . . . .	55
HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE . . . . .	56
HE REPROVES THE CURLEW . . . . .	56
HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY . . . . .	57
A POET TO HIS BELOVED . . . . .	57
HE GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES . . . . .	58

TO HIS HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO FEAR . . . . .	58
THE CAP AND BELLS . . . . .	59
THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG . . . . .	60
THE LOVER ASKS FORGIVENESS BECAUSE OF HIS MANY MOODS . . . . .	60
HE TELLS OF A VALLEY FULL OF LOVERS . . . . .	61
HE TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY . . . . .	61
HE HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE . . . . .	62
HE THINKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE SPOKEN EVIL OF HIS BELOVED . . . . .	62
THE BLESSED . . . . .	62
THE SECRET ROSE . . . . .	64
MAID QUIET . . . . .	65
THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION . . . . .	65
THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR OLD FRIENDS . . .	65
THE LOVER SPEAKS TO THE HEARERS OF HIS SONGS IN COM- ING DAYS . . . . .	66
THE POET PLEADS WITH THE ELEMENTAL POWERS . . . . .	66
HE WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD . . . . .	67
HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN . . . . .	67
HE THINKS OF HIS PAST GREATNESS WHEN A PART OF THE CONSTELLATIONS OF HEAVEN . . . . .	68
THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY . . . . .	68
<b>IN THE SEVEN WOODS</b>	<b>72</b>
IN THE SEVEN WOODS . . . . .	72
THE ARROW . . . . .	72
THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED . . . . .	73
OLD MEMORY . . . . .	73
NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART . . . . .	74
THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS . . . . .	74
ADAM'S CURSE . . . . .	75
RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND . . . . .	76
THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER . . . .	77
UNDER THE MOON . . . . .	77
THE RAGGED WOOD . . . . .	78
O DO NOT LOVE TOO LONG . . . . .	78

THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING ON THE PSALTERIES AND ON THEMSELVES . . . . .	79
THE HAPPY TOWNLAND . . . . .	80
<b>THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER POEMS</b>	<b>84</b>
HIS DREAM . . . . .	84
A WOMAN HOMER SUNG . . . . .	84
WORDS . . . . .	85
NO SECOND TROY . . . . .	86
RECONCILIATION . . . . .	86
KING AND NO KING . . . . .	87
PEACE . . . . .	87
AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE . . . . .	88
THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT . . . . .	88
A DRINKING SONG . . . . .	89
THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME . . . . .	89
ON HEARING THAT THE STUDENTS OF OUR NEW UNIVER- SITY HAVE JOINED THE AGITATION AGAINST IMMORAL LITERATURE . . . . .	89
TO A POET, WHO WOULD HAVE ME PRAISE CERTAIN BAD PO- ETS, IMITATORS OF HIS AND MINE . . . . .	90
THE MASK . . . . .	90
UPON A HOUSE SHAKEN BY THE LAND AGITATION . . . . .	91
AT THE ABBEY THEATRE (Imitated from Ronsard) . . . . .	91
THESE ARE THE CLOUDS . . . . .	92
AT GALWAY RACES . . . . .	92
A FRIEND'S ILLNESS . . . . .	93
ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME . . . . .	93
BROWN PENNY . . . . .	93
<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>97</b>
THE GREY ROCK . . . . .	98
TO A WEALTHY MAN WHO PROMISED A SECOND SUBSCRIP- TION TO THE DUBLIN MUNICIPAL GALLERY IF IT WERE PROVED THE PEOPLE WANTED PICTURES . . . . .	102
SEPTEMBER 1913 . . . . .	103
TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS COME TO NOTHING . . . . .	104
PAUDEEN . . . . .	105

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TO A SHADE . . . . .	105
WHEN HELEN LIVED . . . . .	106
ON THOSE THAT HATED 'THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD', 1907 . . . . .	106
THE THREE BEGGARS . . . . .	107
THE THREE HERMITS . . . . .	109
BEGGAR TO BEGGAR CRIED . . . . .	110
RUNNING TO PARADISE . . . . .	110
THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN . . . . .	111
A SONG FROM 'THE PLAYER QUEEN' . . . . .	115
THE REALISTS . . . . .	116
THE WITCH . . . . .	116
ME PEACOCK . . . . .	116
THE MOUNTAIN TOMB . . . . .	117
TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND . . . . .	117
TWO YEARS LATER . . . . .	118
A MEMORY OF YOUTH . . . . .	118
FALLEN MAJESTY . . . . .	119
FRIENDS . . . . .	119
THE COLD HEAVEN . . . . .	120
THAT THE NIGHT COME . . . . .	121
AN APPOINTMENT . . . . .	121
THE MAGI . . . . .	122
THE DOLLS . . . . .	122
A COAT . . . . .	123
<b>THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE</b> . . . . .	<b>126</b>
THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE . . . . .	126
IN MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY . . . . .	127
AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH . . . . .	131
MEN IMPROVE WITH THE YEARS . . . . .	132
THE COLLAR-BONE OF A HARE . . . . .	133
UNDER THE ROUND TOWER . . . . .	133
SOLOMON TO SHEBA . . . . .	134
THE LIVING BEAUTY . . . . .	135
A SONG . . . . .	135
TO A YOUNG BEAUTY . . . . .	136
TO A YOUNG GIRL . . . . .	137

THE SCHOLARS . . . . .	137
TOM O'ROUGHLEY . . . . .	138
SHEPHERD AND GOATHERD . . . . .	138
LINES WRITTEN IN DEJECTION . . . . .	142
THE DAWN . . . . .	143
ON WOMAN . . . . .	143
THE FISHERMAN . . . . .	145
THE HAWK . . . . .	146
MEMORY . . . . .	146
HER PRAISE . . . . .	147
THE PEOPLE . . . . .	147
HIS PHOENIX . . . . .	149
A THOUGHT FROM PROPERTIUS . . . . .	150
BROKEN DREAMS . . . . .	150
A DEEP-SWORN VOW . . . . .	151
PRESENCES . . . . .	152
THE BALLOON OF THE MIND . . . . .	152
TO A SQUIRREL AT KYLE-NA-NO . . . . .	152
ON BEING ASKED FOR A WAR POEM . . . . .	153
IN MEMORY OF ALFRED POLLEXFEN . . . . .	153
UPON A DYING LADY . . . . .	154
EGO DOMINUS TUUS . . . . .	158
A PRAYER ON GOING INTO MY HOUSE . . . . .	160
THE PHASES OF THE MOON . . . . .	161
THE CAT AND THE MOON . . . . .	165
THE SAINT AND THE HUNCHBACK . . . . .	166
TWO SONGS OF A FOOL . . . . .	166
ANOTHER SONG OF A FOOL . . . . .	168
THE DOUBLE VISION OF MICHAEL ROBARTES . . . . .	168
<b>MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER</b>	<b>174</b>
MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER . . . . .	174
SOLOMON AND THE WITCH . . . . .	175
AN IMAGE FROM A PAST LIFE . . . . .	177
UNDER SATURN . . . . .	178
EASTER 1916 . . . . .	179
SIXTEEN DEAD MEN . . . . .	181
THE ROSE TREE . . . . .	182



ON A POLITICAL PRISONER . . . . .	182
THE LEADERS OF THE CROWD . . . . .	183
TOWARDS BREAK OF DAY . . . . .	184
DEMON AND BEAST . . . . .	185
THE SECOND COMING . . . . .	186
A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER . . . . .	187
A MEDITATION IN TIME OF WAR . . . . .	189
TO BE CARVED ON A STONE AT THOOR BALLYLEE . . . . .	190

**THE TOWER 193**

SAILING TO BYZANTIUM . . . . .	193
THE TOWER . . . . .	194
MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR . . . . .	200
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN . . . . .	207
THE WHEEL . . . . .	212
YOUTH AND AGE . . . . .	212
THE NEW FACES . . . . .	212
A PRAYER FOR MY SON . . . . .	213
TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY . . . . .	214
FRAGMENTS . . . . .	215
LEDA AND THE SWAN . . . . .	216
ON A PICTURE OF A BLACK CENTAUR BY EDMUND DULAC . . . . .	216
AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN . . . . .	217
COLONUS' PRAISE . . . . .	220
WISDOM . . . . .	221
OWEN AHERNE AND HIS DANCERS . . . . .	222
A MAN YOUNG AND OLD . . . . .	224
THE THREE MONUMENTS . . . . .	230
ALL SOULS' NIGHT . . . . .	230

**THE WINDING STAIR AND OTHER POEMS 236**

IN MEMORY OF EVA GORE-BOOTH AND CON MARKIEWICZ . . . . .	236
DEATH . . . . .	237
A DIALOGUE OF SELF AND SOUL . . . . .	237
BLOOD AND THE MOON . . . . .	240
OIL AND BLOOD . . . . .	242
VERONICA'S NAPKIN . . . . .	242
SYMBOLS . . . . .	243

SPILT MILK . . . . .	243
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER . . . . .	243
STATISTICS . . . . .	243
THREE MOVEMENTS . . . . .	244
THE SEVEN SAGES . . . . .	244
THE CRAZED MOON . . . . .	245
COOLE PARK, 1929 . . . . .	246
COOLE PARK AND BALLYLEE, 1931 . . . . .	247
FOR ANNE GREGORY . . . . .	248
SWIFT'S EPITAPH . . . . .	249
AT ALGECIRAS — A MEDITATON UPON DEATH . . . . .	249
THE CHOICE . . . . .	250
MOHINI CHATTERJEE . . . . .	250
BYZANTIUM . . . . .	251
THE MOTHER OF GOD . . . . .	253
VACILLATION . . . . .	253
QUARREL IN OLD AGE . . . . .	257
THE RESULTS OF THOUGHT . . . . .	258
GRATITUDE TO THE UNKNOWN INSTRUCTORS . . . . .	258
REMORSE FOR INTEMPERATE SPEECH . . . . .	259
STREAM AND SUN AT GLENDALOUGH . . . . .	259
 <b>WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS</b>	 <b>263</b>
I CRAZY JANE AND THE BISHOP . . . . .	263
II CRAZY JANE REPROVED . . . . .	264
III CRAZY JANE ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT . . . . .	264
IV CRAZY JANE AND JACK THE JOURNEYMAN . . . . .	265
V CRAZY JANE ON GOD . . . . .	266
VI CRAZY JANE TALKS WITH THE BISHOP . . . . .	267
VII CRAZY JANE GROWN OLD LOOKS AT THE DANCERS . . . . .	267
VIII GIRL'S SONG . . . . .	268
IX YOUNG MAN'S SONG . . . . .	269
X HER ANXIETY . . . . .	269
XI HER CONFIDENCE . . . . .	270
XII LOVE'S LONELINESS . . . . .	270
XIII HER DREAM . . . . .	271
XIV HIS BARGAIN . . . . .	271
XV THREE THINGS . . . . .	272

XVI LULLABY . . . . .	272
XVII AFTER LONG SILENCE . . . . .	273
XVIII MAD AS THE MIST OF SNOW . . . . .	274
XIX THOSE DANCING DAYS ARE GONE . . . . .	274
XX 'I AM OF IRELAND' . . . . .	275
XXI THE DANCER AT CRUACHAN AND CRO-PATRICK . . . . .	276
XXII TOM THE LUNATIC . . . . .	277
XXIII TOM AT CRUACHAN . . . . .	277
XXIV OLD TOM AGAIN . . . . .	278
XXV THE DELPHIC ORACLE UPON PLOTINUS . . . . .	278

**A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 281**

I FATHER AND CHILD . . . . .	281
II BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE . . . . .	281
III A FIRST CONFESSION . . . . .	282
IV HER TRIUMPH . . . . .	282
V CONSOLATION . . . . .	283
VI CHOSEN . . . . .	283
VII PARTING . . . . .	284
VIII HER VISION IN THE WOOD . . . . .	285
IX A LAST CONFESSION . . . . .	286
X MEETING . . . . .	287
XI FROM THE 'ANTIGONE' . . . . .	287

**FROM A FULL MOON IN MARCH 291**

PARNELL'S FUNERAL . . . . .	291
THREE SONGS TO THE SAME TUNE . . . . .	292
ALTERNATIVE SONG FOR THE SEVERED HEAD IN 'THE KING OF THE GREAT CLOCK TOWER' . . . . .	295
TWO SONGS REWRITTEN FOR THE TUNE'S SAKE . . . . .	296
A PRAYER FOR OLD AGE . . . . .	298
CHURCH AND STATE . . . . .	298
SUPERNATURAL SONGS . . . . .	299
I RIBH AT THE TOMB OF BAILE AND AILLINN . . . . .	299
II RIBH DENOUNCES PATRICK . . . . .	300
III RIBH IN ECSTASY . . . . .	300
IV THERE . . . . .	301
V RIBH CONSIDERS CHRISTIAN LOVE INSUFFICIENT . . . . .	301

VI HE AND SHE . . . . .	302
VII WHAT MAGIC DRUM? . . . . .	302
VIII WHENCE HAD THEY COME? . . . . .	303
IX THE FOUR AGES OF MAN . . . . .	303
X CONJUNCTIONS . . . . .	304
XI A NEEDLE'S EYE . . . . .	304
XII MERU . . . . .	304
<b>LAST POEMS</b>	<b>307</b>
THE GYRES . . . . .	307
LAPIS LAZULI . . . . .	308
IMITATED FROM THE JAPANESE . . . . .	309
SWEET DANCER . . . . .	310
THE THREE BUSHES . . . . .	310
THE LADY'S FIRST SONG . . . . .	313
THE LADY'S SECOND SONG . . . . .	313
THE LADY'S THIRD SONG . . . . .	314
THE LOVER'S SONG . . . . .	314
THE CHAMBERMAID'S FIRST SONG . . . . .	315
THE CHAMBERMAID'S SECOND SONG . . . . .	315
AN ACRE OF GRASS . . . . .	315
WHAT THEN? . . . . .	316
BEAUTIFUL LOFTY THINGS . . . . .	317
A CRAZED GIRL . . . . .	317
TO DOROTHY WELLESLEY . . . . .	318
THE CURSE OF CROMWELL . . . . .	319
ROGER CASEMENT . . . . .	320
THE GHOST OF ROGER CASEMENT . . . . .	321
THE O'RAHILLY . . . . .	322
COME GATHER ROUND ME, PARNELLITES . . . . .	323
THE WILD OLD WICKED MAN . . . . .	324
THE GREAT DAY . . . . .	326
PARNELL . . . . .	326
WHAT WAS LOST . . . . .	327
THE SPUR . . . . .	327
A DRUNKEN MAN'S PRAISE OF SOBRIETY . . . . .	327
THE PILGRIM . . . . .	328
COLONEL MARTIN . . . . .	329

A MODEL FOR THE LAUREATE . . . . .	332
THE OLD STONE CROSS . . . . .	333
THE SPIRIT MEDIUM . . . . .	333
THOSE IMAGES . . . . .	334
THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED . . . . .	335
ARE YOU CONTENT? . . . . .	337
THREE SONGS TO THE ONE BURDEN . . . . .	338
IN TARA'S HALLS . . . . .	341
THE STATUES . . . . .	342
NEWS FOR THE DELPHIC ORACLE . . . . .	343
THREE MARCHING SONGS . . . . .	344
LONG-LEGGED FLY . . . . .	347
A BRONZE HEAD . . . . .	348
A STICK OF INCENSE . . . . .	349
JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR MRS. MARY MOORE . . . . .	349
HOUND VOICE . . . . .	351
HIGH TALK . . . . .	351
THE APPARITIONS . . . . .	352
A NATIVITY . . . . .	353
WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD? . . . . .	353
THE STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY . . . . .	354
CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN . . . . .	355
THE CIRCUS ANIMAL DESERTION . . . . .	356
POLITICS . . . . .	357
THE MAN AND THE ECHO . . . . .	358
CUCHULAIN COMFORTED . . . . .	360
THE BLACK TOWER . . . . .	361
UNDER BEN BULBEN . . . . .	362

**NARRATIVE AND DRAMATIC 368**

<b>THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN</b>	<b>370</b>
THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN . . . . .	370
<b>THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE</b>	<b>402</b>
THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE . . . . .	402

<b>BAILE AND AILLINN</b>	<b>409</b>
<b>THE SHADOWY WATERS</b>	<b>418</b>
INTRODUCTORY LINES . . . . .	418
THE HARP OF AENGUS . . . . .	420
THE SHADOWY WATERS A DRAMATIC POEM . . . . .	422
<b>THE TWO KINGS</b>	<b>449</b>
THE TWO KINGS . . . . .	449
<b>THE GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID</b>	<b>457</b>
THE GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID . . . . .	457

**LYRICAL**





**CROSSWAYS**  
**1889**



## 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.  
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.  
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 —  
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.  
Rewording in melodious guile  
Thy fretful words a little while,  
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;  
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.

### 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,  
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  
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;  
And my own talc 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.

### 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  
Sailleth the rover Sorrow,  
All day and night.’  
‘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.'

## 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.

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 carol*

*To mighty Brahma, be 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:  
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?  
*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 carheads*  
*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,  
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.

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;

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,*

*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



Trouble his sleeping: give him dreams of me.

## 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,  
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.*

## 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:

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.

## 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 patt, ere the season of passion forget us,  
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

## 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.'  
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.

'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.'

## THE MADNESS OF KING GOLL

I SAT on cushioned otter-skin:  
My word was law from Ith to Emain,

And shook at Inver Amergin  
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen,  
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.  
'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  
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:  
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;  
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,  
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.*

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  
Through summer's heat and winter's cold.  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.*

## 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*  
*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 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  
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 to 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.  
*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 you can understand.*

## 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.

With caties in the candles,  
And lights the curtained room,  
Shy in the doorway  
And shy in the gloom;

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

### 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.

### 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 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.*

## 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.

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 Colooney;  
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.

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.

## 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,  
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.

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,  
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.

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,  
God lights the stats, 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.

### 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.'

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.

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,

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

Setvants round his cushioned place  
Are with new sorrow wrung;  
Hounds are gazing on his face,  
Aged hounds and young.

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**



## 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, where of 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.*

*Come near, come near, come near — Ah, leave me still  
A little space for the rose-breath to fill!  
Lest I no more bear 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.*

## 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  
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

*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.

*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!

### 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,  
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.'

'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.'

'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.

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.'

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?'

'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,  
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.

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.

### **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.

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.

### **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;

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

### 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,*  
*Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips,*

*And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.  
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.  
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.

### A FAERY SONG

WE who are old, old and gay,<sup>1</sup>  
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:

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<sup>1</sup>*Sung by the people of Faery over Diarmuid and Grania, in their bridal sleep under a Cromlech.*

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

### 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 honeybee,  
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 mourning 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.

### 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### 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.

### 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 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!

### 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:  
*She was more beautiful than thy first love,  
But now lies under boards.*

### 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.

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

### **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 MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND**

HE stood among a crowd at Dromahair;  
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  
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  
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 —  
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:

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.

### **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  
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.

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.

### **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.

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.

### **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!’

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.

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!’

‘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.

‘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.’

## 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,  
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 winged sandals dart,  
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:  
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

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 ill things turn to barrenness  
In the dim glass the demons hold,  
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.

### 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  
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.

### 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  
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  
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.  
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 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 agleam,  
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,  
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling Away, come away.

**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.

### 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?

### 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.

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

And never was piping so gay.

### 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.

### 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 ghost;  
O heart the winds have shaken, the unappeasable host  
Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's feet.

**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;  
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.

**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:

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 lads 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.

### 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 y 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.

### 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.

### **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.

### **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  
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.

### **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,  
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,  
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.

### **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.

**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,  
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.  
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.

**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.

### **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,  
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,  
Live but to light your passing feet.

### **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.



**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;  
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.  
'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.  
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.

### 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 caim 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.

### 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;  
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':  
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.

### **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 fair,  
Or remembering hers they will find no other face fair  
Till all the valleys of the world have been withered away.

### **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.

### 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.

### HE THINKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE SPO- KEN 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.

### 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  
And learn to pray when you pray.  
'I can bring you salmon out of the streams  
And heron out of the skies.'  
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 blesseddest souls that walk in the world  
To fill your heart with content.'  
'And which is the blesseddest,' 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 blesseddest soul in the world  
And he nods a drunken head.  
'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.'

## 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  
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 moms 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  
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?  
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,  
Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

**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.

**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.

**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.

### 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.'

### THE POET PLEADS WITH THE ELEMENTAL POW- ERS

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;  
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.



**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.

**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.

### **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?

### **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,  
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.

**IN THE SEVEN WOODS**  
**1904**



### 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 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.

## THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

ONE that is ever kind said yesterday:  
‘Your well-beloved’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,  
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.

## 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;  
Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said  
That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

### 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.  
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.

### 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 Eights 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 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 their dances 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 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.

### 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  
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.’

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  
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.

### **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.

### 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.’

### 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 Uladh, 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.  
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.

### 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 —  
O my share of the world, O yellow hair!  
No one has ever loved but you and I.

### 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.

### 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.

*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.

## 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.

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.'

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.

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**





## 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  
— 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.

## A WOMAN HOMER SANG

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  
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  
But an heroic dream.

## 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,  
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.

## 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?  
Why, what could she have done, being what she is?  
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

## 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.  
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,  
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

## 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;  
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  
Men neither soul nor body has been crossed.

## 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,  
Came when Time had touched her form.

### 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.  
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.

### 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,  
Theatre business, management of men.  
I swear before the dawn comes round again  
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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?

**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?

**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.'

'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?'



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

### 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.  
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?

### 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:  
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

### 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,  
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.

### 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?

### 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.

### 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.  
O love is the crooked thing,  
There is nobody wise enough  
To find out all that is in it,  
For he would be thinking of love  
Till the stars had run away  
And the shadows eaten the moon.  
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,  
One cannot begin it too soon.

# **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

*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.*

*January 1914*

## RESPONSIBILITIES THE GREY ROCK

*Poets with whom I learned my trade.  
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,  
Here's an old story I've remade,  
Imagining 'twould better please  
Your cars 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.*

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.

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  
And rrembling 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.  
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,  
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,  
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;

‘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 —  
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 faithfulest heart most love  
The bitter sweetness of false faces?  
Why must the lasting love what passes,  
Why are the gods by men betrayed?'

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.

*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.*

**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 Pauden'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.

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!

*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.

**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.

**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 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 instilt heaped upon him for his pains,  
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;  
Your enemy, an old futil mouth, had set  
The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,

And gather the Glasnevin coverlet  
About your head till the dust stops your ear,  
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*

### **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 waked with her boy,  
Had given but as the rest  
Of the men and women of Troy,  
A word and a jest.

### **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.



**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,  
'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,  
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  
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,  
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  
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.

*'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  
But I do not seem to care.'*

**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  
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 eamed  
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  
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,  
Giddy with his hundredth year,  
Sang unnoticed like a bird.

**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,’  
*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.’

**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;  
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 a old sock full:  
*And there the king is but as the beggar.*

The wind is old and still at play  
While I must hurty 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.*

## 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, 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.

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,  
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.  
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?  
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  
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  
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,  
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 dies  
And the sheep bleating at the wind  
As when I also played the fool.'

The beggar in a rage began  
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.'

'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  
'That flesh and bone may disappear,  
And souls as if they were but sighs,  
And there be nothing but God left;  
But, I aone being blessed 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  
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 bed  
From Maeve and all that juggling plain,  
Nor gave God thanks till overhead  
The clouds were brightening with the dawn.

### 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,  
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?

### 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?

### 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?

### ME 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.

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

### 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.  
What need have you to dread  
The monstrous crying of wind!

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

## **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,

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  
Tore from the clouds his marvellous moon.

## 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.

These 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

## 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  
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?  
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.

## 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

Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken  
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

### **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,  
To bundle time away  
That the night come.

### **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  
And threw him up to laugh on the bough;  
No government appointed him.

## 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 helms 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.

## 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  
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.'



**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.

**THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE**  
**1919**



**THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE**

*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**

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 MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GRE- GORY

### 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 stairs 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 al 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 county 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.

### **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,  
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.

### 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,  
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.

### 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;

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.

‘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.’

### **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 a old horse in a pound.’

To Solomon sang Sheba,  
Planted on his knees,  
‘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  
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.'

### **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.

### **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?

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?

### 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.

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.

### **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.

### **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.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

**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.  
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.'

**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  
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.

*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 died  
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,  
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  
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,  
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  
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.'

*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,  
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;  
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,  
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.

### 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  
I must endure the timid sun.

### **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  
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.

### **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  
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  
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  
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  
Perverse creature of chance,  
And live like Solomon  
That Sheba led a dance.

**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  
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,  
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,  
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.'

### 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.'

'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.'

### 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.

### 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.  
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.

### 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 —  
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,  
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,  
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.

## 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 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 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 cen-  
turies,  
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.  
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.

### 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 Athene's Side,  
Or been fit spoil for a centaur  
Drunk with the unmixed wine.

### 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  
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,  
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  
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:  
Vague memories, nothing but memories.

### 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.

## 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:  
One is a harlot, and one a child  
That never looked upon man with desire.  
And one, it may be, a queen.

## 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.

## 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.

### 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.

### 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  
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?  
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 would journey home,  
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

### 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.



## II

**Certain Artist 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 trees  
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,  
We have naught for death but toys.

## 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  
Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,  
We and our dolls being but the world were best away.

**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.'

**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?

**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.

**VII**  
**Her Friends Bring her a Christmas Tree**

Ppardon, 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.

**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.

*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.

*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  
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  
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  
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.

*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  
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.

### 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,

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.

### 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 hoots 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,  
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.  
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 learnt 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.'  
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  
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  
Athene 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  
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,  
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.  
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 countrymen  
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 separate, perfect, and immovable  
Images can break the solitude  
Of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes.  
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,  
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  
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;  
And 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;  
Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,  
Inspid 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 cres-  
cents.  
The burning bow that once could shoot an arrow  
Out of the up and down, the wagon-wheel  
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 countryman:  
I'd stand and mutter there until he caught

'Hunchback and Saint and Fool,' and that they came  
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.

### 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?  
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.  
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils  
Will pass from change to change,  
And that from round to crescent,  
From crescent to round they range?

Minnalouslyhe creeps through the grass  
Alone, important and wise,  
And lifts to the changing moon  
His changing eyes.

## 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,  
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.

## 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,  
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  
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.

## 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.

## 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,  
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.

## II

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;

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 solider 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,  
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,

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  
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,

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**

*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,  
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 Athene by the hair;  
For what mere book can grant a knowledge  
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  
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?

*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,  
Even from the foot-sole think it too.

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

## SOLOMON AND THE WITCH

AND thus declared that Arab lady:  
'Last night, where under the wild moon

## Who understood

‘Yet the world stays.’

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.'

### AN IMAGE FROM A PAST LIFE

*He.* Never until this night have I been stirred.  
The elaborate starlight 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.

*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?

*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 —  
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,  
I do not know, that know I am afraid  
Of the hovering thing night brought me.

## 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.  
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.

### 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 winged 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.  
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.  
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;  
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  
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  
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.

### 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?  
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?

### 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,  
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.’

### 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:  
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.

## 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 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.  
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 Bulbin 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.

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.

**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  
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.

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;  
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.

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?

## 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.  
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,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

### 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,  
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,  
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  
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 wisc.  
And many a poor man that has roved,  
Loved and thought himself beloved,  
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

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,  
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,  
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  
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.

## 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 fantasy'.

**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**



**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.

**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.

#### 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.

### 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.  
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  
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 sconce  
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  
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.

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  
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  
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.  
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.

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;  
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?  
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,  
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.

### 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,  
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  
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  
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  
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  
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.

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  
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.

## MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR

### 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 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.

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 ease  
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;  
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  
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  
Me 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.

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 min 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.

## 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 state.

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no cleat 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.

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.

## 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,  
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  
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,  
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.

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.

## 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.

A man in his own secret meditation  
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made  
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  
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,  
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 whereon  
They fixed old aching eyes,  
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  
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,  
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.

### 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 that what disturbs our blood  
Is but its longing for the tomb.

### YOUTH AND AGE

MUCH did I rage when young,  
Being by the world oppressed,  
But now with flattering tongue  
It speeds the parting guest.

### 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.

**A PRAYER FOR MY SON**

BID a strong ghost stand at the head  
That my Michael may sleep sound,  
Nor cry, nor 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  
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  
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,  
Protecting, till the danger past,  
With human love.

**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;  
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.

**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:  
Whatever flames upon the night  
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

## **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.

### 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.

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?

### 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

Where seven Ephesian topers 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.

## 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 histories,  
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  
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  
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,  
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?



## 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;

## 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?

## COLONUS' PRAISE

*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  
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 Athene 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  
Glittering among grey-leaved olive-trees,  
Has plucked a flower and sung her loss;  
Who finds abounding Cephissus  
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;  
Summer and winter, day and night,  
Of horses and horses of the sea, white horses.

## WISDOM

THE true faith discovered was  
When painted panel, statuary.  
Glass-mosaic, window-glass,  
Amended what was told awry  
By some peasant gossamer;  
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,  
His majestic Mother sat  
Stitching at a purple hoarded  
That He might be nobly breeched  
In starry towers of Babylon  
Noah's freshet 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.

*The Girl.* I rage at my own image in the glass  
That's so unlike myself that when you praise it  
It is as though you praised another, or even  
Mocked me with praise of my mere opposite;  
And when I wake towards morn I dread myself,  
For the heart cries that what deception wins  
Cruelty must keep; therefore he warned and go  
If you have seen that image and not the woman.

*The Hero.* I have raged at my own strength because  
you have loved it.

*The Girl.* If you are no more strength than I am beauty

I had better find a convent and turn nun;  
 A man at least has all men's reverence  
 And needs no cruelty.

*The Hero.* I have heard one say  
 That men have reverence for their holiness  
 And not themselves.

*The Girl.* Say on and say  
 That only God has loved us for ourselves,  
 But what care I that long for a man's love?

*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.

## OWEN AHERNE AND HIS DANCERS

### I

A STRANGE thing surely that my Heart, when love had come un-  
 sought  
 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 rhymers had,  
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 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

### 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,  
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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## 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.

## 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 cosseting  
To hear a jackass bray;  
My arms are like the twisted thorn  
And yet there beauty lay;

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.’

## 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  
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.

## 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,  
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

### 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  
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.

**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,  
Being all alone I'd nurse a stone  
And sing it lullaby.

**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;  
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.

### 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;  
And let all base ambition be,  
For intellect would make us proud  
And pride bring in impurity:  
The three old rascals laugh aloud.

### ALL SOULS' NIGHT

*Epilogue to 'A Vision'*

MIDNIGHT has come, and the great Christ Church Bell  
And may 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.

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.

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.

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.

On Florence Emery I call the next,  
Who finding the first wrinkles on a face  
Admired and beautiful,  
And knowing that the future would be vexed  
With 'minished 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.

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.

And I call up MacGregor from the grave,  
For in my first hard springtime 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!

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.

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.

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.

**THE WINDING STAIR AND  
OTHER POEMS  
1933**





## IN MEMORY OF EVA GORE-BOOTH AND CON MARKIEWICZ

### I

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.

### II

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.

## 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.

## 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,  
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,  
If but imagination scorn the earth  
And intellect is 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  
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.

## II

*My Self.* A living man is blind and drinks his drop.  
What matter if the ditches are impure?  
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  
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;  
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,  
We are blest by everything,  
Everything we look upon is blest.

## 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.

### 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 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;

*Saeva 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.

### III

The purity of the unclouded moon  
Has flung its atrowy 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!  
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,  
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.

### **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.

### **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.



## 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.

## SPILT MILK

WE that have done and thought,  
That have thought and done,  
Must ramble, and thin out  
Like milk spilt on a stone.

## 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.

## STATISTICS

'THOSE Platonists are a curse,' he said,  
'God's fire upon the wane,  
A diagram hung there instead,  
More women born than men.'

### 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?

### 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?  
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.

*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.

## THE CRAZED 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!

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.

### COOLE PARK, 1929

I MEDITATE upon a swallow's flight,  
Upon a 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.

### 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.

### 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.’

‘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.’

### 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.

### 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.

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*

### 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.

### 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  
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 —  
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.’

1928

## 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;  
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 star-lit golden bough,  
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,  
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,  
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.

## THE MOTHER OF GOD

THE threefold 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?

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?

## 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?

**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, 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.

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.

## 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  
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.

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,  
'Let all things pass away.'

Wheels by milk-white asses drawn  
Where Babylon or Nineveh  
Rose; some conquer 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.'

## 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.  
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

## 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.

### 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.

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?

### 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.



**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.

**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?

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?

# **WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS**



**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.)*  
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:  
*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.*

**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,  
Made the joints of Heaven crack:  
So never hang your heart upon  
A roaring, ranting journeyman.  
*Fol de rol, fol de rol.*

**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.*

'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.*

#### 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.

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 must walk when dead.

## 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  
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  
That men pass over  
My body makes no moan  
But sings on:  
*All things remain in God.*



**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,  
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.'

**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,  
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  
Such a dance as there was danced —  
*Love is like the lion's tooth.*

## 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?

**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.'

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.

**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.*

## XI HER 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.

## 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.

### **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.

### **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.

## 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.*

‘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.*

## 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;

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.

## 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.

**XVIII**  
**MAD AS THE MIST OF 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?*

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.*

**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.*

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,  
Whether to maid or hag:  
*I carry the sun in a golden cup,*  
*The moon in a silver bag.*

## 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.  
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,  
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.'*

## XXI THE DANCER AT CRUACHAN 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.

**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 s-o 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.

‘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.’

**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.’

**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.

**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.

# **A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD**



**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.

**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,  
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.

### 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.

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?

### 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;  
And now we stare astonished at the sea,  
And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.

## 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?  
But where the crime's committed  
The crime can be forgot.

## 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 subtetranean 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,  
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.

## 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

*She.* That light is from the moom.

*He.* That bird ...

*She.* Let him sing on,  
I offer to love's play  
My dark declivities.

## 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  
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 —  
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,  
That they had brought no fabulous symbol there  
But my heart's victim and its torturer.

**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,  
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;  
And though it loved in misery  
Close and cling so tight,  
There’s not a bird of day that dare  
Extinguish that delight.

## 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.'

'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.

## 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.

‘Pray I will and sing I must,  
And yet I weep — Oedipus’ child  
Descends into the loveless dust.

**FROM A FULL MOON IN  
MARCH  
1935**





**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;  
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.  
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.

## 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 clark grove he passed, and there  
Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.

## THREE SONGS TO THE SAME TUNE

### I

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.

*Those fanatics all that we do would undo;  
Down the fanatic, down the clown;  
Down, down, hammer them down,  
Down to the tune of O'Donnell Abu.*

'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'.

*Those fanatics all that we do would undo;  
Down the fanatic, down the clown;  
Down, down, hammer them down,  
Down to the tune of O'Donnell Abu.*

'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.

*Those fanatics all that we do would undo;  
Down the fanatic, down the clown;  
Down, down, hammer them down,  
Down to the tune of O'Donnell Abu.*

## II

Justify 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, hole,  
Defending Ireland's soul.

*'Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman,  
'They killed my goose and a cat.  
Drown, drown in the water-but,  
Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman.*

Justify all those renowned generations,  
Justify all that have sunk in their blood,  
Justify all that have died on the scaffold,  
Justify all that have fled, that have stood,  
Stood or have marched the night long  
Singing, singing a song.

*'Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman.  
'They killed my goose and a cat.  
Drown, drown in the water-butt,  
Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman.*

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.

*'Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman,  
'They killed my goose and a cat.  
Drown, drown in the water-butt,  
Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman.*

### III

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.

*Who'd care to dig 'em,' said the old, old man,  
'Those six feet marked in chalk?  
Much I talk, more I walk;  
Time I were buried,' said the old, old man.*

When nations are empty up there at the top,  
When order has weakened or faction is strong,  
Time for us all to pick out a good tune,  
Take to the roads and go marching along.  
March, march — How does it run? —  
O any old words to a tune.

*'Who'd care to dig 'em,' said the old, old man,  
'Those six feet marked in chalk?  
Much I talk, more I walk;  
Time I were buried,' said the old, old man.*

Soldiers take pride in saluting their Captain,  
Where are the captains that govern mankind?  
What happens a tree that has nothing within it?  
O marching wind, O a blast of the wind.  
Marching, marching along.  
March, march, lift up the song:

*'Who'd care to dig 'em,' said the old, old man.  
'Those six feet marked in chalk?  
Much I talk, more I walk;  
Time I were buried,' said the old, old man.*

### **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?*  
 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.  
*A slow low note and an iron bell.*

## **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!*  
*Tomorrow 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.

*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  
I whistled and whistled and whistled in vain.

*Oro, oro!*

*To-morrow night I will break down the door.*

## 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.

### 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 word is out  
And prayer comes round again —  
That I may seem, though I die old,  
A foolish, passionate man.

### 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!  
Wine shall run thick to the end,  
Bread taste sour.



## SUPERNATURAL SONGS

## 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  
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  
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.

**II*****Ribh Denounces Patrick***

An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man —  
Recall that masculine Trinity. Man, woman, child (a daughter or a  
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 God-  
head,  
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-scaled serpent is multiplicity,  
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.

**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.

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.

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  
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.

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!

## 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

## 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?

## 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 personae* 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?

## 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.

**X*****Conjunctions***

If Jupiter and Saturn meet,  
What a cop of mummy wheat!  
  
The sword's a cross; thereon He died:  
On breast of Mars the goddess sighed.

**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.

**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,  
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.

**LAST POEMS**  
**1936-1939**





## 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?  
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,  
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.

## 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,  
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.  
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,

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;  
The third, doubtless a serving-man,  
Carries a musical instrument.

Every discoloration 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;  
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.

### 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.

### 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;  
Lead them gently astray;  
Let her finish her dance,  
Let her finish her dance.  
*Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!*

### THE THREE BUSHES

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  
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?

*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 stip 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.

*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.'

*O my dear, O my d-ear.*

'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.

*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.

*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.*

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.*

**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.

**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.  
*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?  
*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

### 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.

### 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.



**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.

**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.

**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.

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.

### 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?'*

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 naught,  
Something to perfection brought';  
*But louder sang that ghost, 'What then?'*

## 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 waiting a train,  
Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head:  
All the Olympians; a thing never known again.

## A CRAZED 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,  
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.'

### 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.

What climbs the stair?

Nothing that common women ponder on  
If you are worr'd my hope! Neither Content  
Nor satisfied Conscience, but that great family  
Some ancient famous authors mistepresent,  
The proud Furies each with her torch on high.

## 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.  
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 company,  
Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,  
That I am still their setvant 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.

*O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say?*

**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;  
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;

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

**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.*

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.*

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.*

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.*

### 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  
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  
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  
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.?*

## 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,  
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.  
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,  
And Parnell loved his country  
And Parnell loved his lass.

### 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.  
*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

'Kind are all your words, my dear,  
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?’

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

Then Said she to that wild old man,  
His stout stick under his hand,  
‘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.’

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘Go your ways, O go your ways,  
I choose another mark,  
Girls down on the seashore  
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.

*Daybreak 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.

*Daybreak 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,  
Horseman erect upon horseback  
Or child hid in the womb.

*Daybreak 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.’

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

## THE GREAT DAY

HURRAH for revolution and more cannon-shot!  
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.  
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again !  
The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.

## PARNELL

PARNELL came down the road, he said to a cheering man:  
‘Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone.

### 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.

### THE SPUR

YOU think it horrible that lust and rage  
Should dance attention upon my old age;  
They were not such a plague when I was young;  
What else have I to spur me into song?

### 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,  
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.

## 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 rolly O.*

Round Lough Derg's holy island I went upon the stones,  
I prayed at all the Stations upon my matrow-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 rolly O.*

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 rolly 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 rolly O.*

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 rolly O.*

**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  
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,  
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,  
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.  
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,  
'Harness an ass and cart,  
Carry the gold about the town,  
Throw it in every patt.'  
*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  
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  
From the seaweed on the strand.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

### 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  
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,  
That waxen seal, that signature.  
For things like these what decent man  
Would keep his lover waiting,  
    Keep his lover waiting?

## 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,  
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,  
*Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
*Under the old stone Cross.*

## 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  
Perning 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.*

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.*

## 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

Find in middle air  
An eagle on the wing,  
Recognise the five  
That make the Muses sing.

## THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED

### 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,  
'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:  
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  
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).  
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 beggar-man.

## 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  
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.

## 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,  
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,  
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.

### 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.  
*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,  
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,  
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  
And wear a coat in fashion.  
Memories of the talk  
Of henwives 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?  
The player Connolly,  
Close to the City Hall he died;  
Catriage and voice had he;  
He lacked those years that go with skill,  
But later might have been  
A famous, a brilliant figure  
Before the painted scene.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

Some had no thought of victory  
But had gone out to die  
That Ireland's mind be greater,  
Her heart mount up on high;  
And yet who knows what's yet to come?  
For patrick pearse had said  
That in every generation  
Must Ireland's blood be shed.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.*

### IN TARA'S HALLS

A MAN I praise that once in Tara's Hals  
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 a woman needs,  
A roof, good clothes, passion, love perhaps,  
But never asked for love; should I ask that,  
I shall be old indeed.'

Thereon the man  
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 woman, 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.

## 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  
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 eyeballs knew  
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,  
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace  
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

April 9, 1938

## 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,  
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  
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  
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.

## 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.*

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,  
And all that's finished, let it fade.*

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,  
And all that's finished, let it fade.*

## 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 spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

We know what rascal might has defiled,  
The lofty innocence that it has slain,  
Were we not born in the peasant's cot  
Where men forgive if the belly gain?  
More dread the life that we live,  
How can the mind forgive?

*What marches down the mountain pass?  
No, no, my son, not yet;  
That is an airy spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

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 the wind, O a marching wind,  
March wind, and any old tune.  
March, march, and how does it run?

*What marches down the mountain pass?  
No, no, my son, not yet;  
That is an airy spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

### 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.*



‘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:  
‘Oh, 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.*

‘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.*

## 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.*

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 a street.  
*Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*  
*Her mind moves upon silence.*

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 that 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.*

## A BRONZE HEAD

HERE at right of the entrance this bronze head,  
Human, superhuman, 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; who can tell  
Which of her forms has shown her substance right?

Or maybe substance can be composite,  
Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath  
A mouthful held 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  
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.

### A STICK OF INCENSE

WHENCE did all that fury come?  
From empty tomb or Virgin womb?  
Saint Joseph thought the world would melt  
But liked the way his finger smelt.

### JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR MRS. MARY MOORE

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.  
*What shall I do for pretty girls*  
*Now my old bawd is dead?*

Though stiff 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,  
And being old she put a skin  
On everything she said.  
*What shall I do for pretty girls*  
*Now my old bawd is dead?*

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?*

## 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  
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,  
Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;  
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,  
And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.

## 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, ake but poor shows,  
Because children demand Daddy-long-legs upon This timber toes,  
Because women in the upper storeys 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.  
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.

### 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 thar 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,  
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  
Because of the increasing Night  
That opens her mystery and fright.  
*Fifteen apparitions have I seen;  
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

**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.

Why is the woman terror-struck?  
Can there be mercy in that look?

**WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD?**

WHY should not old men be mad?  
Some have known a likely lad  
That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist  
Turn to a drunken journalist;  
A girl that knew all Dante once  
Live to bear children to a dunce;  
A Helen of social welfare dream,  
Climb on a wagonette to scream.  
Some think it a matter of course that chance  
Should starve good men and bad advance,  
That if their neighbours figured plain,  
As though upon a lighted screen,

No single story would they find  
Of an unbroken happy mind,  
A finish worthy of the start.  
Young men know nothing of this sort,  
Observant old men know it well;  
And when they know what old books tell  
And that no better can be had,  
Know why an old man should be mad.

### THE STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY

I LIVED among great houses,  
Riches drove out rank,  
Base drove out the better blood,  
And mind and body shrank.  
No Oscar ruled the table,  
But I'd a troop of friends  
That knowing better talk had gone  
Talked of odds and ends.  
Some knew what ailed the world  
But never said a thing,  
So I have picked a better trade  
And night and morning sing:  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

Am I a great Lord Chancellor  
That slept upon the Sack?  
Commanding officer that tore  
The khaki from his back?  
Or am I de Valera,  
Or the King of Greece,  
Or the man that made the motors?  
Ach, call me what you please!  
Here's a Montenegrin lute,  
And its old sole string



Makes me sweet music  
And I delight to sing:  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

With boys and girls about him.  
With any sort of clothes,  
With a hat out of fashion,  
With Old patched shoes,  
With a ragged bandit cloak,  
With an eye like a hawk,  
With a stiff straight back,  
With a strutting turkey walk.  
With a bag full of pennies,  
With a monkey on a chain,  
With a great cock's feather,  
With an old foul tune.  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

### CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN

I AM tired of cursing the Bishop,  
(Said Crazy Jane)  
Nine books or nine hats  
Would not make him a man.  
I have found something worse  
To meditate on.  
A King had some beautiful cousins.  
But where are they gone?  
Battered to death in a cellar,  
And he stuck to his throne.  
Last night I lay on the mountain.  
(Said Crazy Jane)  
There in a two-horsed carriage  
That on two wheels ran  
Great-bladdered Emer sat.

Her violent man  
Cuchulain sat at her side;  
Thereupon'  
Propped upon my two knees,  
I kissed a stone  
I lay stretched out in the dirt  
And I cried tears down.

## THE CIRCUS ANIMAL 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 intetvened 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.

### POLITICS

*'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning 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 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!

### THE 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.

## CUCHULAIN COMFORTED

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.  
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 must we sing and sing the best we can,  
But first you must be told our character:  
Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain

‘Or driven from home and left to die in fear.’  
They sang, but had no human tunes nor words,  
Though all was done in common as before;

They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds.

## 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.*

## 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-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 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 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,  
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 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:

*Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by!*

# **NARRATIVE AND DRAMATIC**



**THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN**  
**1889**



## THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN

### 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.

*Oisin.* 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;  
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-motmnds,  
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill  
Where passionate Maeve is stony-still;  
And found On the dove-grey edge of the sea  
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.



*S. Patrick.* You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.

*Oisin.* ‘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,  
‘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  
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  
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.'

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;

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;  
He shook himself and neighed three times:  
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 vallcys,  
Or down the dewy forest alleys,  
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,  
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  
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  
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone  
In the pale west, and the sun’ rim sank,  
And clouds atrayed 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  
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;  
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,  
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  
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;  
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;  
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.

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.  
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,  
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,  
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.  
'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,  
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,  
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  
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,  
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  
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;  
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  
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,  
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.  
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.

*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 tutned 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.  
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,  
Each forehead like an obscure star  
Bent down above each hooked 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,  
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,  
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';  
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;  
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  
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 matred by many a blow  
From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago  
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,  
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:  
'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:  
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,  
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  
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 Aedh 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,  
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, netveless, blind, the eagles stood.

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,  
He had sat down and sighed with cumbered heart,  
As though His hour were come.

We sought the patt

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,  
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  
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  
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  
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 mnnel 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  
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  
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  
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;  
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  
And wander in the storms and clinging snows,  
Hopeless for ever: ancient Oisín 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;  
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,  
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge  
His new-healed shape; and for a hundred years  
So waited, so feasted, with no 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 Almuin and heard the thin  
Outcry of bats.

And then young Niamh came  
Holding that horse, and sadly called my name;  
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  
And Mananna'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  
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.

### 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?  
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 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-blanced horns, in whose hollow a child of three 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.

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 glammers 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, there 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 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-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 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 spearhead'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 Blanid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward of old time  
slunk,

Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the spittle on his 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 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, Lo-  
mair.

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 dews  
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 wept:  
But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering alone that de-  
light  
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs impatiently stept.

I died, '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 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 haymouse 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 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’ 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,  
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 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  
mth,  
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 un, glorious, their  
chieftains stood,  
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one, caught in your  
net:  
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the roaring of wind  
in a wood.

And before I went by them so huge and so speedy with eyes so  
bright,  
Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man 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 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 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 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 bow-  
strings,  
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 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 under a weir.  
It were sad to gaze on the blessed 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**



## 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 time  
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,  
In her high house at Cruachan; 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,  
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 high heart,  
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,  
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,  
Sudden and laughing.

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;  
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  
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 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  
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,  
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  
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?'

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:  
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  
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 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  
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.

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  
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**



**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 Uladh, Buan's son,  
Baile, who had the honey mouth;  
And that mild woman of the south,  
Aillinn, who was King Lugaidh's heir.  
Their love was never drowned in care  
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold  
Because their hodies had grown old.  
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  
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.

*O wandering hirds 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 hut know  
That all this life can give us is  
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.  
Who was it put so great a scorn  
In the grey reeds that night and morn  
Are trodden and broken hy 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,  
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,  
'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;  
And he, being laid upon green boughs,  
Was carried to the goodly house  
Where the Hound of Uladh 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  
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  
Sofull 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  
Rave such long memories that they still  
Remember Deirdre and her man;  
And when we walk with Kate or Nan  
About the windy water-side,  
Our hearts can Fear 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,

Gathering his cloak about him, mn  
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 matriage-bed,  
And harpers, pacing with high head  
As though their music were enough  
To make the savage heart of love  
Grow gentle without sorrowing,  
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  
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 Laighen, because  
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.

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 finger ran.  
For this young girl and this young man  
Have happiness without an end,  
Because they have made so good a friend.

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.

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  
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,  
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,  
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 hird cry out their fill  
Of the harper's daughter if they will,  
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.  
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**



THE SHADOWY WATERS  
TO  
LADY GREGORY

*I walked among the seven woods of Coole:  
Shan-walla, where a willow-hordered 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 hy green houghs  
Where old age cannot find them; Paire-na-lee,  
Where hazel and ash and privet hbind the paths:  
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling  
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;  
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 Buddy 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;  
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  
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?*

*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.*

**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 ruhy 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.*

textscPersons in the Poem

Forgael

Aibric

Sailors

Dectora

## 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 bachelor  
I could give all my heart to that Red Moll  
That had but the one eye.

*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?

*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.

*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 play-  
ing,  
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.

*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.

*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?

*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  
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.

*[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,  
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?

*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?

*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,  
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!  
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;  
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,  
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.  
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.

*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  
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.

*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.

*Aibric.* It's certain they are leading you to death.

None but the dead, or those that never lived,  
Can know that ecstasy. Forgae! Forgae!  
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,  
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!

*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.

*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!  
*[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 Fiends; 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.  
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  
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?  
But what's the meaning? [*He cries out.*] Why do you  
linger there?  
Why linger? Run to your desire,  
Are you not happy winged 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.

*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.

*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  
    But laughter and tears — laughter, laughter, and tears;  
    That every man should carry his own soul  
    Upon his shoulders.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*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 For-  
gael.]*

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.

*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.

*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  
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?

*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 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, Aib-  
ric,  
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.

*[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.  
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!  
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  
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:  
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,  
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 —

*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,  
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;  
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,

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.

*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  
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  
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.'  
[*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.  
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.

*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.

*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?

*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 ear?,  
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,  
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.

*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,  
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.

*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**



## 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  
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,  
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  
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.

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,  
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.  
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.

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  
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,  
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,  
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,  
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.  
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,  
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,  
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  
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.'  
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  
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  
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?'  
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  
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**



**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,  
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  
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  
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  
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.’  
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;  
And so a hunter carries in the eye  
A mimic 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,

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.’

‘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?’

‘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

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  
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  
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  
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 livelong 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.

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,  
It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace.  
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  
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 —  
Nor dazzled by the embroidery, nor lost  
In the confusion of its night-dark folds,  
Can hear the armed man speak.