

## *Selected Poems*



“The greatest poet of our time – certainly the greatest in this language, and so far as I am able to judge, in any language... one of the few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them.”

*T.S. Eliot*

“Yeats is like a mountain range, lying on the horizon. He can’t be emulated; you just walk around under the shade”

*Seamus Heaney*

“The only poet worthy of serious study.”

*Ezra Pound*

“Ireland still lives in the shadow of W.B. Yeats. At times, the shadow darkens and changes its shape, but it is never absent, because his search for freedom and soaring autonomy makes him our contemporary.”

*Colm Tóibín*



## *Contents*

Selected Poems	1
The Song of the Happy Shepherd	3
Down by the Salley Gardens	5
The Meditation of the Old Fisherman	6
Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea	7
When You Are Old	10
The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner	11
He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven	12
Never Give All the Heart	13
Adam's Curse	14
The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water	16
Words	17
Peace	18
The Fascination of What's Difficult	19
Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation	20
These Are the Clouds	21
At Galway Races	22
All Things Can Tempt Me	23
To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures	24
September 1913	26
When Helen Lived	27
Fallen Majesty	28
Friends	29
That the Night Come	30
A Coat	31
While I, from That Reed-throated Whisperer...	32
In Memory of Major Robert Gregory	33

An Irish Airman Foresees His Death	37
To a Young Beauty	38
The Scholars	39
Her Praise	40
Broken Dreams	41
Ego Dominus Tuus	43
Easter, 1916	46
Sixteen Dead Men	49
The Rose Tree	50
On a Political Prisoner	51
The Second Coming	52
A Prayer for my Daughter	53
Sailing to Byzantium	56
The Tower	58
Meditations in Time of Civil War	64
I    Ancestral Houses	64
II   My House	65
III  My Table	66
IV   My Descendants	67
V    The Road at My Door	68
VI   The Stare's Nest by My Window	68
VII  I See Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness	69
Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen	71
Two Songs from a Play	75
Leda and the Swan	77
Among School Children	78
All Souls' Night	81
In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz	84
A Dialogue of Self and Soul	85
Coole Park, 1929	88
Coole and Ballylee, 1931	89
Byzantium	91
Crazy Jane and the Bishop	93
Mad as the Mist and Snow	94

Father and Child	95
A Prayer for Old Age	96
Meru	97
The Gyres	98
Lapis Lazuli	99
An Acre of Grass	101
What Then?	102
Beautiful Lofty Things	103
The Great Day	104
Parnell	105
What Was Lost	106
The Spur	107
The Old Stone Cross	108
The Municipal Gallery Revisited	109
Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?	111
Under Ben Bulbin	112
The Statues	115
A Bronze Head	116
High Talk	117
Man and the Echo	118
The Circus Animals' Desertion	120
Note on the Text	122
Notes	123
Extra Material	127
<i>Yeats's Life</i>	129
<i>Editor's Note</i>	132
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	142
Index of Titles and First Lines	143



# *Selected Poems*





*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,                   10  
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,                               20  
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 –                   30  
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-harbouring shell,  
And to its lips thy story tell,  
And they thy comforters will be,  
Rewording in melodious guile  
Thy fretful words a little while, 40  
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; 50  
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.

*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, 10  
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.*



“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,  
I have often heard the sweet sound of his bow. 50  
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?" 60

"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, 80  
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.

*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.

10



*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.

10

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.

*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.