

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

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 honeybee,
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.

Glossary and comment

Innisfree: Derived from the Irish 'Inis Fraoch' – Island of Heather. The 'free' in the name has nothing to do with freedom.

Wattles – Wooden poles, intertwined with thin branches to form a wall or roof.

Glimmer – flicker of light (here used to mean the twinkle of stars).

Linnet – a small song bird, once commonly kept as a cage bird because of its beautiful singing.

Background

Yeats wrote this poem in 1888 when he was a young man, living in London. He was lonely and homesick for Ireland at the time. Looking in a shop window, he saw a toy fountain and the sound of the water reminded him of lake water. Inspired by this, he wrote 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.

Summary and analysis

Stanza One

The poem opens very formally with the words 'I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree.' It has been pointed out that these words echo those of the prodigal son in the Bible when he says, 'I will arise and go to my father.' These biblical overtones reinforce the idea of Innisfree being an almost holy place and bring to mind the prodigal son's sense of relief when he resolved to leave his chaotic, unhappy life and return to his childhood home – a place of serenity and simplicity.

The poet goes on to describe the life he will lead on the island. He will be completely self-sufficient, having 'nine bean rows' and 'a hive for the honey-bee'. The poet's vision is of a romantic, idyllic, timeless way of life. Yeats imagines living in peace and solitude; he says he will 'live alone in the bee-loud glade.' The only sounds will be of nature. It seems that Yeats is rejecting the hustle and bustle of the modern world. The details in the poem give it a timeless quality; there is no hint of the modern world in Yeats' vision of the island. The only mention of modernity comes in the last stanza when Yeats refers to the 'pavements grey'.

Stanza Two

In this stanza, Yeats becomes so involved with the idea of this peaceful paradise that the future tense is abandoned and he uses the present tense instead. It is almost as if, by thinking and writing about Innisfree, he imagines himself there at that moment. He tells us that 'peace comes dropping slow,' and 'midnight's all a glimmer'. He moves through each stage of the day, bringing his vision to life for us with his vivid descriptions and beautiful imagery. The description of the day's rhythm makes us feel that this is a never-ending cycle of sensual pleasure. In the morning, the mist is like veils thrown over the lake; at noon, the purple heather – which gives the island its name - blazes under the sun; the evening is full of the whirr of the linnet's wings (the linnet is a small songbird) and at night, the stars fill the sky: 'midnight's all a glimmer'. The sounds in this stanza are soft and slow, creating a sense of peace and calm.

I find it interesting that Yeats chose to imagine the sound of the linnet's wings rather than the birdsong itself. The linnet is, after all, known for its beautiful song. However, on reflection, the image Yeats has chosen conjures up a place that is so quiet that even the whirr of this tiny birds' wings can be heard.

Stanza Three

Yeats brings us back to the opening lines in this stanza, beginning again with the words 'I will arise and go'. The solemnity is reinforced and emphasised by this repetition, as is the strength of his longing. The alliteration and assonance in the line, 'I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;' emphasise the tranquillity of the scene Yeats is describing. The broad vowels in this line slow the movement of the poem; it is virtually impossible to read it aloud at a fast pace. This is appropriate for a poem centred on ideas of tranquillity and escape from the sordid, chaotic city life. In contrast to this timeless, magical, colourful island, we are reminded of Yeats' reality at the time of writing: 'While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey'. The colourless grey of the pavements seems dreary and depressing and we can empathise with Yeats' yearning for the lake isle of Innisfree, a yearning he feels in 'the deep heart's core.' The last line is monosyllabic, which drives home the simple strength of the message.

This poem is in the Romantic tradition in that Yeats favours the pastoral over the urban and sees the world of nature in an idealistic way. It is reminiscent of the much longer 'Tintern Abbey' by William Wordsworth in that both poems centre on revisiting a place which they consider to be the epitome of natural perfection and a place where a poet may – in peace and solitude – reflect on life. You should bear this in mind when reading 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole' in that Yeats' opinion and approach have altered considerably in those later poems.

Themes

The poet's discontent, which leads him to imagine this perfect place.

A longing to go back to nature and live a self-sufficient life.

The search for peace, wisdom and truth.



September 1913

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone?
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind,
The names that stilled your childish play,
They have gone about the world like wind,
But little time they had to pray
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For that Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,
And call those exiles as they were,
In all their loneliness and pain,
You'd cry, 'Some woman's yellow hair
Has maddened every mother's son':
They weighed so lightly what they gave
But let them be, they're dead and gone
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

Background

Yeats was inspired to write this poem as a response to the proposed closure of the Hugh Lane art gallery and by the 1913 Lockout.

Hugh Lane was Yeats' nephew and a close friend of Lady Gregory. He had bequeathed a large collection of priceless paintings to the city of Dublin, but the corporation was unwilling to pay the cost of keeping the gallery open.

The 1913 Lockout was a long and bitter struggle between workers and employers. Workers wanted to unionise, but the employers refused to allow them to work if they joined a union. This sparked off a major industrial dispute between approximately 20,000 workers and 300 employers in Dublin. The dispute lasted from 26 August 1913 to 18 January 1914, and is often viewed as the most severe and significant industrial dispute in Irish history.

Yeats attacks the Catholic middle classes who had recently replaced the old Protestant landowners. He sees them as being overly-materialistic, narrow-minded, short-sighted, greedy and religious in name only. He laments the loss of what he sees as 'Romantic Ireland': a place of heroes and great bravery. Yeats believes that the Ireland of 1913 is not what those men wanted when they fought for their country's freedom.

Summary and analysis

Stanza One

This public poem opens with Yeats directly addressing the merchant classes. His tone is contemptuous, sarcastic and bitter as he gives his personal opinion of the wealthy Catholic middle class. He sees them as miserly, greedy men who have come to the realisation that accumulating money and saying a few token prayers is all that is needed in life. Money will ensure they are comfortable in this life, and the prayers will ensure they are safe in the next life. Yeats plays with the word 'save' in this stanza. The merchants are saving money, but they may also be praying to save their souls. The word 'shivering' to describe the prayers suggests that the merchants pray out of fear rather than any sense of spirituality. The image of the men 'fumbling' and 'shivering' as they 'pray and save' is a negative one and portrays the merchants in a most unfavourable light.

Yeats is being deeply sarcastic when he says that the merchants have ‘come to sense’. He despises their limited views and believes that they have taken all the goodness out of life. They have ‘dried the marrow from the bone.’ This may also refer to the employers exploiting their workers.

The refrain at the end of this stanza refers to the Irish patriot John O’Leary, who died shortly before the poem was written. He was a founder of the Fenian movement, and a man for whom Yeats had great admiration. He epitomised what Yeats saw as the ideal qualities of selflessness and idealism. These qualities have died with him, in Yeats’ opinion. The refrain is repeated at the end of the subsequent stanzas, giving the poem the air of a ballad. The repetition reinforces the main message of the poem, that ‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone / It’s with O’Leary in the grave’.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter (four iambs per line: an iamb being an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable). This is a metre associated with ballads and thus storytelling. Here Yeats uses it to tell us a simple story in a forceful way.

Stanza Two

The word ‘yet’ at the start of the stanza signals a change in tone. Now Yeats has moved on to discuss those who are worthy of admiration. Yeats contrasts the selflessness of the heroes of the past with the greed of the middle classes. These dead heroes, he says, ‘were of a different kind’, and were nothing like the men who have taken over as the dominant force in the Ireland of 1913.

As children, the merchants themselves were impressed by the heroism and valour of these men. Mention of them ‘stilled’ the merchants’ ‘childhood play’, but now that they are adults, the merchants have chosen to reject the values of the men they once revered. Now they are focused only on selfish pursuits and revere money instead. The heroes of the past had ‘little time’ to pray or save because they spent all their energy fighting for a free Ireland and pursuing a noble ideal. Yeats asks rhetorically what they could have saved, implying that there is nothing left in modern Ireland worth saving as the merchants have no interest in anything but themselves and their own comforts. His cry, ‘And what, God help us, could they save?’ is a powerful one. The colloquial ‘God help us’ adds force to his heartfelt frustration. These patriots could not even save their own lives. Their efforts were doomed and ‘the hangman’s rope was spun’ for them. This suggests that there was never much hope of any end other than death, yet the men still considered the dream worth fighting for. The image of the rope being spun – almost in anticipation of their deeds – captures the inevitability of

their death and their determination to carry on despite this. The bitter refrain at the end of the stanza reinforces Yeats' disgust at the current situation in Ireland.

Stanza Three

In this stanza Yeats continues to pose rhetorical questions, but the tone of his questioning has become even more bitter and angry than in the previous two stanzas. The repetition of 'for this' serves to emphasise his message. Each time he says 'for this', he is contrasting contemporary Irish society with a specific example from what he considered to be the country's glorious, romantic, noble past. The examples he gives are drawn from different times in Ireland's history. The 'wild geese' were Irish noblemen and soldiers who were forced to flee the country after being defeated by the British in 1690. Many of them went on to achieve fame and fortune in other countries throughout the world. Edward Fitzgerald and Wolfe Tone were leaders of a failed rebellion against the British in 1798, and they both died in prison before they could be executed. Robert Emmet led another uprising in 1803. It too failed, and he was executed by the British.

Yeats concludes that these heroes died in vain. The Ireland of 1913 is a mean-spirited, selfish, cynical, un-Romantic place and the people in it have betrayed the men who fought and died so that they could be free: 'Was it for this that blood was shed?'

The 'delirium of the brave' suggests that even Yeats struggles to understand the men's heroism. They must have been caught up in a sort of frenzy which enabled them to act so bravely and to face the might of the British army. There was never much hope of success, yet they fought on. Yet though he may not share their willingness to lay down their lives for their country, Yeats greatly admires the patriots. They represent a sort of heroic ideal that he believes died with them.

The list of heroes shows Yeats' pride in the Anglo-Irish patriots who fought for their country. Yeats was Anglo-Irish too, and it is significant that he chose those particular examples. He is allying himself with their patriotism, and distancing himself from the Catholic middle classes who appear incapable of appreciating any sort of nobility or self-sacrifice.

Stanza Four

In the final stanza, Yeats wonders what would happen if we could recall the dead heroes to the present day. He imagines what the reaction of the merchants would be to the men who suffered so much in their quest. His answer is a gloomy one. Yeats believes that the middle

classes would view the heroes as insane and that they would believe their love of Ireland was nothing more than madness. They would be mocked and derided for their heroism by men who can see no profit in doing anything that doesn't bring personal gain. The personification of Ireland as a woman with 'yellow hair' is typical of Irish political ballads. Their sacrifice and their willingness to die for their vision: 'They weighed so lightly what they gave' could not be comprehended by men who are incapable of such nobility. Those heroes were utterly selfless in their devotion to Ireland.

There is sadness and a sort of bitter resignation in the final lines of the poem. Yeats concludes that it is pointless to even try to stir the merchant classes to any sort of understanding of the past. They are so self-serving and cynical that they could never share the dream of a romantic Ireland. It is best to let the dead heroes rest in peace: 'But let them be, they're dead and gone / They're with O'Leary in the grave'.

There is no mention of the future and no note of hope in this final stanza.

Themes

Yeats' disillusionment with the greed, cynicism, selfishness and materialism of the Ireland of his time.

Idealistic view of war.

Lament for an ideal, noble, romantic Ireland and bitter disappointment with the middle classes of his time.

The Wild Swans at Coole

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty Swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

Background

Yeats wrote this poem in 1916, when he was fifty one years of age. Coole Park, in Co. Galway was the home of Lady Augusta Gregory, Yeats' friend and patron. In the poem, he reflects on how his life has changed since he was a younger man and walked 'with a lighter tread'. In reality, Yeats had not been carefree in his youth, but for the purposes of this poem, we must suspend disbelief and take him at his word.

In 1916, Yeats' love, Maud Gonne was widowed. Her husband, Major John McBride, had been executed by the British for his part in the Easter Rising. Maud Gonne went to France to work as a nurse with the war wounded, and Yeats followed her to propose marriage once again. Once again she refused. In 1917 Yeats married Georgiana Hyde-Lees and moved into Thoor Ballylee, a tower-house near Coole Park.

Summary and analysis

Stanza One

Yeats begins the poem by describing the beauty of Coole Park in the autumn. Details such as the brimming water and the dry woodland paths bring this peaceful scene to life. The brimming water of the lake contrasts with the dry paths. It is as if the lake and its occupants represent life and growth, while the land – where Yeats stands – is barren. Autumn is linked with slowing down and dying. Does Yeats feel that, at fifty one, he is reaching the autumn years of his life? The swans are counted; there are 'nine-and-fifty' of them. Swans mate for life, so why is there an odd number? Is one of them, like Yeats, alone? The repeated 'm', 's' and 'l' sounds in this stanza emphasise the sense of peace and quiet. The tone of this stanza is quite detached. The descriptions are given without any obvious emotion.

Stanza Two

In the second stanza, Yeats becomes far more personal as he recalls that it is nineteen years since he first counted these swans. Although logic tells us that these are unlikely to be the same swans, we suspend disbelief and accept that this is just an artistic construct. The use of the phrase 'come upon me' in relation to the passing of years is an interesting one. It implies the years are unwelcome and that they are weighing the poet down.

Suddenly, before Yeats can finish his counting, all the swans rise into the air. The run-on lines suggest movement and reflect the swans' flight. The onomatopoeic word 'clamorous' effectively captures the clapping and beating of the swans' wings as they oar into the air. The dynamic verbs 'mount' and 'scatter', along with the description of the noise made by the

swans as they rise into the air, contrasts with the lack of energy, stillness and silence in the first stanza. The swans form a ring – a symbol of eternity – and perhaps this reminds Yeats that while he might change, the swans remain the same, and even make the same patterns in the sky every year.

Stanza Three

In this deeply personal stanza, the poet reflects how everything in his life has changed since he first looked at the swans on this lake. 'All's changed'. He is not as young or as carefree as he was when he 'Trode with a lighter tread'. His 'heart is sore' as he thinks of the loss of his youth and of his failed romances. The description of the swans' wings in flight, 'The bell-beat of their wings' is particularly effective here. The alliteration in 'bell-beat' captures and reinforces the steady beat of the birds' huge wings as they fly above his head.

Stanza Four

There is a note of envy in the fourth stanza as Yeats watches the bird 'Unwearied still, lover by lover,' paddling together in the 'Companionable streams'. The streams may be cold, but the swans have one another. They are united, and time does not seem to touch them. 'Their hearts have not grown old'. Wherever they go, 'Passion or conquest' are with them. This seems to be in contrast to Yeats' own life. He implies that he is old and tired and heartbroken. The swans can swim in the 'brimming' water and fly in the air, but Yeats is limited to the dry woodland paths.

Stanza Five

The poem ends with Yeats wondering where the swans will go next to 'Delight men's eyes'. Perhaps he means that they, unchanged, will continue to bring pleasure to others who stand as he does now, watching them glide once more on the still water. They will leave him, however.

The poem is set in autumn, and winter will inevitably follow, for the poet. The swans seem untouched by everything and will continue to 'drift on the still water'. Yeats may be thinking of his creative life or his love life, or both, when he reflects on the changes that time has wrought. The swans are unchanging, content, almost immortal. He is none of these things.

Theme

The passage of time, and the loss of youth, creative vision and love.

An Irish Airman Foresees His Death

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

Glossary and comment

Background

The Irish airman in this poem is Robert Gregory, Lady Gregory's son. He was one of many Irishmen who fought and died for Britain in the First World War. He was shot down and killed while in Northern Italy. He was thirty seven years of age.

Yeats saw Gregory as a Renaissance man - a soldier, an artist, a horseman, a hunter, an educated aristocrat – and he admired him greatly. His death affected Yeats profoundly, and he wrote several poems for him.

Summary and analysis

This poem is an elegy in memory of Robert Gregory, who was killed during the First World War, but it is also more than that. It explores the state of mind of men who volunteered, as Gregory did, to fight in that war and examines their motivation.

The poem is structured unusually, in that it is the dead man himself who is speaking to us. Typically, an elegy would mourn the loss of the subject of the poem and list his good qualities,

but this poem is different. The tone is not one of sorrow so much as fatalism. (Fatalism = acceptance that events are predetermined by fate and, therefore, unchangeable. What will happen will happen.) The speaker is aware that he will die, yet chooses to fight, regardless of the fact. This fatalism is obvious from the opening lines:

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere in the clouds above;

The airman goes on to say that he is not motivated to fight by love of his fellow countrymen or hatred of the enemy. The tone is bleak, with no sense of passion. He has chosen to go to his death for reasons other than patriotism. There is no sense that he even supports the war effort. He feels it will not make any difference to his fellow countrymen:

No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.

In lines nine and ten, the airman makes it clear that he was not forced to fight, nor did he feel he had a duty to do so. It wasn't the 'cheering crowds' which carried him away; he was not swept up in the emotion of the enlistment meetings. There is a sense of cynicism in the mention of the 'public men' and the 'cheering crowds'. He has seen the realities of war and is not impressed or moved by politicians or public opinion. The repeated negatives 'nor – nor' emphasise the deliberate nature of his choice. He knows the reasons others may have chosen to fight, but they were not his reasons. His decision was a rational, calm one. He chose to go to war, knowing that by doing so, he had chosen his fate. He thought about it logically and intelligently: 'I balanced all, brought all to mind,' and made his decision. The balance of this line and the following two mirrors the balanced decision. He looked with detachment at his life to date, and at the possible future. His disenchantment with both is obvious:

The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind...

In contrast, the 'tumult in the clouds' seemed to Gregory to be an adventure, an 'impulse of delight'. Ironically, it seems that he only felt truly alive when flying towards his inevitable death. The repetition of the words 'waste of breath' emphasises Gregory's contempt for the dull security of life at home. He would rather die a heroic death than stay safely on his estate.

Is there a sense in which the poet and the airman are alike? Both are driven by a passion for a different way of life. Both are solitary figures. The difference is that the airman chooses a life of action, of adventure.

Theme

Some see this poem as a championing of war and risk-taking; others see it as an exploration of the motivation and psychological state of those who chose to fight in the war. They were not conscripted, and they did not have any great patriotic feelings. So why did they fight and die for a country they did not love against an enemy they did not hate? Yeats seems to say that it is the excitement, the thrill of the 'tumult' which led to so many Anglo-Irishmen losing their lives during the war. The impulse which drove them was a 'lonely' one. They were doing this for themselves, not for anyone else.



Approaching the Poetry Essay

- Marks: There are **50 marks** for this section.
- Time: You should allow about **45/50 minutes** for this section.
- You are required to study six poems by each of the poets on your course. You are not expected to refer to all six in the same level of detail in your answer. Use your discretion. You may be desperate to show how hard you have studied and how much you know, but you risk losing marks by including material which is not relevant to the question.
- Everything you have learned about structuring essays should be brought into play here. This is not an exercise in proving to the examiner that you have studied your poems and learned your quotes – it is an opportunity for you to show that you can frame an argument based on the title given. This means that you must have a **thesis**. This is your interpretation of the question, and it tells the reader the direction your essay is going to take.
- Your answer should take up at least three pages of your answer booklet.
- Plan your answer carefully. Check your plan before you write. Does each point answer the question? Have you stayed focused?
- Make your point, develop it and support it with suitable quotation.
- Use link words and phrases between paragraphs to ensure the coherence of your essay: However, Therefore, In a similar manner, Like (name poem), (next poem) also deals with the issue of...

**Remember:
THEMES
STYLE
PERSONAL RESPONSE**

Sample Essay Structure

Note: This is only *one way* of structuring your essay. You are free to organise yours any way you see fit. You will see from the sample essays we will examine in the coming days how such an essay looks when completed. Each paragraph need not contain every element listed below, nor need they be in that order (indeed, your essay would appear dull and formulaic if they were) but you should be aware of them and make an effort to include them wherever possible.

Paragraph One: Introduction, in which you respond to the question and give the examiner an idea of the direction of your essay. You should refer to specific poems – but not necessarily all of those you intend to use – and quote briefly. I do not advise saying ‘In this essay I will...’ as it is a little basic. Presumably your essay will speak for itself. Your essay should have a focus: you should try to move from one aspect of Yeats’ work / life to another.

Paragraph Two: Link to introduction. Poem One. Relate to question. Comment on language. Personal response.

Paragraph Three: Link to paragraph two. Second point about Poem One. Relate to question. Comment on language. Personal response.

Paragraphs Four and Five: Poem Two. Links at the start of each paragraph. Relate to question. Comment on language. Personal response.

Paragraphs Six and Seven: Poem Three. Links at the start of each paragraph. Relate to question. Comment on language. Personal response.

Conclusion. Refer back to terms of question. Do not make a new point. End on a quote if possible. The quote may be from one of Yeats’ poems (on your course or from another source) or it may be a quote about Yeats. (There is a selection of quotes by and about Yeats in these notes. You may find them a helpful starting point.)

In summary, then, your essay should consist of an introduction, two paragraphs about each poem, and a conclusion.

Quotes

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

– W.B. Yeats

“What can be explained is not poetry.”

– W.B. Yeats

“Life is a long preparation for something that never happens.”

– W.B. Yeats

“Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry.”

– W.B. Yeats

“O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?”

– W.B. Yeats

“Happiness is neither virtue nor pleasure nor this thing nor that but simply growth. We are happy when we are growing.”

– W.B. Yeats

“I think that if I could be given a of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato...I think that in early Byzantium, maybe before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers...spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design , absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people .”

– W.B. Yeats

“To Yeats, MacBride had appeared to be a ‘drunken, vainglorious lout,’ and when he heard that MacBride had refused a blindfold, saying ‘I’ve been staring down rifle butts all my life,’ he remarked that MacBride had better have said that he had been staring down pintpots all his life. His antipathy to MacBride at first made him see the rebellion as all wrong, and he and Maud Gonne had – according to her daughter Iseult – a furious argument on the subject. Then he brought himself to recognise the importance of the blood sacrifice that had been made, and even MacBride’s part in it. The poem he wrote ‘Easter 1916,’ did not give up his reasons for opposing the rebellion, or his dislike of MacBride, but he now attributed the rebels’ ‘bewilderment’ to an ‘excess of love,’ a malady with which he could thoroughly sympathise, and one appropriate to Easter in any year.” - Richard Ellman, in the

introduction to *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*.

‘While Yeats refuses to be categorised, it is clear that Platonism is the philosophical tradition with which he is most closely aligned; as Robertson Davies has said, reviewing a book on Yeats and Jung, ‘If we do not agree that Yeats and Jung are wholly Platonists, we must agree that they fit better into that honourable assembly than any others’. For Platonism provided Yeats with three key doctrines in which he himself believed: a transcendent reality, the immortality of the soul, and reincarnation.’ *Yeats and Platonism* by Brian Arkins.

Key Literary Terms

You are analysing a poem, so must show an awareness of poetic techniques. Below is a list of basic literary terms with which you should be familiar.

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds, particularly at the start of words.

Allusion: A reference to another piece of literature, work of art, person, place etc.

Ambiguity: A word or expression which has two or more possible meanings.

Anthropomorphism: Giving human qualities or feelings to something which isn't human.

Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds.

Colloquialism: A local or regional expression which may not be understood by outsiders.

Consonance: The repetition of consonants or consonant patterns, usually at the end of words. The words need not rhyme or contain the same vowel sounds. 'Think, blank'; 'Stroke, luck'.

Convention: An established technique, literary device or practice.

Couplet: Two lines, usually rhyming and having the same metre, which form a complete thought.

Genre: A particular category of writing. Each genre has its own style, form etc.

Imagery: Figurative language (metaphors, similes etc.)

Lyric: A poem in which personal and subjective feelings are expressed. Lyric poems are usually short and songlike.

Metaphor / Simile: Drawing a comparison to suggest a likeness. 'She's an angel'. A simile is like a metaphor except that the comparison is usually introduced by 'like' or 'as'. 'My love is like a red, red rose.' A metaphor is usually considered stronger than a simile.

Octet: A set of eight lines.

Onomatopoeia: A word which sounds like its meaning: 'squelch', 'slap', 'thud', 'screech', 'cheep'.

Paradox: A seeming contradiction. "Some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again." (C.S. Lewis to his godchild, Lucy Barfield, to whom he dedicated *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)

Persona: A character assumed by the poet. Derek Mahon adopts the persona of Bruce Ismay in 'After the Titanic'.

Personification: The representation of an abstraction or a thing as a human or some sort of divine being. For example, the idea of death is often represented by the Grim Reaper.

Quatrain: A group of four lines of verse.

Sestet: A group of six lines of verse.

Sibilance: Words which make or contain an 's' or 'sh' sound. 'The hissing snake...'

Sonnet: A poem consisting of fourteen lines arranged according to a prescribed scheme. Shakespearean sonnets consist of three quatrains and a couplet. The couplet usually sums up the main idea (theme) of the poem or looks at the theme in a fresh way.

Symbol: Something which represents something else. Symbols have a deeper meaning than signs and can sometimes provoke strong, emotional responses.

Tercet: A group of three lines of verse. The lines often rhyme.

Tone: The attitude or feeling implied by the style of writing. A tone may be melancholy or optimistic, for example. The tone may change one or more times during the course of the poem.

Villanelle: A formal, ordered poem which consists of nineteen lines divided into five tercets (three-line stanzas) and a quatrain (four-line stanza). There are only two rhymes throughout, and two refrains. The two refrains are used as the first and third lines of the first stanza, and thereafter alternately repeated as the final line of the remaining tercets. The refrains come together again as the final two lines of the quatrain. (This sounds quite complicated until you look at the poem and see how straightforward it actually is.)

Villanelles are associated with thoughts of death and grief.

Volta: This comes from the Italian word for 'turn'. A volta is the turn in thought in a sonnet that is often indicated by such initial words as 'but', 'yet' or 'and yet'.