Week 6: W. B. Yeats:

* 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?

Apocalyptic writing, Yeats’  *‘The Second Coming’* tries to put into words what countless people of the time felt: that it was the end of the world as they knew it and that nothing else would ever be the same again.

First: it is always bloody and massive, a vicious explosion that shakes the world to its foundation

Second: the Biblical imagery takes over the visions of corrupted nature.

*Apocalyptical tradition. “*Bethlehem*” is named at the end of the poem. First stanza: Easter, first world war, Russian Revolution, Irish Civil War. Religious political figure.*

* A Prayer for my Daugther:

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-leggèd 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 wise,  
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.

This poem was written by William Butler Yeats for his infant daughter, Anne. He worries about her. Maud Gonne was a radical, opinionated intelligent woman he had loved, but who had rejected his proposals. In this poem he vents his thoughts on her. Georgie Hyde Lees was his wife.

Stanza 1: The weather is a reflection of Yeats’ feelings. The post-war period was dangerous. Anne’s vulnerability and innocence is symbolised by the “cradle-hood” and “coverlid.”

Stanza 2: Yeats is worried about Anne. “Ihave walked and prayed for this young child an hour.” The weather reflects the threatening forces he fears.  
“Flooded stream” represents intense forces caused by people as it has strong forces. It is “flooded” because the troublemakers exist in large numbers or the forces are strong. The weather or external forces caused by the war are stormy and destructive. THe “elms” are tossed due to the destructive forces. People (possibly represented by “elms”) are affected.

Stanza 4: Yeats speaks of Greek mythology.

*She is born in hard times. “Perfect gentleman” “Perfect woman”. Beauty. He does not want her to be beauty as it would have big consequences in the war. Then, as ever, is connected Greek mythology with the present. In the middle of the Civil War, he is saying that it good to people be polite. Politeness comes from the Greek. Another things he is worried about is about the opposite of love: nuclear weapons. From reactionary to insane. The values of civilization: how is going her daughter to come through.*

* Sailing to Bythantium:

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.

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.

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.

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

Sailing to Byzantium focuses on the journey of the soul, allegorically expressed by Yeats placing the speaker on a sea-going vessel, about to reach Byzantium having left behind a country that is not for old men. This could be Ireland or life lived as a mortal, in the real world of flesh and blood.

* 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?

Yeats's Leda and the Swan is a sonnet based on Greek mythology, and one in which he interprets the rape of queen Leda by God Zeus as an incident of annunciation of a two thousand years' long phase of civilizational cycle in history. Yeats first dramatically presents the moment of the mythical rape of a Greek queen Leda by God Zeus in the form of a wild swan; then he goes on to contemplate its significance and consequence.

*Violence. It is time to imagine the suffering. Rape is normal in the Greek mythology. “They do not rape man, because they are so beautiful”.*

*What is it like to be rape by Swan? Could be the tittle also. The tone is calm to be speaking about a rape.*

*Could be a part of the annunciation. It is also a religious poem, but it is not a conventional one. Leda is seen as a kind of purity object, as they refer to her as “laid in that white rush”.*

*Even though it is an horrific act of violence, is a reflected poem about a significant rape in mythological.*

*Did she become as God? He is interested in that question.*

*What does all this violence means?*

*The space in the third stanza is the introduction to the conclusion.*

* The Tower:

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 Bulben'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 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 a 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

‘The*Tower’* begins with the poet’s reluctance to accept his old age, but ends with a more calming and assertive note of following his inspirers Burke and Gratton.

*‘The*Tower’ by W. B. Yeats describes the absurdity of becoming old. While he is getting weaker physically, he feels growing more passionate and inspired than ever. Nevertheless, he is aware that it is time to say goodbye to poetry and choose reason, to match his age. He walks to and fro atop the tower and remembers the wealthy Mrs. French, a legendary peasant girl, and the character Hanrahan created by him. He also thinks of some people who could be cheered with neither love nor music. One such man is the former master of the poet’s house. He also thinks of those who walked around the house dressed for war.

* Among Schoolchildren:

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;

A kind old nun in a white hood replies;

The children learn to cipher and to sing,

To study reading-books and history,

To cut and sew, be neat in everything

In the best modern way—the children's eyes

In momentary wonder stare upon

A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent

Above a sinking fire, a tale that she

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?

Among School Children is one of Yeats' later poems and focuses on human potential, how we as creative beings can work towards a unity of body and soul to fulfil that potential.

The poem deals with several major issues: contrasting youth and old age, school work and life wisdom, love and physical pain, intellect and artistic expression.

Overall, the theme is that of essential change, how a person deals with the passage of time, desire, ideals and how that person works towards harmony and union.

The first five stanzas explore youth, old age and love from a personal perspective; the latter three becoming more impersonal as the speaker attempts to reach a unifying vision.

Each stanza is a progressive step towards what is ultimately a question concerning expression and complete harmony of a human life.

* Bythantium:

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 starlit 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.

*Byzantium* is a symbolic poem that started life as a note in the diary of W.B.Yeats in 1930. He'd long been an admirer of Byzantine art and culture and wanted to combine this passion with his belief in the spiritual journey of the artistic human soul.

The narrative is both impersonal and personal; the speaker commentates from a distance then comes closer to the reader with detailed first person description. There are repeated words, ambiguous phrases, allusions to mythology, real experiences and unreal experiences all kept under control by long and shorter, mostly iambic, rhyming lines.

* Crazy Jane Talks to 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.'

This short poem of three stanzas is a dialogue between an old woman and a church dignity – a bishop. It enunciates philosophy in a light-hearted vein. Yeats had seen such a woman in Dublin who had always puzzled him as to what in life she should symbolize. She was vulgar in her tongue and amoral in her life; but she was down to earth and candid. She knew no pretense that many call civilization.

*She is a prostitute. It is her that is doing the most of the topic. 17 century sentiments. He uses challenging words: “For nothing can be sole or whole that has not been rent” – This is made to read by a unique way. We cannot read it seguido. The most demanding and harsh of the prostitute is the beauty. Life is hard.*

* The Circus Animals’ Desertion:

I

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,

I sought it daily for six weeks or so.

Maybe at last being but a broken man

I must be satisfied with my heart, although

Winter and summer till old age began

My circus animals were all on show,

Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,

Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

II

What can I but enumerate old themes,

First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose

Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,

Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,

Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,

That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;

But what cared I that set him on to ride,

I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride.

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,

`The Countess Cathleen' was the name I gave it,

She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away

But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.

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.

It is partly about poetic inspiration and the drive to write. In the first section, Yeats tells us that ‘I sought a theme and sought for it in vain’. This is a poet in search of something to write about, who throughout his life – until old age arrived – never had to look too far to find something to write about. His imagination was crowded with images and ideas, like the animals in a circus.

But in the second section, we realise that such inspiration has now largely deserted the poet as he enters old age. Now he can only reiterate things he has already said, and goes on to cite examples from Irish legend

The poem’s final lines argue that great poetry comes out of the ugly, the ordinary, the downtrodden, and that this is where the poet must return to find new inspiration: ‘the foul rag and bone shop of the heart’ suggests that beautiful poetry springs from unbeautiful origins, from the curious bric-a-brac of everyday experience.

*Too abstract, too complicated. Last stanza: masterful images because it is a masterful poem. “Old”, “old” … a clearly obsession getting old. Raving slut. Every image is awful. He is frightened about the sensuality of human passion.*

* Arts
* Sexual
* Mithology

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Decadence and Symbolism:

Charles Baudeliere  « Les Fleur du Mal »

Stephane Mallarmé

Arthur Rimbaud « Le bateau livre »

Algernon Swinburne

Lionel Johanson

Oscar Wilde

Aubrey Beardsley

Stendhal

Flaubert

Balzac

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Thomas Hardy: more traditional English fashion.

There is a revolt against the Victorian poetry.

Ezra Pound “A guide to Kulchur”