

# A personal response to the poetry of w.b yeats

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In my opinion W. B Yeats is one of Ireland's greatest poets. His work is saturated with descriptive imagery, deep personal feelings and political opinions. This patriotic poet also gives us an insight into life during the 1900's as well as his own personal life. The poetry of W. B Yeats contains powerful metaphors and imagery that have a very memorable quality to them. There are also dynamic contrasts in every poem which makes him stand out amongst other poets. Although I don't have a great interest in Irish history I must say that I really enjoyed Yeats political poems set in early twentieth century Ireland.

This, can be best seen in " September 1913", in this poem Yeats launches a powerful controversial argument against the merchant classes. Yeats condemns those who " add the half pence to the pence" and " fumble in a greasy till". Yeats writes of how the " marrow" has been " dried from the bone" of the country. However Yeats bitter argument reaches a climax in the third stanza where Yeats presents a list of Ireland's dead heroes, glorifying them and all they have done for Ireland, for they were " the names that stilled your childish play."

The repetition of ' for this' really highlights what these heroes have done but Yeats concludes that they have died in vain because they definitely did not die for the money-driven Ireland that Yeats despises. In my opinion Yeats honesty is the best aspect of this poem, you get a real sense of how angry Yeats is and his disillusionment in Ireland, this sets Yeats apart from any other poet on my course. In the final stanza Yeats imagines bring all " those exiles" brought back but then realizes that they would be dismissed as madmen- " some woman's yellow hair has maddened every mother's son".

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The poem ends on a pessimistic note: “ but let them be, they’re dead and gone, they’re with O’Leary in the grave” Yeats concludes that it is pointless trying to raise the memories of the heroic dead in a penny-pinching Ireland. Yeats creates some very vivid and tranquil images though out his poems especially in ‘ The Lake Isle of Innisfree’. Yeats wrote this poem while in London surrounded by a busy environment but Yeats has no problem remembering the beautiful Isle of Innisfree.

The poem describes the kind of Idyllic lifestyle he wants: living alone in a “ small cabin” made of “ clay and wattle” where he will have “ bean-rows” and a “ hive for the honey-bee”. He says he will “ have some peace there” and I think from this line it is obvious that the city is not his home and he longs to be back in Co. Sligo. I think the most prominent image of the island is at midnight, when it’s “ all a glimmer” and at noon, when there’s a “ purple glow”, I can clearly picture in my mind the moonlight reflecting off of the water and fields of purple heather (which if a flower native to the island).

In the closing stanza we get a sense of how special this place is to him as he can hear the “ lake water lapping by the shore” even if he’s standing on a “ roadway” or “ grey pavement” he can hear it in the “ deep heart’s core”. These last few lines also create a strong contrast between the majestic Island and the cold, noisy streets of London, which I think really accentuates the Islands beauty. Another poem based around the theme of nature is ‘ The wild swans at Coole’ except this poem is also about Yeats growing old or as he puts it, entering the “ autumn” of his life.

In this very personal poem Yeats reflects on the passing of time, comparing it to the swans at Coole Park where Lady Gregory lived. In the opening stanza he describes the trees in their "autumn beauty", the "dry woodland" paths" and the "nine-and-fifty" swans "upon the brimming water". The fact that there's fifty nine swans means that there is one without a mate and that swan represents him. Yeats was madly in love with Maude Gonne but she rejected him time and time again so when he says the swans "suddenly mount" and "scatter" I think this symbolizes Maude Gonne moving away from him.

In the third stanza his "heart is sore" because "all has changed" since he first came here, when he "trode with a lighter tread" (when he was happier). I think there's a sense of jealousy in the fourth stanza. These swans are "Unwearied" unlike Yeats and as they "paddle in the cold" Yeats know that "their hearts have not grown old" because once a swan finds a mate they stick together for the rest of their lives, something I think Yeats would be deeply jealous of. In the concluding stanza Yeats highlight the contrast between his own mortality and that of nature's.

Yeats ends the poem on a positive note says that the swans will continue to "delight men's eyes" even after he has died. I love when poets adopt different personas in their poetry 'After the Titanic' by Derek Mahon is probably my favorite poem on the course) I think it really shows how skilled a poet is and that's exactly what Yeats does in 'An Irish Airman foresees His Death'. Yeats is deeply saddened by the death of Lady Gregory's son, a fighter pilot who died during the war. Throughout this tragic poem Yeats tries

to come to terms with Robert Gregory's death and tries to understand how he felt.

The poem begins negatively with the line " I know that I shall meet my fate somewhere in the clouds above", the speaker is sure that he will die while flying, fighting for his country but " those that [he] fights [he] does not hate" and " those that [he] guards [he] does not love". The people who he loves are " Kiltartan's poor" but he knows that his death won't affect them. The beginning of the poem is dark and it seems that the speaker is fighting for no reason but then we learn that it is out of a " lonely impulse of delight" that he became a fighter pilot.

He was not influenced by " law", " duty" or " cheering crowds" he did it because he loved it. The speaker seems to have made the decision to become a fighter pilot in a very logical way, as if he has weighed out all the pros and cons of becoming a pilot-" I balanced all, brought all to mind". When he says " the years to come seem waste of breath" I think he feels that life would be pointless if he couldn't fly and is willing to risk his life for something he enjoys.

Although the last few lines could be read in a more pessimistic way I think it's reassuring to know that Robert died doing something he loved even if it was the thing that killed him. Over all, I think it's the passion in Yeats' poetry that I like the most. No matter what he writes about, whether its politics, swans or a little island in Sligo you can really tell that he's passionate about it and his poems are always bursting with emotion, vivid imagery and captivating contrasts.