

POEMS OF W. B. YEATS

A New Selection

Selected, with an Introduction and Notes, by

A. NORMAN JEFFARES

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Selection, Introduction and editorial matter

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First published 1984 by
Higher and Further Education Division
MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD

London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by Wessex Typesetters Ltd
Frome, Somerset

Printed in Hong Kong

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Yeats, W. B.

Poems of W. B. Yeats.

I. Title II. Jeffares, A. Norman

821'.8 PR5097

ISBN 0-333-36213-6

ISBN 0-333-36214-4 Pbk

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that poems have been chosen for this selection under eighteen different subject headings may indicate something of the diversity to be found in Yeats's poetry. He was a poet straddling two centuries. He began as a poet influenced by the great Victorians, yet seeking to establish his own individual note, writing lyrics with a delicate, haunting beauty. He developed into a leading – some would say *the* leading – twentieth-century poet, a modernist who influenced many of his contemporaries and continues to influence many poets writing today. Yeats wrote poetry from his teens – probably as early as 1883 – until his death in 1939: he developed and changed his style, and startling it seemed to many of those who had admired his early wistful 'twilight' poetry; he was consistently seeking directer, more urgent utterance yet casting his poetry in a rhetorical mould. It is this quality which poses continuous challenging questions to readers and ensures the continuing vitality of his work, its eminently quotable, indeed its insistently memorable dramatic force.

To match this changing, developing style there was the poet, himself a changing, developing man, who as he gained in confidence, skill and success became the subject of his own poetry. That he made himself a fit subject for his art is a measure of his greatness; he contained variety enough of experience; though idiosyncratic, he was in touch with his age in such a way that he could, by concentrating upon subjects and imagery, by presenting them with masterly technique, imbue them with a continuing relevance for subsequent readers' own experiences and ideas. Certain aspects of his work are part of the poetic tradition, and are incorporated in it because that tradition lasts through its universality. An Indian reader, a Japanese, an American, may find Yeats today as vital as he seemed to readers in his lifetime – and yet different aspects of his poetry may appeal to them. There is a variety in the subject matter of his poetry, published during a period of fifty-four years; there is a certain lasting universality in the work of this poet who is so based in the literary history and even the political history of his own island. And yet, ironically perhaps, Yeats once told his wife that he had spent his whole life saying the same thing in different ways.

What had he to say, then? Can we pluck one basic idea from his poems – or indeed his plays, his autobiographies, his essays, his journalism, his letters or his diaries? Or was his remark one of those deep rhetorical phrases that need to be decompressed, translated, brought into the prosaic light of day? Perhaps we can explain the continuing appeal of Yeats if we trace one of his underlying preoccupations which centres upon the common inescapable fact that all of us must die. '*What then?*' sang Plato's ghost. '*What then?*' is the refrain of a late poem in which the poet describes his life: desire for fame, acquisition of technical skill, the sheer hard work that laid the foundations for that fame, gaining

sufficient money to live a modest life filled with the pleasure of friendships, and the youthful dreams fulfilled – marriage, children, a house, good company – and then? This is the question we all face sooner or later: what happens when we die? Is this the end of us as sentient beings? Or do we have a further existence? A re-incarnation? Or some ghostly existence? Do mortals become immortal, or does this only occur through art giving them continuance in the minds of succeeding generations?

Yeats did not find satisfactory answers in the religion of his forefathers – his paternal grandfather and great grandfather were country clergymen in Ireland – and though on the one hand he wanted to believe, to have faith, on the other he had a strongly sceptical streak in his mental make-up. While still a schoolboy he abandoned science after a brief flirtation with it; and then, after becoming interested in Indian philosophy as a youth, he joined the Theosophical Society only to be asked to leave it because he wanted proof. He remained interested in spiritualism throughout his life, and in cabalism and astrology. He studied magic; he immersed himself in occultism; he joined and played a large part in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a magical order (his imaginative development was obviously affected by the order's elaborately codified symbolism and rituals); and he himself wanted to form an Irish order of mysteries. All of this activity was inspired by a continuous searching, an exploring of the mysteries of life and death.

Yeats found, in his very wide reading, others who shared his quest. William Blake (1757–1827), Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1722) and Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) with their interest in contraries appealed to him particularly. Theories of opposites – reinforced later, no doubt, by his reading John Donne – provided a creative theme in his thought: the tension of the self and the soul at variance. And those long periods he spent as a child in the west of Ireland, where his mother's family lived, provided him with an early awareness of the supernatural, as his *Autobiographies* make clear. That, too, he followed up in his subsequent reading, his discussion, his talk. He read the mystics, the Neo-Platonics, and many of the classic philosophers; he read history and political thought. In middle age he moved from translations of Irish mythological literature and folklore into an admiration of eighteenth-century Irish writers in English whom he had scorned in his youth. This reading, an exploration of occult and mystical writings and traditions as well as history and philosophy, culminated in his writing *A Vision*, which was first published in 1926 and then, in revised form, in 1937. Into this strange book Yeats put his thoughts about history and how civilisations perish with all their beauty and achievement, about human personality and how its nature is determined, how it can – perhaps – escape its predestined fate.

Though *A Vision* provided 'stylistic arrangements of experience', the questions remained (apart from the obviously symbolic elements, Yeats said of the fixed periods, 'if sometimes overwhelmed by miracles as all men must be in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon

recovered') for Yeats was always a great asker of questions, even if, at times, they revealed a tragic despair over the nature of life:

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say?

What indeed? And 'Why should not old men be mad?' This latter poem poses the questions Yeats found liable to recur despite a lifetime spent in searching for belief, in facing the idea of death bravely. Affirmations and theories superseded each other, only to be overcome by the same innate scepticism, with the old questions still challenging him. The only answer, ultimately, for Yeats was that of ignorance. He does not know what will happen, and at last can see the question itself as eternal:

When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day,
His empty heart is full at length,
But he has need of all that strength
Because of the increasing Night
That opens her mystery and fright . . .

That is how he put it in 'The Apparitions', and here is how he put it in 'Man and the Echo' where the man is initially Yeats in old age going over his life, asking himself questions till, he says,

I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right

He meditates upon death, and upon the role of the intellect in arranging everything in one clear view: he is, in the Irish phrase, 'making his soul'. But when he addresses Rocky Voice, that echo from the rocks in a cleft in the Sligo mountainside, asking if in the great night of death we shall rejoice, he has to answer his query restrictively; we do not know about death:

What do we know but that we face
One another in this place?

To portray Yeats as preoccupied by death and the hereafter does not, however, fully convey the cold passion he sought to create, the tragic joy he found in contemplating and celebrating beauty and love, in creating and capturing his own vision of Irish literature, his blending of past achievements with those of the eighteenth-century writers whose inheritor he came to think

himself, whose tradition he made into his own view of what it was to be Anglo-Irish.

One of the benefits of his complex literary ancestry was that he attained a magnificent power of expression: words came into his call as the result of intense labour (testified to by the manuscripts and notebooks which survive, containing overwhelming evidence of his endless writing and rewriting in an obsessive search for the right word in the right place).

Yeats was born into the Victorian age, but grew up with the great advantage of having a father who questioned current attitudes and ideas. He was an idealistic painter and a man of ideas, a conversationalist *par excellence*. He recited poetry to his son and discussed it with him, particularly when they both took the train from Howth to Dublin, there to breakfast in the father's studio in York Street before the son took himself up Harcourt Street to the High School, where he studied only what interested him, as his penultimate publication, 'I became an author' (*The Listener*, 4 August 1938), tells us, recording his respect for his father's views and his own attitude to his schooling:

How did I begin to write? I have nothing to say that may help young writers, except that I hope they will not begin as I did. I spent longer than most schoolboys preparing for the next day's work, and yet learnt nothing, and would always have been at the bottom of my class but for one or two subjects that I hardly had to learn at all. My father would say: 'You cannot fix your mind on anything that does not interest you, and it is to study what does not that you are sent to school.' I did not suffer from the 'poetic temperament' but from some psychological weakness. Greater poets than I have been great scholars. Even today I struggle against a lack of confidence, when among average men, come from that daily humiliation, and because I do not know what they know. I can toil through a little French poetry, but nothing remains of the Greek, Latin and German I tried to learn. I have only one memory of my schooldays that gives me pleasure; though in both my English and Irish schools I was near the bottom of the class, my friends were all at the top, for then, as now, I hated fools. When I would find out if some man can be trusted, I ask if he associates with his betters.

He did not seem likely to be able to pass the notoriously easy entrance examination to Trinity College, Dublin, of which his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been graduates. But he grew up in a milieu where things of the mind were what mattered most. His father's ideas about the need for poetry to be dramatic had a lasting affect on him, and his father's pre-Raphaelitism was also a highly formative influence, to be succeeded later in England by an admiration for William Morris. John Butler Yeats, though deeply worried about the family's lack of money, discouraged his eldest son from seeking regular employment, encouraging him instead to develop his own talent, and welcoming his decision (arrived at when he was a student at the College of Art in Dublin) to become a poet. His father's friend Edward Dowden,

the Professor of English at Trinity College, also encouraged him in his early writing of poetry.

These two men were, in effect, urging him on to write in the English romantic tradition – which coloured much of his early work. But Yeats was to experience an Irish inheritance as well, for John O'Leary (a leader of the Fenian movement arrested in 1865, whose sentence of twenty years penal servitude had been commuted to exile after he had served four years of it) returned to Dublin in 1885, and introduced him to Irish literature. Through the medium of often poor prose translations and the poetry of James Clarence Mangan and Sir Samuel Ferguson, and under the stimulus of Standish O'Grady (whose *History of Ireland – The Heroic Period* (1878) and *Cuchulain and his Contemporaries* (1880) imparted heroic stature to the figures of Irish mythology, in particular, those of the Ulster cycle of tales), the young Yeats realised that there was an alternative tradition to the English one for him to explore. At the English school he had attended before he went to the High School in Dublin he had been unsatisfied with a mythology based on victories, such as those of Agincourt and Crécy – legendry ultimately to culminate in imperialistic jingoism. Neither did he like the current imagery of Catholic Ireland, based on a mythology of defeat and on the simplistic rhetorical imagery of a popular patriotism which the writers of *The Nation* had brought into being, from 1830 onwards, to provide a sense of nationhood in an Ireland turning from Irish to the use of English for economic and political purposes. And he did not possess enough classical learning to develop his early adventuring into Arcadian realms; nor had he been attracted by the Arthuriad which, after all, Tennyson had made his own. Like any ambitious young poet he wanted to be different, to make his own mark, to speak in his own voice, to be himself. And now, through the books O'Leary lent him, he saw into an exciting and heroic Ireland of the remote past which he could recreate, re-interpreting it as his imagination chose.

Here was the inspiration for the movement called variously the Irish Renaissance, the Irish literary movement, the Irish literary revival, the Celtic revival. Ireland had her own mythology, her own heroic and bardic age which, perhaps because its early literature had been largely oral, had been largely forgotten after Irish aristocratic civilisation finally collapsed with the Flight of the Earls in 1607. Their leaving Ireland, in recognition that they could no longer successfully oppose – or work with – a politically centralised unified English presence, signalled the virtual end of an Irish culture which had, till then, generously supported the Irish poets who kept its traditions, its genealogies, its literatures alive. The patrons gone, the poets dwindled away. The rediscovery by Yeats and his contemporaries of that literature, however incomplete, with its heroic tales of battles, feasts, quarrels and love affairs, through the medium of translations (Yeats himself never knew Irish) was often accompanied by a freshly kindled, sometimes parallel, sometimes coalescing, sometimes diverging enthusiasm for the learning and use of the Irish language, and Irish sports and games, as evinced in the Gaelic League (founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893) and the Gaelic Athletic Association (founded in 1884). These

cultural movements were to exert a powerful influence on the political forces that erupted in the Rising of 1916, and resulted in the establishment of the Irish Free State governing the twenty-six southern counties of Ireland and of Northern Ireland, the six northern counties with a parliament in Belfast but also sending MPs to Westminster.

Yeats had the imagination to see that Ireland had in the literature of the remote past a means of regenerating a mythology that could differ from that of England, and achieve an Irish independence of mind. This seemed to him as necessary a thing to achieve as any political independence and indeed a vital part of such an independence. He had the energy and confidence to try to convert his Irish readers from admiring what he saw as the sentimental patriotism of Tom Moore and Thomas Davis to a new attitude which would be more discriminating, which would recognise the merits of a new literature founded upon greater technical skills and greater artistry: that new literature would complete the incomplete ancient Irish one. Irish culture had, he thought, been harassed by Danish invaders, then Norman, then English, but the material was there, if only it could be given original and accomplished handling.

Yeats himself wanted to blend the pagan past with the Christian traditions; he was also greatly influenced by current European interest in the Celtic past. But while he looked back to a remote mythology he learned his trade from contemporary English poets, and he urged Irish writers to use the finest English writers as their models. Careful composition had to underpin apparent spontaneity: criticism had to be international, the literature itself national. Yeats wrote much prose to shape the kind of national literature he wanted his countrymen and countrywomen to write. Ultimately the example of his poetry was probably more effective. His aim was, as he put it in a letter to *United Ireland*, to 'build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language'. He had to explain himself to the less imaginative, for his poetry was rooted in this deep conviction: the subject matter could be based upon the simplicity of country people who believed in supernatural forces (they were unlike the Irish of the cities; they provided an antidote to the complexities of Victorian thought and nature description) and upon the sophistication of a remote aristocratic literary tradition. It did not matter to him whether the bardic histories of Ireland were fictional or not: he was able to create his own view of the 'dim' past, while telling his audience in 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' that he was writing in the more recent tradition of 'Davis, Mangan, Ferguson' – no doubt he put in Davis as a sop to the political nationalists, but drew attention to Mangan and Ferguson for their interpretation of the lyric and epic remnants of a heroic past which had been virtually forgotten or totally unknown.*

* His own experience is recorded in the Preface he wrote to Lady Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirtheimne* (1903) p. xvii:

When I was a child I had only to climb the hill behind the house [his grandparents' house,

This desire of Yeats to be seen as part of Ireland's literary tradition stemmed perhaps from his awareness of the great power of bards in an aristocratic Irish society. 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' also reminds us of his occult interests; his rhymes 'more than their rhyming tell' because he is in touch with the elemental creatures, because he treads in measured ways. This poem reminds us, too, of his love and his awareness of the brevity of life, his speculation that there may be 'No place for love and dream at all'. His love and his dream were intermingled, and as he had discovered Irish mythology through O'Leary so, too, he discovered through him the woman he was to mythologise. O'Leary gave Maud Gonne a letter of introduction. She was beautiful, well-to-do, independent, unconventional and a revolutionary Irish nationalist. One of the orphaned daughters of a British colonel, she arrived at John Butler Yeats's house in Bedford Place in London one spring morning in 1889, full of talk of revolutionary politics, and Yeats fell in love with her:

Tall and noble but with face and bosom
Delicate in colour as apple blossom

He thought at first that he would not tell her of his love because he was penniless and could not contemplate marriage, though in 1891 he made the first of many proposals of marriage to her. She consistently told him that the world would thank her for not marrying him, and that they should remain friends. The poetry he wrote her was beautiful, mainly melancholic, devoted but defeatist – quintessentially poetry of the Celtic twilight: allusive and adjectival, only permitting images of beauty, harking back to an idealised romantic past. He hoped his devotion would eventually persuade her to marry him. Partially to impress her, he began to play a more public role in Irish life and wrote a patriotic play, *The Countess Cathleen*, for her; he even briefly joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB); but he sought to persuade her that his work for Irish independence was to create a literary movement which would give Irish people a new sense of their cultural heritage, a new sense of self-respect, a new independence of mind. Despite his belief that this work (which included his setting up Irish Literary societies in Dublin and London, as well as writing articles and reviews setting out his views on the kind of literature that was needed) was every bit as important as the work of the political groups with which she was involved, he himself got drawn into politics in 1897 and 1898, as Chairman of the 1798 Association, formed to commemorate the 1798 Revolution in Ireland. This experience showed him the results of violence when there were riots in Dublin, and he turned away from nationalist politics, resigning from the IRB probably about 1901.

Merville, in Sligo | to see long, blue, ragged hills flowing along the southern horizon. What beauty was lost to me, what depth of emotion is still perhaps lacking in me, because nobody told me, not even the merchant captains who knew everything, that Cruachan of the Enchantments lay behind those long, blue, ragged hills!

What followed was a period of practicality: the very effective bringing into being of earlier dreams of an Irish drama: writing plays, 'theatre business, management of men'. With Lady Gregory's considerable collaborative aid, the Abbey Theatre was created and nurtured. This was also a period of disillusion: Maud Gonne married John MacBride in 1903 only to separate from him in 1905, and Yeats's love poems now told of past devotion and how she had failed to understand or appreciate, but still must be celebrated, 'being what she is'. The nationalists – and Maud herself – disliked the kind of plays being staged in the Abbey. Patriotic puritanism did not want the presentation of less than idealised Irish womanhood on the stage, and there followed the riots against Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, an example of the 'great art' Yeats had helped to bring into being. Yet more disillusionment with the Irish public was to follow over the reaction of Dublin Corporation to Sir Hugh Lane's offer to give his French impressionist paintings to Dublin. Yeats reacted angrily in public poems of a new kind. In 'A Coat' he even attacked those who were writing in his former Celtic twilight manner; as far as he was concerned, they could take the coat 'Covered with embroideries/Out of old mythologies'; there was 'more enterprise in walking naked'.

A sumptuous eight-volume edition of Yeats's *Collected Works* was published by A. H. Bullen in 1908, when Yeats was forty-three. With the publication of this edition it must indeed have seemed as if all things could now tempt him from his craft of verse:

One time it was a woman's face, or worse
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land . . .

His long-lasting love for Maud Gonne had come to nothing; in the words of 'Adam's Curse' he was 'weary-hearted'; the vision of a regenerated literature and a national theatre had been tempered by reality, 'the day's war with every knave and dolt'. Up to this point Yeats had had a successful literary life; he had created a distinguished reputation: but it is likely that he would not now be read and studied with such attention and pleasure had his career ended with the publication of his *Collected Works* in 1908. He would probably be seen as the poet of the Celtic twilight, known for some poems of great beauty but outside the main stream of English literature; he would also have been remembered for his energetic effort in bringing the Irish theatre into being.

However, Yeats did not end his poetic career by withering into truth; instead there was a magnificent second flowering of his talent. This is the work of Yeats the modernist, who responded to Ezra Pound's advice, 'Make it new'. Yeats had pursued idealism as far as he could in his elaborate Celtic twilight poetry with its increasing use of an esoteric, rarefied symbolism removed, indeed an escape from modern life. After the turn of the century he pushed a bare kind of realism as far as it would go: it was negative, recording the past tense of his love for Maud Gonne; stripping poetry of adjectival decoration and beauty; recording

that the sap had dried out of his veins; expressing scornful anger at the obscure spite of Irish political attitudes, and despair at the lack of imaginative vision in Ireland, an inability to understand and appreciate the art he and his friends were trying to create for their country. There was no real satisfaction in this negativity for Yeats, for though he had a strongly satiric vein as well as a sceptical one, there was in him a powerful reservoir of imagination, a volcanic force of feeling for life and the glories of human achievement; and he had the skill to match his ideas with words that would define precisely and yet reverberate expansively in readers' minds and memories. The great good fortune is that the early dreaming, tempered by middle-aged realism, could eventuate in a poetry which captured violence, hatred, bitterness, uncertainty, politics, friendship, love, passion, the evanescence of beauty, historical change, destruction and revival, death and tragic joy.

How did this happen? How do we account for the terrible beauty of 'Easter 1916', the devastating horror of 'The Second Coming'? How do we explain the strength and affirmation of 'Among School Children'? Or the dazzlingly effective imagery of the two Byzantine poems as they move from the sensual music of Ireland to the artistic and intellectual balance of an imagined Byzantium where the souls of the dead arrive at the purging fires? Or the subtle symbolic significance of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War'? Or the haunting quality of the two Coole poems with their warm memories and cool assessments, their capture of apparent certainty at the mercy of change? Or yet the power of 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' with its recognition of the sources of the Celtic twilight's old themes, the pull of the players and the painted stage, and its awareness that the heart has been at the centre of it all.

Yeats is supremely a poet of the emotions, though as the years go by the wide-ranging power and curiosity of his intellect are now given more praise. He read to find what he wanted, to support his own ideas, to give himself the authority he was always seeking – and never fully finding. But his modernity, his ability to write public poetry, to speak his mind freely, to capture many of our continuing concerns in masterly language which blends simple and complex vocabulary in a syntax suiting the stanzaic forms he used with such technical skill – all these drew strength from the coming together of circumstances which allowed the disparate elements to coalesce, the diffidences and differences, the doubts and contrarities to be expressed in a diversity that was encompassed within the poet's own personality.

Yeats's marriage in 1917 and the births of his children, which continued the Yeats line in which he had become so interested, his restoration of the ancient tower (the first permanent home he owned, in the west of Ireland), his Nobel Prize for poetry, his Senatorship, his Dublin house in Merrion Square, were all signs of achievement, of fulfilment. His marriage led, with Mrs Yeats's automatic writing, to the creation of *A Vision* (1925). The seven and a half years spent in the writing of that book, and then the subsequent process of revising it for the version published in 1937, gave him not only a kind of scaffolding for

much of his poetry (such as 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes', 'The Second Coming', 'Demon and Beast', 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', 'Two Songs for a Play', 'Leda and the Swan', 'Byzantium', 'Vacillation', 'The Gyres', 'Lapis Lazuli', 'The Statues', 'News for the Delphic Oracle', and 'Under Ben Bulbin') but also the confidence to express his ideas in its terminology. Through the process of creating it ('putting it all in order') he was able to face with considerable courage the issues of his time: revolution, guerrilla warfare, civil war, the aftermath of civil war and the creation of a new state. Revolutionary youth had begotten a constructive conservatism in him; even if that conservatism was to veer towards an admiration for authority he remained individualistic. 'My dear' he wrote flippantly in old age to Dorothy Wellesley, 'I remain as anarchic as a sparrow': a remark to be weighed against such things as his continuing, devoted work for the Abbey Theatre, his notable contribution to the work of the Senate in chairing the Commission that gave Ireland an elegant pre-decimal coinage, his creation of an Irish Academy of Letters, and his serious thoughts and comments about how best to educate young people in a country where law (often regarded in the past as being a British institution) had not been respected. There were profound problems outside Ireland too; civilisation might be hooped together, apparently at peace, but man was 'Ravenging, raging and uprooting' his way into desolation. And Yeats himself had to face personal pains and problems: increasing ill health; the encroachment of age's limitations upon an active mind and excitable senses; and the ultimate question pressing nearer upon him:

Bid imagination run
 Much on the Great Questioner;
 What He can question, what if questioned I
 Can with a fitting confidence reply

Thus Yeats, recovering from serious illness at the age of sixty-three, meditated upon death. He had earlier had moments of intense happiness to record, as in the fourth section of 'Vacillation'; moments of contentment, even bravado when, as in 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', he was

content to follow to its source
 Every event in action or in thought;
 Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
 When such as I cast out remorse
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast
 We must laugh and we must sing
 We are blest by everything,
 Everything we look upon is blest

And though he had 'always hated work', confidence could be placed in the work

done: 'something to perfection brought' and yet that too reminds him – and us – of human limitations. They have underlain the brave attitudes, the masks adopted; they are what the mythologies, poetic and personal, are intended to shield us against, to enable us, however briefly, to be freed from the limitations of time, to apprehend infinity.

PRINCIPLES OF SELECTION

The object of this selection is to provide a book which is manageable in size for new readers, to allow Yeats's art to be considered in its kinds rather than in his volume divisions, to give a cross-section of his poetry, presented in chronological order within these groupings. It is not intended as a substitute for the *Poems: A New Edition* or the *Collected Poems*, and if it leads readers on to subsequent familiarity with all his work then it will have fulfilled its intention.

To categorise the items selected here from the 507 poems of the *Poems: A New Edition* or the 382 poems of the *Collected Poems* is not easy, because Yeats's poems are often complex: Irish mythology, for example, obviously informs the Irish narrative poems; a fine piece of speculation on the future of his children which appears in 'My Descendants', section IV of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' might well have been placed in the section entitled 'The Poet's Family' but to remove it from its context would spoil the total effect of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War'. This is a sequence that might have been considered for inclusion in several sections – in 'The Thought of A Vision', perhaps, or in 'Irish Characters and Places' or 'Anglo-Irish Attitudes' or 'Politics and Polemics' – but it seemed best placed in the section entitled 'Moods and Meditations' because of the range of its ideas: its speculation about the link between greatness and violence and what the generations transmit of both; about the poet's tower, its history and its function; about the changelessness of art and the transmission of artistic skills from generation to generation; about the future of the tower if the poet's own descendants were to lose vitality; about those fighting in the Irish civil war and their attitude to death; about the ignorance and the hatred engendered by civil war; about images of hatred and the nature of the poet's own life. 'The supernatural' too, is a category which could overlap with 'Dreams', 'Irish Mythology' and 'Age and After' or with some of the contents of, say, 'Songs from the Plays'. But poems have been categorised, as far as possible, by their predominant strains, and readers will recognise the interrelationships, the recurrent yet often subtly different imagery, the developing and developed symbolism, that link the verse together.

Readers used to the usual division of Yeats's poems may be surprised at some of these juxtapositions, and the order of separate items within the sections. Yeats, however, did not arrange his poems in different volumes in the chronological order of their composition or separate publication; indeed some were deliberately held over, to be included in later volumes, particularly when

they were of a very personal nature, as, for instance, in the case of 'Owen Aherne and his Dancers'.

In this selection the date of composition, when it is firmly established or can be reasonably conjectured, is placed below the title of a poem on the left-hand side, in italics; the date on the right-hand side is the date a poem was first published. The date alone is given if a poem appeared in a journal; if, however, a poem first appeared in a volume of Yeats's work then the initials of that volume are given before the date. Dates at the end of poems are those Yeats gave them when published; they do not necessarily correspond with either the dates supplied by the present edition for the date of their composition or of their first publication. In general the poems in this selection are arranged in order of composition, allowance having been made in some cases for Yeats's habit of rewriting much of what he wrote over differing periods of time. In two cases two versions of poems are given to show how the process of rewriting changed their nature. The copy text used is that of W. B. Yeats *The Poems: A New Edition* (1984); the text of this edition differs in some minor respects from that of *Collected Poems* (1950). Those poems which appear as *Last Poems* in *Collected Poems* are collected – some in a different order – as *New Poems* (1938) and [*Last Poems* (1938–39)] in *Poems: A New Edition*, which also contains 125 poems, collected as *Additional Poems*. These poems were not collected by Yeats, but with the exception of eleven texts (see NC xxii) are contained in the *Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1957) and the *Collected Plays* (1950). The *Variorum Edition* contains 'Reprisals' which is not included in *Collected Poems*, or in *Poems: A New Edition*.

Some of Yeats's poems were set in italics during his lifetime, and corresponding italics have been used in this edition, as for example in the case of 'To Ireland in the Coming Times'.

The names of Irish people and places are explained and where necessary their pronunciations indicated in Appendices II and III. Four maps, of Ireland, Co. Sligo, Sligo Town and Co. Galway are contained in Appendix IV and a diagram from *A Vision* illustrating the Phases of the Moon is supplied in Appendix V.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

<i>A</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Autobiographies</i> (1955)
<i>AMYO</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>A Man Young and Old</i> (a series of poems first published in <i>OB</i> as <i>The Young Countryman</i> and <i>The Old Countryman</i> , later in <i>TT</i>)
<i>AV</i> (1925)/ <i>AV</i> (1937)	W. B. Yeats, <i>A Vision</i> (1925; 2nd ed. 1937)
<i>AWYO</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>A Woman Young and Old</i> (series of poems in <i>WS</i> (1929) and <i>WS</i> (1933))
<i>BS</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Bounty of Sweden</i> (1925)
<i>CP</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Collected Poems</i> (1933; 2nd ed. 1950)
<i>DWL</i>	<i>Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley</i> (1940)
<i>E</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Explorations</i> (1962)
<i>E & I</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Essays and Introductions</i> (1961)
<i>KGCT</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems</i> (1934)
<i>L</i>	<i>The Letters of W. B. Yeats</i> , ed. Allan Wade (1954)
<i>M</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Mythologies</i> (1959)
<i>NC</i>	A. Norman Jeffares, <i>A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats</i> (1984)
<i>PNE</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Poems, A New Edition</i> (1984)
<i>SS</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Supernatural Songs</i> (a series of poems in <i>KGCT</i> 1934, and <i>FMIM</i> 1935)
<i>TT</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Tower</i> (1928)
<i>W & B</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Wheels and Butterflies</i> (1934)
<i>WMP</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>Words for Music Perhaps</i> (1932)
<i>WR</i>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Wind Among the Reeds</i> (1899)
<i>WS</i> (1929)	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Winding Stair</i> (1929)

BOOKS BY W. B. YEATS

<i>APEP</i> 1929	<i>A Packet for Ezra Pound</i>
<i>ASTP</i> 1937	<i>A Speech and Two Poems</i>
<i>CK</i> 1892	<i>The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics</i>
<i>CNH</i> 1902	<i>Cathleen Ni Hoolihan</i>
<i>CP</i> 1934	<i>The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats</i>
<i>CW</i> 1908	<i>The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats</i>
<i>EP & S</i> 1925	<i>Early Poems and Stories</i>
<i>FMIM</i> 1935	<i>A Full Moon in March</i>
<i>FPPD</i> 1921	<i>Four Plays for Dancers</i>
<i>GH</i> 1910	<i>The Green Helmet and Other Poems</i> (Cuala Press edition)
<i>GH</i> 1912	<i>The Green Helmet and Other Poems</i> (Macmillan edition)
<i>ISW</i> 1903	<i>In the Seven Woods</i>

KGCT 1934	<i>The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems</i>
LP & TP	<i>Last Poems and Two Plays</i>
MRD 1921	<i>Michael Robartes and The Dancer</i>
NP 1938	<i>New Poems</i>
<i>Nine Poems</i> 1918	<i>Nine Poems</i>
OB 1927	<i>October Blast</i>
OTB 1939	<i>On the Boiler</i>
PWD 1913	<i>Poems Written in Discouragement</i>
RPP 1914	<i>Responsibilities: Poems and a Play</i>
SKO 1928	<i>Sophocles' King Oedipus</i>
SPF 1922	<i>Seven Poems and a Fragment</i>
TKT 1904	<i>The King's Threshold</i>
TLAM 1897	<i>The Tables of the Law [and The Adoration of the Magi]</i>
TPFD 1919	<i>Two Plays for Dancers</i>
TWOI 1917	<i>The Well of Immortality</i> (early version of <i>At the Hawk's Well</i>)
W & B 1934	<i>Wheels and Butterflies</i>
WMP 1932	<i>Words for Music Perhaps</i>
WO 1889	<i>The Wanderings of Oisín</i>
WR 1899	<i>The Wind Among the Reeds</i>
WS 1929	<i>The Winding Stair</i>
WS 1933	<i>The Winding Stair and Other Poems</i>
WSC 1917	<i>The Wild Swans at Coole, other verses and a Play in Verse</i>
WSC 1919	<i>The Wild Swans at Coole</i>