

Writing Ireland

Lecture 4: Poetry (1): The 19th Century

(Charlotte Brooke to Early Yeats)

Mary Tighe (1772-1810)

WRITTEN AT THE EAGLE'S NEST, KILLARNEY (1800)

Here let us rest, while with meridan blaze
The sun rides glorious 'mid the cloudless sky.
While o'er the lake no cooling Zephyrs fly,
But on the liquid glass we dazzled gaze,
And fainting ask for shade: lo! where his nest
The bird of Jove has fixed: the lofty brow,
With arbutus and fragrant wild shrubs drest,
Impendent frowns, nor will approach allow:
Here the soft turf invites; here magic sounds
Celestially respondent shall enchant,
While Melody from you steep wood rebounds
In thrilling cadence sweet. Sure, life can grant
No brighter hours than this; and memory oft
Shall paint this happiest scene with pencil soft.

WRITTEN AT KILLARNEY (1800)

How soft the pause! the notes melodious cease,
Which from each feeling could an echo call;
Rest on your oars; that not a sound may fall
To interrupt the stillness of our peace:
The fanning west-wind breathes upon our cheeks
Yet glowing with the sun's departed beams.
Through the blue heavens the cloudless moon pours streams
Of pure resplendent light, in silver streaks
Reflected on the still, unruffled lake.
The Alpine hills in solemn silence frown,
While the dark woods night's deepest shades embrown.
And now once more that soothing strain awake!
Oh, ever to my heart, with magic power,
Shall those sweet sounds recal this rapturous hour!

ON LEAVING KILLARNEY (1800)

Farewel, sweet scenes! pensive once more I turn
Those pointed hills, and wood-fringed lakes to view
With fond regret; while in this last adieu
A silent tear those brilliant hours shall mourn
For ever past. So from the pleasant shore,
Borne with the struggling bark against the wind,
The trembling pennant fluttering looks behind
With vain reluctance! 'Mid those woods no more
For me the voice of pleasure shall resound.
Nor soft flutes warbling o'er the placid lake
Aerial music shall for me awake.
And wrap my charmed soul in peace profound!
Though lost to me, here still may Taste delight
To dwell, nor the rude axe the trembling Dryads fright!

ADDRESS TO MY HARP (1811)

On, my loved Harp! companion dear!
Sweet soldier of my secret grief,
No more thy sounds my soul must cheer,
No more afford a soft relief.

When anxious cares my heart oppressed,
When doubts distracting tore my soul,
The pains which heaved my swelling breast
Thy gentle sway could oft control.

Each well remembered, practised strain,
The cheerful dance, the tender song,
Recalled with pensive, pleasing pain
Some image loved and cherished long.

Where joy sat smiling o'er my fate,
And marked each bright and happy day,
When partial friends around me sat.
And taught my lips the simple lay;

And when by disappointment grieved
I saw some darling hope o'erthrown,
Thou hast my secret pain relieved;
O'er thee I wept, unseen, alone.

Oh! must I leave thee, must we part,
Dear partner of my happiest days?
I may forget thy much-loved art,
Unused thy melody to raise,

But ne'er can memory cease to love
Those scenes where I thy charms have felt,
Though I no more thy power may prove,
Which taught my softened heart to melt.

Forced to forego with thee this spot,
Endeared by many a tender tie,
When rosy pleasure blessed my lot,
And sparkled in my cheated eye.

Yet still thy strings, in Fancy's ear,
With soothing melody shall play;
Thy silver sounds I oft shall hear,
To pensive gloom a silent prey.

Thomas Furlong (1794-1827)

THE SPIRIT OF IRISH SONG (1827)

Lov'd land of the Bards, and Saints! to me
There's nought so dear as thy minstrelsy;
Bright is Nature in every dress,
Rich in unborrow'd loveliness;
Winning is every shape she wears,
Winning she is in thine own sweet airs;
What to the spirit more cheering can be
Than the lay whose ling'ring notes recall
The thoughts of the holy-the fair-the free,
Belov'd in life or deplor'd in their fall?
Fling, fling the forms of art aside,
Dull is the ear that these forms enthrall;
Let the simple songs of our sires be tried,
They go to the heart – and the heart is all.
Give me the full responsive sigh,
The glowing cheek and the moisten'd eye;
Let these the minstrel's might attest,
And the vain and the idle – may share the rest.

Antoine Raftery (c. 1784-1835) (Antoine Ó Reaghtabhra)

I am Raftery the poet,
Full of hope and love,
With eyes that have no light, [With no light in my eyes,]
With gentleness that has no misery.

Going west upon my pilgrimage
Guided by the light of my heart, [By the light of my heart,]
Feeble and tired, [Though feeble and tired,
To the end of my road. To the end of my rove.]

Behold me now,
And my face to a wall, [With my back to the wall,
A-playing music Playing music]
Unto empty pockets.

James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849)

TO MY NATIVE LAND (1832)

Awake! arise! shake off thy dreams!
Thou art not what thou wert of yore:
Of all those rich, those dazzling beams,
That once illum'd thine aspect o'er
Show me a solitary one
Whose glory is not quenched and gone.

The harp remaineth where it fell,
With mouldering frame and broken chord;
Around the song there hangs no spell—
No laurel wreath entwines the sword;
And startingly the footstep falls
Along thy dim and dreary halls.

When other men in future years,
In wonder ask, how this could be?
Then answer only by thy tears,
That ruin fell on thine and thee;
Because thyself wouldst have it so—
Because thou welcomedst the blow!

To stamp dishonour on thy brow
Was not within the power of earth;
And art thou agonised, when now
The hour that lost thee all thy worth,
And turned thee to the thing thou art,
Rushes upon thy bleeding heart?

Weep, weep, degraded one—the deed,
The desperate deed was all thine own:
Thou madest more than maniac speed
To hurl thine honours from their throne.
Thine honours fell, and when they fell
The nations rang thy funeral knell.

Well may thy sons be seared in soul,
 Their groans be deep by night and day;
Till day and night forget to roll,
 Their noblest hopes shall morn decay—
Their freshest flowers shall die by blight—
Their brightest sun shall set at night.

The stranger, as he treads thy sod,
 And views thy universal wreck,
May execrate the foot that trod
 Triumphant on a prostrate neck;
But what is that to thee? Thy woes
May hope in vain for pause or close.

Awake! arise! shake off thy dreams!
 'Tis idle all to talk of power,
And fame and glory—these are themes
 Befitting ill so dark an hour;
Till miracles be wrought for thee,
Nor fame nor glory shalt thou see.

Thou art forsaken by the earth,
Which makes a byword of thy name;
Nations, and thrones, and powers whose birth
As yet is not, shall rise to fame,
Shall flourish and may fall—but thou
Shalt linger as thou lingerest now.

And till all earthly power shall wane,
And Time's grey pillar, groaning, fall;
Thus shall it be, and still in vain
Thou shalt essay to burst the thrall
Which binds, in fetters forged by fate,
The wreck and ruin of what once was great.

KATHALEEN NY-HOULAHAN (1841)
(From the Irish)

Long they pine in weary woe, the nobles of our land,
Long they wander to and fro, proscribed, alas! and banned;
Feastless, houseless, altarless, they bear the exile's brand,
 But their hope is in the coming-to of Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan.

Think her not a ghostly hag, too hideous to be seen,
Call her not unseemly names, our matchless Kathaleen;
Young she is, and fair she is, and would be crowned a queen,
 Were the king's son at home here with Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan!

Sweet and mild would look her face, O, none so sweet and mild,
Could she crush the foes by whom her beauty is reviled;
Woolen plaids would grace herself and robes of silk her child,
 If the king's son were living here with Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan!

Sore disgrace it is to see the Arbitress of thrones,
Vassal to a Saxoneen of cold and sapless bones!
Bitter anguish wrings our souls—with heavy sighs and groans
 We wait the Young Deliverer of Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan!

Let us pray to Him who holds life's issues in His hands—
Him who formed the mighty globe, with all his thousand lands;
Girding them with seas and mountains, rivers deep, and strands,
 To cast a look of pity upon Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan!

He, who over sands and waves led Israë! along—
He, who fed, with heavenly bread, that chosen tribe and throng—
He who stood by Moses when his foes were fierce and strong—
 May He show forth His might in saving Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939, Nobel Prize 1923)

The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems (1889)
The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics (1892)
Crossways (1893), *The Rose* (1893)
Poems (1895)
The Wind Among the Reeds (1899)
In the Seven Woods (1904)
The Green Helmet (1910)
Responsibilities (1914)
The Wild Swans at Coole (1919)
Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921)
The Tower (1928)
The Winding Stair (1933)
Last Poems (1939) [+ plays and prose]

Cf. The National Library of Ireland's Online Exhibition <http://www.nli.ie/yeats/>

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE (1888)

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping, with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES (1892)

*Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page.
When Time began to rant and rage
The measure of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;
And Time bade all his candles flare
To light a measure here and there;
And may the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon a measured quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep.
For the elemental creatures go
About my table to and fro,
That hurry from unmeasured mind
To rant and rage in flood and wind;
Yet he who treads in measured ways
May surely barter gaze for gaze.
Man ever journeys on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
A Druid land, a Druid tune!*

*While still I may, I write for you
The love I lived, the dream I knew.
From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye;
And we, our singing and our love,
What measurer Time has lit above,
And all benighted things that go
About my table to and fro,
Are passing on to where may be,
In truth's consuming ecstasy,
No place for love and dream at all;
For God goes by with white footfall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*

SONG OF THE WANDERING AENGUS (1897)

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

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