

Seven Poems and a Fragment

W. B. Yeats

The background of the lower half of the page is a teal color. It is decorated with various purple geometric shapes, including triangles pointing up and down, horizontal lines, and diagonal lines. Some of these lines and shapes are interconnected, creating a complex, abstract pattern.

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SEVEN POEMS AND A FRAGMENT

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS.

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SEVEN POEMS AND A FRAGMENT: BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS.

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

'Tis All Souls' Night and the great Christ Church bell,
And many a lesser bell, sound through the room,
For it is now midnight;
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.

H—'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 plunged 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.

SUGGESTED BY A PICTURE OF A BLACK CENTAUR

Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,
Even where the 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 toppers slept and never knew
When Alexander's empire past, 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.

**THOUGHTS UPON THE PRESENT STATE OF
THE WORLD.**

I

Many ingenious lovely things are gone
That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude;
Above the murderous treachery of the moon
Or all that wayward ebb and flow. There stood
Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
An ancient image made of olive wood;
And gone are Phidias' carven ivories
And all his 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.

And other comfort were a bitter wound:
To be in love and love what vanishes.
Greeks were but lovers; all 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 gong.

III

Some moralist or mythological poet
Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
I am content with that,
Contented that 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,
Grown tired of their solitude,
Upon some brand-new happy day:
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 NEW FACES

If you, that have grown old were the first dead
Neither Caltapa 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 hand:
There are malicious things, although
Few dream that they 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,
Have borne You through the smooth and rough
And through the fertile and waste,
Protecting till the danger past
With human love.

CUCHULAIN THE GIRL AND THE FOOL

THE GIRL.

I am jealous of the looks men turn on you
For all men love your worth; and I must rage
At my own image in the looking-glass
That's so unlike myself that when you praise it
It is as though you praise another, or even
Mock me with praise of my mere opposite;
And when I wake towards morn I dread myself
For the heart cries that what deception wins
My cruelty must keep; and so begone
If you have seen that image and not my worth.

CUCHULAIN.

All men have praised my strength but not my worth.

THE GIRL.

If you are no more strength than I am beauty
I will find out some cavern in the hills
And live among the ancient holy men,
For they at least have all men's reverence
And have no need of cruelty to keep
What no deception won.

CUCHULAIN.

I have heard them say
That men have reverence for their holiness
And not their worth.

THE GIRL.

God loves us for our worth;
But what care I that long for a man's love.

THE FOOL BY THE ROADSIDE.

When my days 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.

THE WHEEL

Through winter-time we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when abounding hedges sing
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.

A NEW END FOR 'THE KING'S THRESHOLD'

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Die Seanchan and proclaim the right of the poets.

SEANCHAN.

Come nearer me, that I may know how face
Differs from face, and touch you with my hands.
O more than kin, O more than children could be,
For children are but born out of our blood
And share our frailty. O my chicks, my chicks,
That I have nourished underneath my wings
And fed upon my soul. (He stands up and begins to walk
down steps) I need no help.
He needs no help that joy has lifted up
Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.
The man that dies has the chief part in the story,
And I will mock and mock and mock that image yonder
That evil picture in the sky—no, no—
I have all my strength again, I will outface it.
O look upon the moon that's standing there
In the blue daylight—notice her complexion
Because it is the white of leprosy
And the contagion that afflicts mankind
Falls from the moon. When I and these are dead
We should be carried to some windy hill
To lie there with uncovered face awhile
That mankind and that leper there may know
Dead faces laugh.
(He falls and then half rises.)
King, king, dead faces laugh.
(He dies)

OLDEST PUPIL.

King, king, he is dead; some strange triumphant thought
So filled his heart with joy that it has burst
Being grown too mighty for our frailty,

And we who gaze grow like him and abhor
The moments that come between us and that death
You promised us.

KING.

Take up his body.
Go where you please and lay it where you please,
So that I cannot see his face or any
That cried him towards his death.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Dead faces laugh!
The ancient right is gone, the new remains
And that is death.
(They go towards the king holding out their halters)
We are impatient men,
So gather up the halters in your hands.

KING.

Drive them away.
(He goes into the palace. The soldiers block the way before
the pupils.)

SOLDIER.

Here is no place for you,
For he and his pretensions now are finished.
Begone before the men at arms are bidden
To hurl you from the door.

OLDEST PUPIL.

Take up his body
And cry that driven from the populous door
He seeks high waters and the mountain birds
To claim a portion of their solitude.
(They make a litter with cloak and staffs and lay Seanchan
on it.)

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

And cry that when they took his ancient right
They took all common sleep; therefore he claims
The mountain for his mattress and his pillow.

OLDEST PUPIL.

And there he can sleep on, not noticing
Although the world be changed from worse to worse,
Amid the changeless clamour of the curlew.
(They raise the litter on their shoulders and move a few steps)

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

(motioning to them to stop)
Yet make triumphant music; sing aloud
For coming times will bless what he has blessed
And curse what he has cursed.

OLDEST PUPIL.

No, no, be still;
Or pluck a solemn music from the strings.
You wrong his greatness speaking so of triumph.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

O silver trumpets, be you lifted up
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans upon the waves of time
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
That race may hear our music and awake.

OLDEST PUPIL.

(motioning the musicians to lower their trumpets)
Not what it leaves behind it in the light
But what it carries with it to the dark
Exalts the soul; nor song nor trumpet-blast
Can call up races from the worsening world
To mend the wrong and mar the solitude
Of the great shade we follow to the tomb.

(Fedelm and the pupils go out carrying the litter. Some play a mournful music.)

NOTE ON 'THOUGHTS UPON THE PRESENT STATE OF THE WORLD' SECTION SIX.

The country people see at times certain apparitions whom they name now 'fallen angels' now 'ancient inhabitants of the country,' and describe as riding at whiles 'with flowers upon the heads of the horses.' I have assumed in the sixth poem that these horsemen, now that the times worsen, give way to worse. My last symbol Robert Artisson was an evil spirit much run after in Kilkenny at the start of the fourteenth century. Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the Platonic Year?—W. B. Y.

NOTE ON THE NEW END TO 'THE KING'S THRESHOLD'

Upon the revival of this play at the Abbey Theatre a few weeks ago it was played with this new end. There were a few other changes. I had

originally intended to end the play tragically and would have done so but for a friend who used to say 'O do write comedy & have a few happy moments in the Theatre.' My unhappy moments were because a tragic effect is very fragile and a wrong intonation, or even a wrong light or costume will spoil it all. However the play remained always of the nature of tragedy and so subject to vicissitude.

Here ends, 'Seven Poems and a Fragment:' by William Butler Yeats: with a decoration by T. Sturge Moore. Five hundred copies of this book have been printed and published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats on paper made in Ireland, at the Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, in the County of Dublin, Ireland. Finished in the third week of April in the year nineteen hundred and twenty-two.

Butler Yeats

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