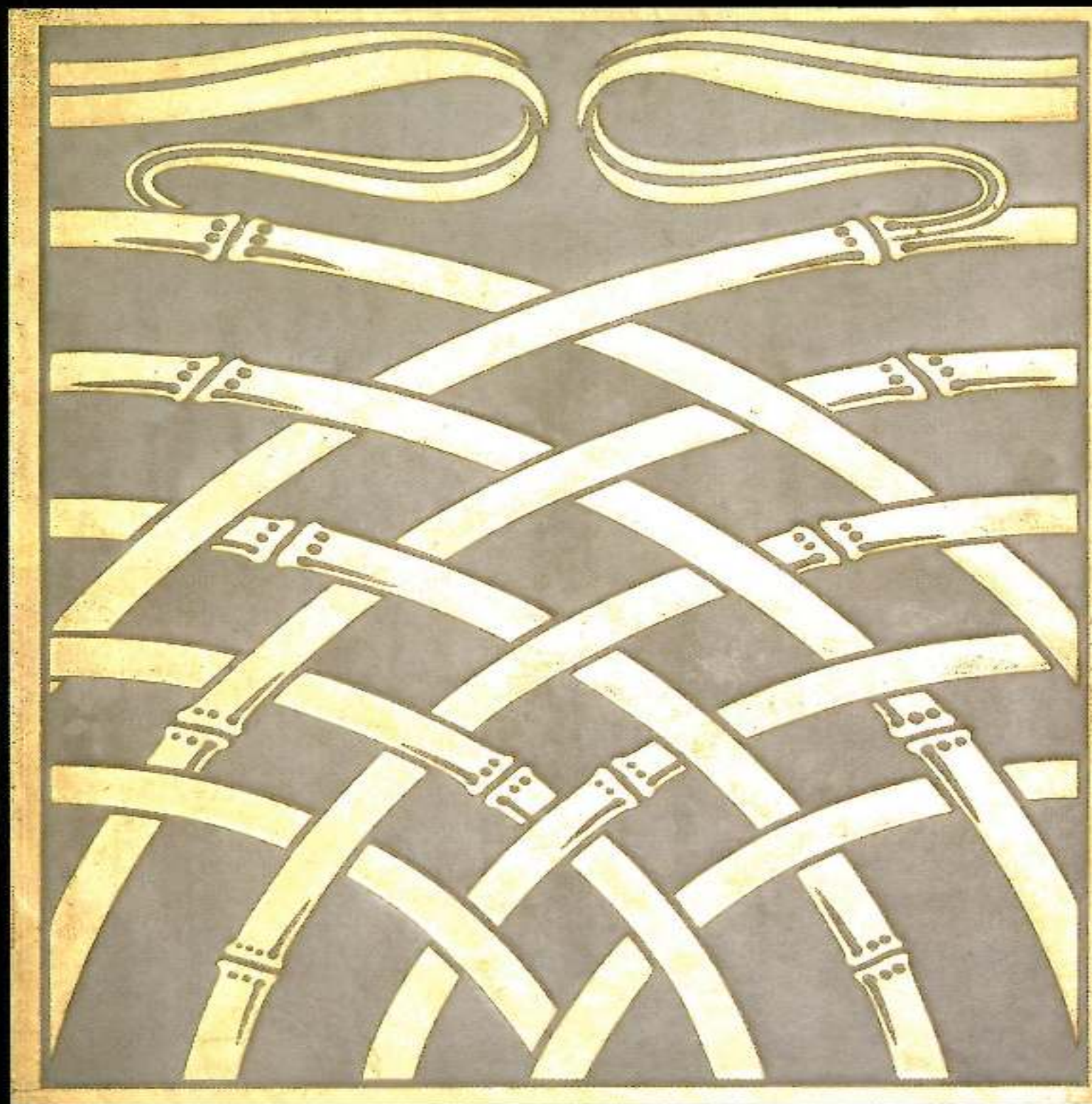


# THE FIRST YEATS

*Poems by W. B. Yeats 1889-1899*

UNREVISED TEXTS, EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY EDWARD LARRISSY

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*Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.  
Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,  
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side*

from 'Thyrsis'

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CARCANET

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## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

There is a widespread assumption that the Yeats of the nineteenth century – roughly the Yeats of the years between *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) – is markedly different from the Yeats who succeeds him. This early Yeats is late-Romantic in matter and manner, whereas middle and late Yeats are thought to be modernist, despite the continuation of certain Romantic themes and techniques. There is, in fact, much to be said for this repeated account. Yeats was born in 1865, and thus his formative years as a poet necessarily passed in a context where the Romantics were living influences, still capable of suggesting new creative ideas. One, in particular, was still being discovered: namely, William Blake. Yeats himself, with his friend Edwin Ellis, brought out the first serious edition of Blake, the three-volume *Works of William Blake* (1893). His thought is clearly indebted to Blake's, perhaps most obviously in his deployment of the principle of contrary states, and in the related matter of exploiting esoteric symbolism for poetic purposes. But Shelley, with his yearning for 'Intellectual Beauty', and his rarefied blend of symbolism and mental association, was perhaps a more potent influence on Yeats's style. Alongside these figures we must not forget the intervening years: Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelites (in particular William Morris) all leave their mark, in one way or another, on the early Yeats. So do a number of Irish poets who attempted to give new and living shape to the matter of Ireland through the medium of the English language, and in forms influenced by British Romanticism. Yeats himself, in his 'Apology Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days' (later to be renamed as 'To Ireland in the Coming Times') identifies the Irish poets Thomas Davis (1814–45), James Clarence Mangan (1803–49) and Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810–86) as having particular significance for him. Then there is the question of French symbolism, which certainly must not be divorced from its origins in Romanticism. Baudelaire, for instance, thought of himself as a Romantic poet, though he is usually nowadays classified as a symbolist poet. It was Yeats's friend Arthur Symonds who was responsible for introducing Yeats to the work of the French symbolist poets, from 1893 or thereabouts, the year when Symonds himself brought Verlaine to London. Verlaine's prescription, in 'Art poétique', for musical suggestiveness in poetry is probably an influence on the poems Yeats wrote from the mid-nineties onwards.

After 1900, and certainly from *In the Seven Woods* (1907), Yeats's style begins to change. The directness, as of a person addressing the reader, albeit with considerable artifice, has few precedents in the earlier verse. The tone and subject-matter also change. A neat way of gauging these developments is to compare and contrast 'Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' (as it was entitled in the first edition of *The Wind Among the Reeds*) with 'A Coat', from *Responsibilities* (1914). In the former, the speaker spreads his 'embroidered' cloths of dreams under the mistress's feet. In the latter he speaks of how he made his song a coat 'Covered with embroideries / Out of old mythologies': it fares ill in the world's hands. In the last lines, the bitter contempt, born of disillusionment, is not uncharacteristic of middle and later Yeats: 'Song, let them take it, / For there's more enterprise / In walking naked.' The nakedness is that of an unadorned style and outlook, free of illusions.

There is only one problem with the account given so far, and it is perhaps not an insuperable one. It arises out of the contemporary realisation that 'Romanticism' is by no means the unified phenomenon that word might seem to imply. If one only considers poetry, one should note that this word has to comprise the Romantic neoclassicism of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', as well as the satirical and sceptical humour and neoclassical style of Byron's *Don Juan*. If it can include these things, can it not



include the later Yeats, as well as the earlier? In particular, can it not also include the Yeats who reflects, at the end of 'Among School Children', on the power of images in our lives, most of all those images where the life and the form are one: images such as those of the tree or the dancer? Are they not images in the Romantic tradition of 'organic form'? Frank Kermode, in his classic critical work *Romantic Image*, certainly thought so. But to let these considerations cause anxiety about terms is probably a waste of energy when the terms are so large and inexact in any case. For that matter 'modernism' is as diverse as 'Romanticism'. Nevertheless, to realise that Yeats's 'Romanticism' does not disappear in 1899 is also to realise that there are likely to be important continuities, and that the early work is clearly essential for an understanding of the later.

Yet it would be doing the early work a grave disservice to reduce it to ancillary status in relation to the later. It is still possible to come across readers who deride the supposedly vague dreaminess of the early Yeats as if this were a given of critical discourse. Presumably they have never analysed the techniques of a poem such as 'The Song of Wandering Aengus'. Here the speaker goes out to a hazel wood, a mysterious place full of trees which in Irish tradition were beneficently magical. He does so at twilight, and he is beside a stream. Symbolically he is close to both temporal and spatial boundaries, and these might operate like cracks in the fabric of the universe through which the supernatural might intervene. When he cuts and peels a hazel wand, to turn it into a fishing rod, the wand does indeed have magical associations, so that when the fish he catches turns into a 'glimmering girl' we should not be entirely surprised. In any case, she is one of the 'Sidhe' (the fairies), and a woman of the Sidhe might well be able to turn herself into a fish and back again. Appropriately enough, she is associated with the element of water, whose mutability might figure the feminine, and the speaker is associated with the masculine element of fire, which burns as the desire in his heart. When she calls him by his name, this in itself is an act of magical power, for no one has revealed it to her. She turns the tables on his evocation of her, and now he must pursue her forever. When he finds her, they will, he thinks, 'pluck till time and times are done, / The silver apples of the moon, / The golden apples of the sun.' The elements of water and fire, which seemed so irreconcilable, are here transformed by the alchemy of love into silver and golden apples. The great lights of moon and sun represent the two major aspects of the world of time transfigured. This would be the consummation of a first meeting that occurred at a point where those aspects meet: at twilight. The poem embodies these ideas by the suggestive combination of images, and through a complex network of related sounds, and it enacts the desire of the speaker by means of an insistent, driving rhythm. To mention some of the ways in which images and sounds work together: for example, 'white moths' are out at the twilight of the morning, while almost next to them, you might think, 'moth-like stars are flickering out'. The combination intensifies the visual impression, and helps to convey more forcefully the important notion of uncertain apprehension. This 'flickering', so redolent of the 'Celtic Twilight', a time and a state for supernatural occurrences, is reinforced by the 'glimmering' that qualifies the girl, and the 'brightening' of the air. There is also a kind of auditory flickering, 'something rustled on the floor'. When the lovers are united in a land beyond time, the 'dappled' grass is a transmutation of the early flickering, intensified by its internal near rhyme with 'apples'.

Such is the supposed vagueness and dreaminess of Yeats's early poetic. There is more to say, of course, about his intellectual preoccupations, of which this beautiful poem is in part the result. Of particular importance are Celticism, and magic. The woman of the Sidhe is a notable instance of Yeats's fascination with these denizens of Irish mythology and folklore. The poem memorably evokes the uncanniness of these beings, immortal creatures who live in a land beyond the western sea, Tír na nÓg ('The Land of the Young', i.e., of those who do not age). They may also live in hills, or at the

bottom of lakes and rivers, as the 'glimmering girl' perhaps does. They may possess great beauty, and are not normally diminutive in size, despite the fact that they were often called in English 'the fairies'. Their beauty may entice mortals, and indeed they appear to wish to entrap, steal or kidnap human kind. Notoriously, this applies to children, as in Yeats's poem 'The Stolen Child'. But who can say whether or not they are really malevolent? Niam, in 'The Wanderings of Oisín', does not appear so. Yet the subtitle of the first version to appear in book form (which of course is what is reprinted here) is 'And How a Demon Trapped Him' – referring to how she enticed Oisín into the other world. And when we turn to *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), we note that Niamh (the same as Niam) is calling 'Away, come away'. In a piece of pre-Raphaelite eroticism, she evokes the heaving breasts, gleaming eyes and parted lips of herself and the other fairy women. Yet perversely, she goes on to assert that 'any gaze on our rushing band, / We come between him and the deed of his hand, / We come between him and the hope of his heart.' Nor had all that many years passed between the publication of *Oisín* and the writing, in 1893, of this poem, so it is not easy to assert some change of attitude on Yeats's part. Here and in his subsequent work he involves the Sidhe in his meditation on a fundamental problem of human experience: our longings for beauty and truth lead us to wonder if these qualities possess such universality that they are eternal. Yet life is changeable and doomed to mortality. In his later years, Yeats turns also to neo-Platonic philosophy and to Romantic poems such as Keats's *Ode for illumination of this predicament*, but the Sidhe are never far from his mind.

But while they are the most captivating examples of the subject-matter of Irish romance, one must not forget the more general cultural-nationalist motivation which led Yeats to offer his powerful reinterpretations of Celtic mythology and tradition. Of course, he was a major figure in the Irish literary and dramatic revival. But this movement did not arise suddenly in the nineties, and Yeats always presents himself as continuing the work of previous Irish poets who had themselves attempted to reinvent Gaelic tradition in a contemporary English-language poetic idiom. For instance, 'Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days', he counts himself one 'With Davis, Mangan and Ferguson': i.e., with the poets Thomas Davis, James Clarence Mangan and Sir Samuel Ferguson. Yet there is more to it than that. Yeats's own poetic *début* is to be found in *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1899). The subject-matter of the title poem shows Yeats boldly handling the most celebrated Celtic material, namely the story of Oisín (or Ossian). It was James Macpherson (1736–97) who had first made the world aware of the name of this legendary ancient bard in prose 'translations' from Scottish Gaelic verses he claimed to have discovered. The first of a number of works of Ossian he published was *Fingal* (1761). Despite questions about the veracity of Macpherson's claims, and about his grasp of the traditions surrounding Ossian, his works enjoyed the most extraordinary popularity and influence down to the end of the nineteenth century. Coleridge and Whitman counted themselves as admirers, and the poems were translated into the major European languages.

It was Irish scholars and poets who tended to offer the most informed criticism of Macpherson's endeavours. Stories of Oisín were the common property of the Gaelic-speaking people of Ireland and Scotland. But wherever the tale was told, there was no doubt about the usual setting: Ireland. Ireland's attempt to wrest Ossian back from Scotland was most ambitiously embodied in the Ossianic Society of Dublin, founded in 1853, whose learned *Transactions* Yeats studied. In other words, Yeats learned from a scholarly tradition instigated by Macpherson's celebrated work; and he also chose to base his first ambitious long poem on the matter which was most clearly related in the public mind to the essential qualities of the Celt.

These qualities had to do with the melancholy of lamenting a heroic age that had passed, and with a sense of noble but inevitable defeat. In his influential lectures, *On Celtic Literature* (well known

Yeats), Matthew Arnold had quoted (or slightly misquoted) a line from Macpherson's *Ossian*: 'They went forth to the battle but they always fell'. This sense that the Celts were destined to defeat by the modern world became something of a truism. It might be a badge of honour for those like Yeats who felt that the 'Grey Truth' of the modern world – its scientific rationalism and submission to the fat disciplines of industry – had turned its back on the most profound truths about human imagination. Yeats gave as a title to one of his poems the same misquotation from Macpherson, and so it appears in this edition, though he later changed it to 'The Rose of Battle'. His interest in Macpherson did not survive into the twentieth century; but it has been too little considered that his oft-expressed regret for the passing of an older heroic order may owe some of its origins to the continued influence of Macpherson's *Ossian* into the late nineteenth century.

What the Celts actually believed, or may have believed, was also a matter of interest to Yeats, and the answer was thought to be well enough known. We need turn no further than to the final lines of his own 'Fergus and the Druid':

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 [...]

Such ideas about transmigration of souls – and indeed about a priesthood who taught them – supported the long-held notion that the Celts (including the Irish) were of oriental origin. The exact location of the Orient was not always clear. In the case of transmigration, it might seem that Indian philosophy provided a clue. The Indian poems in *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* illustrate Yeats's interest in such ideas. In his verse-drama 'Mosada', from the end of that volume, we find a different type of Orient, for the setting is Spain during the Inquisition, and the oriental is represented by a Moorish girl who practises magic and is condemned unknowingly by the hypocritical monk Ebremar who had once been her lover. The play is in part an allegory about Irish society, for it dramatises the conflict between an oppressive Catholicism and a form of magic Yeats could associate with his own esoteric interests. Nor is it irrelevant that Yeats was a Protestant, brought up in the established Anglican Church of Ireland.

But there may be more to say about that particular fact than would at first seem likely. It is, of course, suggestive that members of the Church of Ireland had for long seen themselves as the true heirs of 'the Celtic Church', and had sought to represent the Catholic Church as an alien import. Of more direct relevance might be the fact, outlined by Roy Foster in a brilliant lecture, 'Protestant Magic', that there was a strong tradition of interest in the occult among the educated Protestant middle class in Ireland. When Yeats joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn he was joining an order which was avowedly Rosicrucian. That is to say, it traced its doctrines back to the legendary Christian Rosenkreutz, whose name was interpreted symbolically and related to the doctrines of the order themselves: specifically, these were held to revolve around a symbolic union of Rose and Cross. Yeats's own poem, 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time', offers a useful illustration of the working of these doctrines. Here, the Cross (or Rood) is also seen as a tree, in line with St Paul (Galatians 3:13). This tree that is also a cross of torture and death symbolises the contrariety and struggle of earthly existence. Yet out of this very condition blooms what Yeats calls the 'Eternal Beauty' of the Rose. When one looks at the way in which the Golden Dawn sought a synthesis of many esoteric

traditions, including the Jewish Kabbalah, one realises that this tree is also the Tree of Life expounded by the Kabbalists. This had two aspects, one of sternness and rigour (related to God's judgement) and one of mildness (related to His mercy). A tree of double aspect is also part of the background of Yeats's 'The Two Trees', although he may also be thinking of another Kabbalistic tradition to the effect that, after the Fall of Man, the tree appears in this world as dead and lifeless. So much on the central images of Rosicrucianism. The connection with Irish Protestantism relates to three facts: the inner, or more elite and thoughtful, grades of Freemasonry tended to espouse Rosicrucian doctrines, as witnessed by the very names of a number of masonic lodges; Freemasonry was a pervasive institution among Irish Protestants, at least from the late eighteenth century; and Catholics were officially forbidden to be Freemasons. This provides another way of understanding Yeats's own particular version of 'Protestant Magic'. It shows the mystery and magic of his own caste vying with and surpassing those of the Catholic Church.

The picture we have unfolded is one of a thinker and poet who draws the disparate areas of his experience into a unity. His indebtedness to English Romantic poetry, especially that of Blake, cannot be separated from his immersion in esoteric doctrines, and that cannot be separated from his conception of Druidism or ancient Celtic tradition. Naturally enough, Druidism is central to his sense of what the Celtic temperament and wisdom actually were. And the recovery of that temperament and that wisdom are an aim at one with his political hopes for Ireland. This drive to unity is present in the imagery of the poems themselves. The symbol of the Rose, for instance, while palpably indebted to the Rosicrucian doctrine, also comprises references to the personification of Ireland as a rose in an anonymous poem, 'Róisín Dubh' ('little dark rose', translated by Mangan as 'My Dark Rosaleen'). There is probably also a reference to the 'Red Branch', emblem of the ancient dynasty of Ulster whose legendary history is recounted in the ancient sagas and tales. Yeats takes the trouble to ensure that his readers are left in no doubt about the unity of his aims or his belief in the efficacy of that unity. In the 'Apologia' he informs his audience that his interest in magic and the esoteric, so far from being separate from the aim of cultural nationalism, offers a means of reviving the spirit of ancient Ireland. Yeats, like other nineteenth-century Celticists, thought that the marginalisation of the Celts by modern industrial society meant that they had remained nearer to the ancient sources of wisdom. They might help to save humanity from the deadening effects of modernity in a new age, an age of spiritual rebirth which would dawn in the twentieth century. Ideas such as this give a particular content to the undoubted *fin-de-siècle* quality of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), a work which seems conscious of its date of publication. If the Celts were to assist in the renewal of modern Europe, the liberation of Ireland from domination by the world's greatest imperial and industrial power might be a decisive moment in that renewal. In 'The Valley of the Black Pig', from *The Wind Among the Reeds*, Yeats foresees an apocalyptic battle in which Ireland will confront her foes.

Yet the tone of *The Wind Among the Reeds* is anything but triumphant. Many poems are marked by the melancholy of unsatisfied love. Some of them border on depression. Ireland may need to be renewed, but so does the poet, and for this to happen he needs to find a true marriage, such as Aengus envisages for himself – but has not found, being 'old with wandering'. If it is a question of finding the incipient modernism in early Yeats, nowhere is there a more apt example than this identification of sexual and social renewal. This is indeed a Yeats who prefigures Pound, Lawrence, H.D., and the early work of Eliot and Auden. But by what might seem a paradox at first glance, we need to understand fully the writings of the early Yeats. To do this, we need to go back to the poems as they were first encountered by a wide readership. Only in this way can we gauge the true extent of Yeats's immersion in Celticism and the matter of Ireland – for these were the things that became obscured in later

collections – and connect them to his other, more evident themes. It is with this thought in mind that this edition seeks to provide the reader with a better idea of the earliest Yeats.

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## A Note on the Text

This is a first-version edition of Yeats's early poetry, in the sense that it reproduces the poems that appeared in the first three collections of his own poetry. The volumes are *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1889); *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1892); and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1899). From the contents of these volumes, however, it does not reproduce the text of *The Countess Kathleen*, in line with the persistent tendency among Yeats and his editors and readers to treat this as essentially a dramatic work. Nor does this edition reproduce the texts in *Poems* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), since that is substantially a revision and reordering of poems to be found in *The Wanderings* and *Legends and Lyrics*. Readers should bear these facts in mind when interpreting the statement that the current edition provides the first versions of Yeats's early poems.

Where (as is usually the case) a poem exists in multiple versions, there are arguments for making many or all of these versions available, in one edition or another. One learns different things about the poet from the different versions, and one also learns about the different publics that were reading them, and the different contexts in which they appeared. On the other hand, there is no ideal version. Abiding by the final version, as if it were vital to find the poet's final intention, may hinder a understanding of a poet's early work and ideas; while going back to early versions may lead to an ill-considered depreciation of the poet's second thoughts. As regards the versions to be found in the first collections of a poet's own work, one needs to remember the fundamental point that these are not the first versions in an absolute sense. At the very least, a poem will exist in one or more manuscripts (probably different from each other, as well) before it is even published in book form. But it may also have been circulated by hand in a fair copy, and have appeared in a journal or in an anthology, or in a selection of other writings by the author. Many of the poems in this volume had a life of this kind before they entered the covers of one of these collections. The argument for reproducing the texts to be found in these collections is that they represent the earliest form in which a very large number of readers encountered these poems. Some of these poems were discarded, never to appear again in Yeats's subsequent collections. It is instructive to become acquainted with them. The verse-drama 'Mosada', for instance, enhances our understanding of Yeats's use of oriental imagery by making very clear the way in which it could be used in an allegorical representation of Irish realities. There are a number of poems about 'fairies' – for example, 'A Lover's Quarrel among the Fairies', 'The Priest and the Fairy' – in *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*, which are subsequently discarded. These suggest a far more conventional nineteenth-century context than one might have imagined for the development of Yeats's lifelong interest in those uncanny beings, the Sidhe ('fairies') of Irish mythology and folklore. The wording of some of Yeats's best-known poems is sometimes markedly different from the established versions, as is the case with 'Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days', which will be more familiar to readers as 'To Ireland in the Coming Times'. In this context, the original title can be seen to offer a subtly revolutionary hint which gives more point and urgency to the political aspects of the poem. And the titles of many poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* contain the names of Gaelic personages from mythology and folklore, instead of the pronoun 'he' familiar from later collections: thus, instead of 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', we find here 'Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'. One gains a heightened sense of the importance to Yeats in the nineties of rediscovering and representing Gaelic tradition.

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# THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN AND OTHER POEMS (1889)

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The Wanderings of Oisín and  
*How a Demon Trapped Him*

PATRICK

Oisín, tell me the famous story  
Why thou outlivest, blind and hoary,  
The bad old days. Thou wert, men sing,  
Trapped of an amorous demon thing.

OISIN

'Tis sad remembering, sick with years,  
The swift innumerable spears,  
The long-haired warriors, the spread feast;  
And love, in the hours when youth has ceased:  
Yet will I make all plain for thee.  
We rode in sorrow, with strong hounds three,  
Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
On a morning misty and mild and fair.  
The mist-drops hung on the fragrant trees,  
And in the blossoms hung the bees.  
We rode in sadness above Lough Laen,  
For our best were dead on Gavra's green.  
The stag we chased was not more sad,  
And yet, of yore, much peace he had  
In his own leafy forest house,  
Sleek as any granary mouse  
Among the fields of waving fern.  
We thought on Oscar's pencilled urn.  
Than the hornless deer we chased that morn,  
A swifter creature never was born,  
And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair  
Were lolling their tongues, and the silken hair  
Of our strong steeds was dark with sweat,  
When ambling down the vale we met  
A maiden, on a slender steed,  
Whose careful pastern pressed the sod  
As though he held an earthly mead  
Scarce worthy of a hoof gold-shod.  
For gold his hooves and silk his rein,  
And 'tween his ears, above his mane,  
A golden crescent lit the plain,  
And pearly white his well-groomed hair.  
His mistress was more mild and fair  
Than doves that moaned round Eman's hall  
Among the leaves of the laurel wall,

And feared always the bow-string's twanging.  
Her eyes were soft as dewdrops hanging  
Upon the grass-blades' bending tips,  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset o'er doomed ships.  
Her hair was of a citron tincture,  
And gathered in a silver cincture;  
Down to her feet white vesture flowed  
And with the woven crimson glowed  
Of many a figured creature strange,  
And birds that on the seven seas range.  
For brooch 'twas bound with a bright sea-shell,  
And wavered like a summer rill,  
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

PATRICK

Oisín, thou art half heathen still!

OISÍN

'Why, as ye ride, droops low each head?  
Why do ye sound no horn?' she said.  
'For hunting heroes should be glad.  
The stag ye chase is not more sad,  
And yet, of yore, much peace he had,  
Sleek as any granary mouse,  
In his own leafy forest house,  
Among the waving fields of fern.'  
'We think on Oscar's pencilled urn,  
And those on Gavra lying low,  
Where round and round the ravens go.  
Now, pleasant maiden, tell to me  
Thy name, thy kin, and thy country,'  
Cried Fin; and cried she, 'Men of fame,  
My home is far from where the tide  
Washes the shores where ye abide,  
Ye worn deed-doers, and my name  
Is Niam, daughter of the King  
Of the Young.'

'Young maiden, what may bring  
Thy wandering steps across the sea?  
Is thy companion gone from thee?'  
Clear fluted then that goblin rare –  
'Not so, great king; for I have ne'er  
Been spoken of with any man.  
For love of Oisín my feet ran

Across the glossy sea.'

'Oh, wild

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Young princess, why wert thou beguiled  
Of Oisín, the young man, my son?  
Of princes there is many a one.'  
'Good reason have I for my love,'  
She said; 'for he is fair above  
All men, and stronger of his hands,  
And drops of honey are his words,  
And glorious as Asian birds  
At evening in their rainless lands.  
Full many bowing kings besought me,  
And many princes of high name.  
I ne'er loved any till song brought me  
To peak and pine o'er Oisín's fame.'  
There was, oh Patrick, by thy head,  
No limb of me that was not fallen  
In love. I cried, 'Thee will I wed,  
Young Niam, and thou shalt be callen  
Beloved in a thousand songs.  
Before thy feet shall kneel down all  
My captives, bound in leathern thongs,  
And praise thee in my western hall.'  
'Oisín, thou must away with me  
To my own kingdom in the sea –  
Away, away with me,' she cried,  
'To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,  
Where the voice of change is the voice of a tune,  
In the poppy-hung house of the twilight fluted;  
To shores where dying has never been known,  
And the flushes of first love never have flown;  
And a hundred steeds, tumultuous-footed,  
There shalt thou have, and a hundred hounds  
That spring five paces in their bounds,  
No mightier creatures bay at the moon;  
And a hundred robes of the softest silk,  
And a hundred calves, and a hundred sheep  
Whose long wool whiter than sea-froth flows;  
And a hundred swords and a hundred bows;  
And honey, and oil, and wine, and milk,  
And always never-anxious sleep;  
And a hundred maidens wise and young,  
And sweeter of voice than the pleasant birds,  
And swifter than the salmon herds;  
And a hundred youths, whose limbs are strung

In a vigour more than mortal measure,  
And floating-haired and proud in strife;  
And thou shalt know the immortals' leisure,  
And I be with thee as thy wife.'

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We rode beyond the furze and heather,  
And stood beside the sea together;  
Then sighed she softly, 'Late! 'tis late!  
Mount my white steed, for the fairy state  
Lies far.' I mounted, and she bound me  
In triumph with her arms around me,  
And, whispering to herself, enwound me;  
And when the white steed felt my weight,  
He shook himself for travelling,  
And neighed three times.

When, wondering

Near by, the Fenians saw, and knew  
That I would go with her, they grew  
Mournful, and gathered on the sands;  
They wept, and raised lamenting hands.  
When I had stooped and tenderly  
Had kissed my father, long-armed Fin,  
And the Fenians all had wept with me,  
We rode across the oily sea,  
For the sparkling hooves they sank not in;  
And far behind us, slowly round  
The Fenians on the human ground  
Closed in the misty air profound.  
In what far kingdom do ye go,  
Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow?  
Or are ye phantoms white as snow,  
Whose lips had life's most prosperous glow,  
Oh ye with whom, in sloping valleys  
And down the dewy forest alleys,  
I chased with hounds the flying deer,  
With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,  
And heard the foeman's bucklers rattle,  
And broke the heaving ranks of battle?  
And, Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
Where are ye with your long rough hair?  
Ye go not where the red deer feeds,  
Nor tear the foemen from their steeds.

PATRICK

Bard Oisín, boast not of thy deeds

Nor thy companions. Let them rest,  
The Fenians. Let their deer-hounds sleep.  
Tell on, nor bow thy heathen crest  
In brooding memory, nor weep.

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OISIN

On, on, we galloped o'er the sea.  
I knew not if days passed or hours,  
For fairy songs continually  
Sang Niam, and their dewy showers  
Of pensive laughter – unhuman sound –  
Lulled weariness; and closely round  
My human sadness fay arms wound.  
On, on! and now a hornless deer  
Passed by us, chased of a phantom hound  
All pearly white, save one red ear;  
And now a maid, on a swift brown steed  
Whose hooves the tops of the surges grazed,  
Hurried away, and over her raised  
An apple of gold in her tossing hand;  
And following her at a headlong speed  
Was a beautiful youth from an unknown land.  
'Who are the riding ones?' I said.  
'Fret not with speech the phantoms dread,'  
Said Niam, as she laid the tip  
Of one long finger on my lip.  
Now in the sea the sun's rim sank,  
The clouds arrayed them rank on rank  
In silence round his crimson ball.  
The floor of Eman's dancing hall  
Was not more level than the sea,  
As, full of loving phantasy,  
We rode on murmuring. Many a shell  
That in immortal silence sleeps  
And dreams of her own melting hues,  
Her golds, her azures, and her blues,  
Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps,  
When round us suddenly there came  
A far vague sound of feathery choirs.  
It seemed to fall from the very flame  
Of the great round sun, from his central fires.  
The steed towards the music raced,  
Neighing along the lifeless waste;  
And, as the sun sank ever lower,  
Like sooty fingers many a tree

Rose ever from the sea's warm floor,  
And they were trembling ceaselessly,  
As though they all were beating time  
Upon the centre of the sun  
To the music of the golden rhyme  
Sung of the birds. Our toil was done;  
We cantered to the shore, and knew  
The reason of the trembling trees,  
For round each branch the song-birds flew,  
Or clung as close as swarms of bees,  
While round the shore a million stood  
Like drops of frozen rainbow light,  
And pondered in a soft vain mood  
On their own selves in the waters white,  
And murmured snatches of delight;  
And on the shores were many boats  
With bending sterns and bending bows,  
And carven figures on their prows  
Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats,  
And swans with their exultant throats.  
Among them 'lighting from our steed,  
Maid Niam from a little trump  
Blew one long note. From over reed  
And river, fern and flowery clump,  
Ere long an answering whisper flew,  
A whisper of impetuous feet  
Among the woodland grasses sweet,  
And ever nearer, nearer grew;  
And from the woods there rushed a band  
Of youths and maidens hand in hand,  
And singing, singing all together.  
Their brows were white as fragrant milk,  
Their robes were all of yellow silk,  
Trimmed round with many a crimson feather;  
And when they saw my earthly dress,  
They fingered it and gazed at me,  
And laughed like murmurs of the sea.  
But Niam, with a sad distress,  
Bid them away and hold their peace;  
And when they heard her voice, they ran  
And knelt them, every maid and man,  
And kissed, as they would never cease,  
Her fingers and her garments' hem.  
Now in the woods, away with them  
Went we to find their prince's hall –



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