



POESIA AO MEIO DIA



WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939)

UNDER BEN BULBEN

SWEAR BY WHAT THE SAGES SPOKE
 ROUND THE MAREOTIC LAKE
 THAT THE WITCH OF ATLAS KNEW,
 SPOKE AND SET THE COCKS A-CROW.
 SWEAR BY THOSE HORSEMEN, BY THOSE WOMEN,
 COMPLEXION AND FORM PROVE SUPERHUMAN,
 THAT PALE, LONG VISAGED COMPANY
 THAT AIRS AN IMMORTALITY
 COMPLETENESS OF THEIR PASSIONS WON;
 NOW THEY RIDE THE WINTRY DAWN
 WHERE BEN BULBEN SETS THE SCENE.

HERE'S THE GIST OF WHAT THEY MEAN.

II
 MANY TIMES MAN LIVES AND DIES
 BETWEEN HIS TWO ETERNITIES,
 THAT OF RACE AND THAT OF SOUL,
 AND ANCIENT IRELAND KNEW IT ALL.
 WHETHER MAN DIES IN HIS BED
 OR THE RIFLE KNOCKS HIM DEAD,
 A BRIEF PARTING FROM THOSE DEAR
 IS THE WORST MAN HAS TO FEAR.
 THOUGH GRAVE-DIGGERS' TOIL IS LONG,
 SHARP THEIR SPADES, THEIR MUSCLE STRONG,
 THEY BUT THRUST THEIR BURIED MEN
 BACK IN THE HUMAN MIND AGAIN.

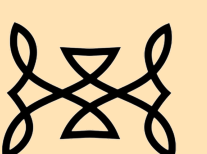
III
 YOU THAT MITCHEL'S PRAYER HAVE HEARD
 'SEND WAR IN OUR TIME, O LORD!'
 KNOW THAT WHEN ALL WORDS ARE SAID
 AND A MAN IS FIGHTING MAD,
 SOMETHING DROPS FROM EYES LONG BLIND
 HE COMPLETES HIS PARTIAL MIND,
 FOR AN INSTANT STANDS AT EASE,
 LAUGHS ALOUD, HIS HEART AT PEACE,
 EVEN THE WISEST MAN GROWS TENSE
 WITH SOME SORT OF VIOLENCE
 BEFORE HE CAN ACCOMPLISH FATE
 KNOW HIS WORK OR CHOOSE HIS MATE.

IV
 POET AND SCULPTOR DO THE WORK
 NOR LET THE MODISH PAINTER SHIRK
 WHAT HIS GREAT FOREFATHERS DID,
 BRING THE SOUL OF MAN TO GOD,
 MAKE HIM FILL THE CRADLES RIGHT.

MEASUREMENT BEGAN OUR MIGHT:
 FORMS A STARK EGYPTIAN THOUGHT,
 FORMS THAT GENTLER PHIDIAS WROUGHT.
 MICHAEL ANGELO LEFT A PROOF
 ON THE SISTINE CHAPEL ROOF,
 WHERE BUT HALF-AWAKENED ADAM
 CAN DISTURB GLOBE-TROTTING MADAM
 TILL HER BOWELS ARE IN HEAT,
 PROOF THAT THERE'S A PURPOSE SET
 BEFORE THE SECRET WORKING MIND:
 PROFANE PERFECTION OF MANKIND.
 QUATTROCENTO PUT IN PAINT,
 ON BACKGROUNDS FOR A GOD OR SAINT,
 GARDENS WHERE A SOUL'S AT EASE;
 WHERE EVERYTHING THAT MEETS THE EYE
 FLOWERS AND GRASS AND CLOUDLESS SKY
 RESEMBLE FORMS THAT ARE, OR SEEM
 WHEN SLEEPERS WAKE AND YET STILL DREAM,
 AND WHEN IT'S VANISHED STILL DECLARE,
 WITH ONLY BED AND BEDSTEAD THERE,
 THAT HEAVENS HAD OPENED.

GYRES RUN ON;
 WHEN THAT GREATER DREAM HAD GONE
 CALVERT AND WILSON, BLAKE AND CLAUDE
 PREPARED A REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD,
 PALMER'S PHRASE, BUT AFTER THAT
 CONFUSION FELL UPON OUR THOUGHT.

V
 IRISH POETS LEARN YOUR TRADE
 SING WHATEVER IS WELL MADE,
 SCORN THE SORT NOW GROWING UP
 ALL OUT OF SHAPE FROM TOE TO TOP,
 THEIR UNREMEMBERING HEARTS AND HEADS
 BASE-BORN PRODUCTS OF BASE BEDS.
 SING THE PEASANTRY, AND THEN
 HARD-RIDING COUNTRY GENTLEMEN,
 THE HOLINESS OF MONKS, AND AFTER
 PORTER-DRINKERS' RANDY LAUGHTER;
 SING THE LORDS AND LADIES GAY
 THAT WERE BEATEN INTO THE CLAY
 THROUGH SEVEN HEROIC CENTURIES;
 CAST YOUR MIND ON OTHER DAYS
 THAT WE IN COMING DAYS MAY BE
 STILL THE INDOMITABLE IRISHRY.

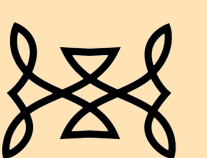


VI

UNDER BARE BEN BULBEN'S HEAD
IN DRUMCLIFF CHURCHYARD YEATS IS LAID,
AN ANCESTOR WAS RECTOR THERE
LONG YEARS AGO; A CHURCH STANDS NEAR,
BY THE ROAD AN ANCIENT CROSS.
NO MARBLE, NO CONVENTIONAL PHRASE,
ON LIMESTONE QUARRIED NEAR THE SPOT

BY HIS COMMAND THESE WORDS ARE CUT:

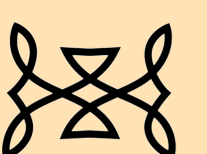
CAST A COLD EYE
ON LIFE, ON DEATH.
HORSEMAN, PASS BY!



IN MEMORY OF EVA GORE-BOOTH AND CON MARKIEVICZ

IT THE LIGHT OF EVENING, LISSADELL,
GREAT WINDOWS OPEN TO THE SOUTH,
TWO GIRLS IN SILK KIMONOS, BOTH
BEAUTIFUL, ONE A GAZELLE.
BUT A RAVING AUTUMN SHEARS
BLOSSOM FROM THE SUMMER'S WREATH;
THE OLDER IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH,
PARDONED, DRAGS OUT LONELY YEARS
CONSPIRING AMONG THE IGNORANT.
I KNOW NOT WHAT THE YOUNGER DREAMS –
SOME VAGUE UTOPIA – AND SHE SEEMS,
WHEN WITHERED OLD AND SKELETON-GAUNT,
AN IMAGE OF SUCH POLITICS.
MANY A TIME I THINK TO SEEK
ONE OR THE OTHER OUT AND SPEAK
OF THAT OLD GEORGIAN MANSION, MIX
PICTURES OF THE MIND, RECALL
THAT TABLE AND THE TALK OF YOUTH,
TWO GIRLS IN SILK KIMONOS, BOTH
BEAUTIFUL, ONE A GAZELLE.

DEAR SHADOWS, NOW YOU KNOW IT ALL,
ALL THE FOLLY OF A FIGHT
WITH A COMMON WRONG OR RIGHT.
THE INNOCENT AND THE BEAUTIFUL
HAVE NO ENEMY BUT TIME;
ARISE AND BID ME STRIKE A MATCH
AND STRIKE ANOTHER TILL TIME CATCH;
SHOULD THE CONFLAGRATION CLIMB,
RUN TILL ALL THE SAGES KNOW.
WE THE GREAT GAZEBO BUILT,
THEY CONVICTED US OF GUILT;
BID ME STRIKE A MATCH AND BLOW.



DOROTHY MOLLOY (1942-2004)

LOOKING FOR MY MOTHER

I RANSACK HER ROOM. LOOT AND PILLAGE.
I ROOT IN HER TRUNK. CRACK OPEN
THE TIGHTLY SPRUNG BOXES OF SATIN
AND PLUSH. PIERCE MY BREAST WITH HER
BUTTERFLY

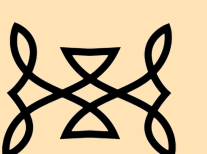
BROOCH. I POSE IN HER HATS,
FRENCH BERETS, MANTILLAS OF LACE,
THE VEIL THAT FALLS OVER HER FACE,
THE BOA SHE WRAPS ROUND HER NECK.

I TRY ON HER SHOES. HER SLIPPERS
ARE MULES. I CAN'T WALK IN HER CALLIPERED
BOOTS. I BREAK INTO HER WARDROBE.
HANDS GROPE IN THE DARK. FADED BATS,

LIKE UMBRELLAS, ARE HUMMING INSIDE.
STOLES OF FOX-FUR AND MINK: TINY CLAWS,
PRECISE NAILS. LIPS CLAMPED IN THE RICTUS
OF DEATH. I'M HOT ON THE SCENT

OF OESTRUS, UMBILICUS, AFTERBIRTH,
EAU-DE-COLOGNE, I FLING MYSELF
DOWN ON THE BED THAT SHE MADE
OF DIRT FROM THE CATACOMBS, BLOOD

OF THE SAINTS. UNDER THE COUNTERPANE,
NETTLES, GOOSE-FEATHERS, A TORC.



LOUIS MACNEICE (1907-1963)

SLIGO & MAYO

III

IN SLIGO THE COUNTRY WAS SOFT; THERE WERE TURKEYS
GOBBLING UNDER THE SYCAMORE TREES
AND THE SHADOWS OF CLOUDS ON THE MOUNTAINS MOVING
LIKE BROWSING CATTLE AT EASE.

AND LITTLE DISTANT FIELDS WERE SPRIGGED WITH HAYCOCKS
AND SPLASHED AGAINST A WHITE
ROADSIDE COTTAGE A WELTER OF NASTURTIUM
DELUGING THE SIGHT,

AND PULLETS PECKING THE FLIES FROM AROUND THE EYES OF HEIFERS
SITTING IN FARMYARD MUD
AMONG HYDRANGEAS AND THE FALLING EAR-RINGS
OF FUCHSIAS RED AS BLOOD.

BUT IN MAYO THE TUMBLEDOWN WALLS WENT LEAP-FROG
OVER THE MOORS,
THE SUGAR AND SALT IN THE PUBS WERE DAMP IN THE CASTERS
AND THE WATER WAS BROWN AS BEER UPON THE SHORES

OF DESOLATE LOUGHS, AND STUMPS OF HOARY BOG-OAK
STUCK UP HERE AND THERE
AND AS THE TWILIGHT FILTERED ON THE HEATHER
WATER-MUSIC FILLED THE AIR,

AND WHEN THE NIGHT CAME DOWN UPON THE BOGLAND
WITH ALL-ENVELOPING WINGS,
THE COAL-BLACK TURF-STACKS ROSE AGAINST THE DARKNESS
LIKE THE TOMBS OF NAMELESS KINGS.