

William Butler Yeats: Enchantment and Rage
The Rosenbach, Winter 2023
Tuesdays, 7:30-9 (zoom)

In a disenchanted age, it is important to consider the unexpectedly ethical potential of enchanted moments. In this course, we will look at enchantment as a moment of wonder that can trigger ethical responses; as a musical metaphor (enchantment comes from the French “chanter,” to sing); and as a figure for national paralysis or colonization in Ireland. We will trace how magic gives way to violence as the main impetus behind Yeats’s poems, ending with his magnificent rage against old age. Each class will begin with relevant background material followed by a detailed examination of 5-10 poems.

Book: The best and most complete volume of Yeats’s poems is *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard Finneran. I recommend that for this course, however, you get *The Yeats Reader: A Portable Compendium of Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, ed. Richard Finneran, because it contains the essays, stories, and plays we are reading. A few of the poems won’t be included, but those can be accessed online.

If you are interested in reading a biography, there is a two-volume biography by Roy Foster that is the most complete, but it probably has more detail than most of you might want. More accessible is *Yeats’ Ghosts*, by Brenda Maddox, or the early biography by Joseph Hone. If you’d prefer a critical biography, Richard Ellmann’s *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, is still excellent. I will also try to give as much context as I can in class.

January 24: Enchantment.

From *The Rose* (1893):

- *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time
- Fergus and the Druid
- Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea
- The Rose of the World
- *The Lake Isle of Innisfree
- The Pity of Love
- *The Sorrow of Love
- *When you are Old
- *Who Goes with Fergus?
- *The Dedication to a Book of Stories Selected from the Irish Novelists
- The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner
- *To Ireland in the Coming times

Essay: “Speaking to the Psalter” (pdf)

Further reading (for those who are interested):

Play: *The Countess Cathleen*

Essay, “Magic” In *The Yeats Reader*

February 7: Rage.

From *The Tower* (1928):

- *Sailing to Byzantium
- *The Tower
- *Meditations in Time of Civil War
- *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen
- A Prayer for my Son
- *Leda and the Swan
- *Among School Children

Essays, From *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), *The Yeats Reader*, pp. 404-11.

February 21: Enchantment.

From *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899)

- *The Hosting of the Sidhe
- The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart
- *The Fish
- *Into the Twilight
- *The Song of Wandering Aengus
- The Song of the Old Mother
- *He mourns for the Change that has come upon Him and his Beloved, and longs
for the End of the World
- *He Bids his Beloved Be at Peace
- He Reproves the Curlew
- He Remembers Forgotten Beauty
- A Poet to his Beloved
- He Gives his Beloved certain Rhymes
- To his Heart, bidding it have no Fear
- The Valley of the Black Pig
- He Hears the Cry of the Sedge
- Maid Quiet
- He wishes his Beloved were Dead
- He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven

Stories, "Red Hanrahan," "The Death of Hanrahan," *The Yeats Reader*, 460-473

March 7: Rage abating.

From *The Winding Stair and other Poems* (1933):

- In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz
- A Dialogue of Self and Soul
- Coole Park, 1929

Coole and Ballylee, 1931
Byzantium
Vacillation
Crazy Jane and the Bishop
Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop
Plays: *Words upon the Window-Pane* (1930)
Resurrection (1931)

Other great poems not on the syllabus (we can discuss any of them on request!)

Adam's Curse
No Second Troy
The Fascination of What's Difficult
The Magi
The Dolls
A Coat
The Wild Swans at Coole
An Irish Airman foresees his Death
The Collar-bone of a Hare
The Fisherman
Ego Dominus Tuus
The Double Vision of Michael Robartes
Easter, 1916
The Second Coming
The other "Crazy Jane" poems
The Gyres
Lapis Lazuli
The Municipal Gallery Re-visited
Under Ben Bulbin
Man and the Echo
The Circus Animals' Desertion