

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
W. B. YEATS

REVISED SECOND EDITION

Edited by
Richard J. Finneran

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18 *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 10
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. 20

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. 30

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! 40

19 *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.' 10

'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.' 20

'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.' 30

'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, 40
 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, 50
 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, 60
 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, 70
 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.

20 *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.

21 *The Rose of Peace*

If Michael, leader of God's host
When Heaven and Hell are met,

80

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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.

10

22 *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,

10

I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
 Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.

November 1919

193 *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.

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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.

40

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.

50

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?

60

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.

September 25, 1916

194 *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?

70

80

10

195 *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.'

10

196 *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: 10
 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 20
 Upon some lofty rock to stare
 Upon the cloudy canopy,
 While under its storm-beaten breast
 Cried out the hollows of the sea.

197 *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 phantasy 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. 10
 They have loud music, hope every day renewed
 And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.

198 *Towards Break of Day*

Was it the double of my dream
 The woman that by me lay
 Dreamed, or did we halve a dream
 Under the first cold gleam of day?

I thought: 'There is a waterfall
 Upon Ben Bulben side
 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 10
 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. 20
 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.

199 *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;

10

20

30

Yet have no dearer thought
 Than that I may find out a way
 To make it linger half a day. 40

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? 50

200 *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. 10
 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, 20
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

359 *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 we shall 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 nor human notes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before,

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

10

20

360 *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.

10

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,
All that is finished, let it fade.

20

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,
All that is finished, let it fade.

30

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 airy¹ spot
 And no man knows what treads the grass.

10

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

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.

20

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

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.

30

¹'Airy' may be an old pronunciation of 'eerie'. I often heard it in Galway & Sligo.

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.

10

'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.'

Robbers had taken his old tambourine,
 But he took down the moon
 And rattled out a tune;
 Robbers had taken his old tambourine.

20

'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.

30