

ENGLISH

[The Japanese texts on the coloured panels are based on the following explanations provided by the National Library of Ireland: <http://www.nli.ie/yeats/>]

1. An Apprentice Poet

'I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths we shall ever find...'

'Four Years'

W. B. Yeats established interests during his late teens and early twenties that continued through the rest of his life and work.

Many of the friendships that he formed, too, were to prove foundation stones for his future. While living with his family in Dublin and London, he experimented with poetry and with dramatic verse, and read widely, exploring spiritual traditions, Irish literature and nationalism. He enrolled at art school in Dublin in 1884, had his first poems published in a university magazine in 1885 and became involved in societies, clubs and meetings, ranging from the Dublin Hermetic Society to the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

2. Early Recognition

'All his twenties filled with toil'

'What Then'

His first collection of poetry, *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* was published in 1889, when Yeats was only twenty-three. In the years that followed, he published collections of poetry, folklore anthologies, novels, and plays. Writing innumerable reviews and newspaper articles, he managed to earn a living by his pen, and gradually established a literary reputation in Dublin and London.

In January 1889 WBY met Maud Gonne for the first time, and what he later called "the troubling of my life" began. Though WBY's love for her was never fully reciprocated, it

inspired some of his best-known poems and they maintained contact until WBY's death.

3. The Celtic Mystic

'I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic. . . . '

'Magic'

The Order of the Golden Dawn, which WBY joined on 7 March 1890, was a society dedicated to the study of Rosicrucianism and ritual magic. The Order evolved an elaborate system of symbols and rituals and also an elaborate hierarchy -- members studied and underwent examinations to move from level to level. They used Tarot cards to prognosticate about the future, performed magical ceremonies to access archetypes and in some instances deities, and engaged in the practice of magic.

Throughout his life WBY maintained an interest in the occult and the esoteric. In the 1890s, he worked to create a Celtic Mystical Order, combining Golden Dawn rituals with Irish folklore and mythology. WBY's extensive reading and research in these areas provided him with beliefs and symbols that he incorporated into his poetry.

4. A Person of the 90's

'I am growing jealous of other poets and we will all grow jealous of each other unless we know each other and so feel a share in each other's triumph'

to Ernest Rhys, recounted in 'Four Years'

The 1890s gave rise to a literary movement characterised by 'aestheticism' and symbolism.

When he co-founded the Rhymers' Club in 1890, WBY already knew literary figures such as Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and William Morris. The club was a focus for the decade's Bohemia, meeting nightly at the Cheshire Cheese pub. It published its own collections, while WBY's contributions to journals such as *The Savoy* and *The Yellow Book* brought contact with artists such as Aubrey Beardsley. WBY's poetic reputation was consolidated with *Poems* in 1895 and *The Wind Among the Reeds* in

1899. His writing epitomised 'Celtic Twilight' and its blend of myth and symbolism with shadowy yearning.

By the late 1890s Maud Gonne had become passionately committed to the cause of Irish nationalism, in particular the celebrations of the centenary of the 1798 rebellion. WBY likewise devoted considerable energy to this cause and became Chairman of the Centenary Committee in London. In the years leading up to the turn of the century WBY was also working with Maud Gonne on establishing a mystical Order of Celtic Mysteries, and was becoming more and more involved with establishing the Irish Literary Theatre. His play *The Countess Cathleen*, which he had begun in 1889, was first performed in 1899.

5. Lady Gregory and Coole Park

*I meditate upon a swallow's flight,
Upon an aged woman and her house,
A sycamore and lime-tree lost in night
Although that western cloud is luminous'*
'Coole Park, 1929'

On 2 June 1894 WBY met Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) for the first time. He visited her home, Coole Park, in Gort, County Galway, in August 1896 with Edward Martyn, becoming a regular guest at the house over the next three decades. Coole Park, Lady Gregory's home, provided a refuge where WBY could write with Lady Gregory's support and collaboration, and also inspired several poems.

Lady Gregory was an important collaborator and friend, particularly in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, and in the study of Irish folklore.

6. An Irish Literary Theatre

'players and painted stage took all my love'
'The Circus Animals Desertion'

In 1897, the 32-year-old WBY discussed the idea of establishing a 'Celtic Theatre' first with Lady Gregory and later with Edward Martyn and George Russell.

These discussions led to the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre, which had its first season in 1899. Four years later, in 1903, it amalgamated with the Irish National Dramatic Company, founded by the brothers William and Frank Fay, to become the Irish National Theatre Society. In 1904 Annie Horniman bought the Mechanics Institute on Abbey Street for the Society: this became the Abbey Theatre. WBY became president of the Society, with George Russell, Maud Gonne and Douglas Hyde as vice-presidents, and William Fay as stage-manager. The INTS represented an uneasy alliance, and tension between WBY and the Fays led to the brothers' resignations in 1908.

7. Written in Discouragement

'I have nothing but a book'

'Pardon old fathers'

The early years of the century, as WBY entered middle age, were a difficult period.

Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903 was a shock and WBY continued to fret over her. WBY was very active but poetically less productive. The Abbey took much time and energy but its disputes disheartened him, as did controversies over Hugh Lane's pictures and political events. During these years WBY was also discovering America on theatre and lecture tours, while Ezra Pound introduced him to modernism and Japanese Noh, which was a dramatic inspiration.

Although his poetic work slowed down, he nevertheless wrote several important poems and continued to develop his skills and ideas, moving slowly towards modernism. This period can be seen as a transitional phase in his development as a writer, bridging the period between his two main phases as a poet: that of his early lyrical Celticism and love poetry, and of his later more direct engagement with both the personal and with ideas of profound universal significance. Many poems of this period reflect disillusion with his personal life and with society, especially in Ireland.

Despite the First World War he continued to travel between England, Ireland and even France to visit Maud Gonne.

8. Easter 1916

'All changed, changed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born. '

'Easter 1916'

The 1916 Rising, as it was known, took WBY by surprise. He was in England, staying with a friend, Sir William Rothenstein, in Gloucestershire, when it happened. His first reaction to the Rising appears to have been sadness at being away from Ireland when many of his acquaintances were dying. He was frustrated by the difficulty of getting accurate news about the events. But on 11 May, a few weeks after the Rising and after the execution of many of its leaders, he wrote to Lady Gregory:

'I am trying to write a poem on the men executed - 'terrible beauty has been born again.' If the English Conservative Party had made a declaration that they did not intend to rescind the Home Rule Bill there would have been no Rebellion. I am very despondent about the future. At the moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of the classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and culture from politics.'

The poem became 'Easter 1916', and WBY also wrote some other poems on the same topic.

9. An Occult Marriage

'There's not a man or woman

Born under the skies

Dare match in learning with us two'

'Solomon to Sheba'

WBY and Georgie Hyde Lees were married on 20th October 1917; the bride had just

turned 25 and the groom was 52.

Georgie was both well-read and familiar with occult studies. During their honeymoon a previously unsuspected mediumistic ability in automatic writing emerged. The automatic script continued intensively for more than two years and in various forms for the next decade, outlining a system of esoteric thought centred on the spiral gyre and the symbolism of sun and moon.

George brought a domestic stability to WBY's life. Their daughter, Anne, was born in 1919 and a son, Michael, in 1921.

10. The Public Man

'A sixty-year-old smiling public man'

'Among School Children'

The twenties brought the private satisfaction of his family, public recognition and renewed creativity.

WBY was nominated to the Irish Senate in 1922 and received an honorary doctorate from Trinity College. The Nobel Prize for Literature followed in 1923, which he considered was less for himself than his country: "Europe's welcome to the Free State". He continued to work on *A Vision* (1925), autobiographical writing and the poems that would make up *The Tower* (1928), regarded as one of his best collections. Ill health led him to start wintering in southern Europe and he resigned from the Senate in 1928.

11. Growing old

'What shall I do with this absurdity... Deceperit age?'

'The Tower'

As WBY drew near to his 70th birthday he felt an inner vigour, despite a lack of good health.

The birthday dinner was held at the Royal Hibernian Hotel, Dublin. The toasts included speeches from Francis Hackett, an Irish-born American living in Denmark; John Masefield, the British Poet Laureate; Desmond MacCarthy, the literary critic; and Sean O'Faolain, the writer. A piece of carved Chinese lapis lazuli was a present from Harry Clifton, a young poet of wealthy background. 'Lapis Lazuli', one of WBY's best-known later poems, was inspired by the carving and dedicated to Clifton.

WBY became interested in Italian fascism and had a brief dalliance with the Blueshirts in Ireland. Linking creative with sexual energy he underwent a 'Steinach operation', a vasectomy thought to be rejuvenating: during this 'second puberty', WBY had several intense friendships with younger women. He collaborated on translations of mystical Hindu writings, campaigned against censorship, set about organising the Irish Academy of Letters, and aroused controversy with his selection of poems for inclusion in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*.

12. Last Years

'The wild old wicked man'

WBY's creative imagination continued to flourish, despite illness and depression.

He explored the 'new' science of eugenics, and broadcast for the BBC. In 1938 he published *New Poems* and his play *Purgatory* was staged. He left Ireland for the last time on 25th October 1938 and died in the South of France on 28th January 1939. At the time of his death he was working on the poems 'The Black Tower' and 'Cuchulain Comforted', and revising his play *The Death of Cuchulain*; they were published in *Last Poems and Two Plays* by Cuala Press in July 1939.