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**2013: Remembering September 1913**

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# Introduction

T. S. Eliot pronounced Yeats "one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them”. This is particularly true of *September 1913*, a poem which accurately captures the complexities of the time. This lecture is prompted firstly by the centenary of the poem’s publication in *The Irish Times* and secondly by the imagery of the ‘greasy till’ that I think we will all agree still resonates 100 years later.

W.B. Yeats wrote five poems in response to the controversy stirred by Sir Hugh Lane’s offer of his collections of paintings to the city of Dublin. Of these *Poems Written in Discouragement*, ‘September 1913’ is deservedly the most celebrated. The poem laments the death in Ireland of heroic, romantic values and the predominance, as Yeats saw it, of a bourgeois materialism. Yeats was in a state of exacerbation at the time of writing because of three public controversies that stirred his imagination. The first was the Parnell Controversy and the Great Lockout, the second was the riots at the Abbey Theatre after the showing of Synge’s Playboy of the Western World, and the third was the aforementioned refusal by Dublin Corporation to house the Hugh Lane collection. The first part of this paper will thus offer a socio-historical perspective on the poem ‘September 1913’ with particular reference to these three events. The second part of this paper will focus on the structure of the poem, particularly its subversion of the conventional political ballad of the time.

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 had they 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 this 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.

# The Parnell Controversy and the Great Lockout

In the preface to ‘Responsibilities’, the 1914 collection in which ‘September 1913’ was published, Yeats writes:

‘In the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspapers, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy. There were reasons to justify a man's joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or on the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction. And another was the dispute over "The Playboy." There may have been reasons for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing, though I can see the one side only, but there cannot have been any for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America. The third prepared for the Corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures’

So let us start with the Parnell controversy and the Great Lockout which are inextricably linked by key figures, most notably, William Martin Murphy. It is worthwhile spending a moment to discuss Yeat’s poem ‘To a Shade’ dated September 29, 1913 which is, in many ways a continuation of the lament for ‘romantic Ireland’ that Yeats initiates in ‘September 1913’. ‘To a Shade’ exalts Parnell, who died a broken man in 1891, after his adulterous affair with Kitty O’Shea came to light in divorce proceedings. For Yeats, the death of Parnell initiated an era of partisan ill will and small minded propaganda against which he saw his own cultural movement as a reaction.

In the poem, Yeats advises the shade of Parnell that if it should return to Dublin it should not linger for they are ‘up to their old tricks again’. The second stanza explains the travesty of parochial Dublin: A man of Parnell’s own ‘passionate, serving kind’ has offered what would have given generations of Dubliners ‘loftier thought, sweeter emotion’. But his efforts have been met with insults and persecution, ‘the pack set upon him’ by Parnell’s enemy ‘old foul mouth’. Yeats is alluding here to Hugh Lane’s attempt to establish a gallery of contemporary art in Dublin. Lane had promised his collection of impressionist paintings to Dublin provided that a suitable gallery be built to house them, but both the paintings and the conditions attached to them met with derision in culturally conservative and nationalist circles, with William Martin Murphy the ‘old foul mouth’ of the poem acting as ringleader. Murphy is invoked here not only because of his role in the attack on Lane, but also, as Yeats explains in a note to the poem ‘A Wealthy Man’ because he had been ‘Mr Healy’s financial supporter in his attack upon Parnell’. Yeats is referring to Tim Healy, a member of parliament who had been one of Parnell’s most strenuous critics during the controversies of 1890 and 1891. This is significant because William Martin Murphy is a key figure in the Great Lockout. The main protagonists in the lockout were William Martin Murphy on the side of the employers and on the side of the workers Jim Larkin and James Connolly. Murphy was the owner of the Irish Independent, the Evening Herald and the Irish Catholic, Clery’s Department Store, the Imperial Hotel and the Dublin United Tramways Company so as you can imagine he held significant power in Dublin at the time. On the side of the workers, James Connolly was an inspirational orator who spoke with passion for workers rights. Like Connolly, Larkin was a talented orator who became well known for his speeches in support of socialism and Irish [nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism) on the streets of Dublin.

‘At twenty to ten on the morning of Tuesday 26th August 1913, the trams stopped running. Striking conductors and drivers pinned the Red Hand badge of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union on their lapels and abandoned their vehicles...’

So goes James Connolly’s description of the Lockout as a drawn battle and moral victory. However, as Padraig Yeates observes, the Lockout was ‘a far shabbier, bloodier and more mundane affair than the myth allows’. The Dublin Lockout was a major industrial dispute involving approximately 20, 000 workers and 300 employers. The dispute lasted until 18 January 1914. A key factor in the ignition of the dispute, apart from the workers right to organise in a trade union was the appalling circumstances in which the poor of Dublin lived. Dublin was home to some of the worst slums in Europe. In fact, on 2 September two tenement houses collapsed in Church Street killing seven people and causing serious injury to several others. T.B was rampant and many were near starvation. The infant mortality rate was 142 per 1000 births and the death rate in Dublin was as bad as Calcutta, 27.6 per thousand. In London it was 15.6.

Sean O’Casey recalling life in the tenements, describes a scene:

‘Where we lived, with thousands of others, the garbage of ashpit with the filth from the jakes was tumbled into big wicker baskets that were carried on the backs of men whose clothing had been soaked in the filth from a hundred homes; carried out from the tiny back yards, through the kitchen living-room, out by the hall, dumped in a horrid heap on the street outside’

In the midst of this deprivation and despite an ultimatum from their employers, brave workers refused to give up their membership of the union and as a result were dismissed and locked out. Events unfolded dramatically following the arrest, imprisonment and subsequent release of James Larkin for seditious intent to break the public peace and the holding of a meeting arranged by James Connolly on Sunday August 31. Most commentators were in agreement that the police reacted with unnecessary violence at the meeting as Ireland experienced its first bloody Sunday with 500 people injured and 3 dead. The Lockout, but in particular the events of August 31, saw writers such as Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, George Russell and James Connolly responding to the society they saw unfolding around them and herein lies the context for September 1913. Yeats wrote an angry critique of the petit bourgeois employers who had starved the tram workers and their families into defeat, using a series of phrases that Larkin and Connolly might well have approved of, particularly in his description of the selfishness of Murphy and his workers.

# The riots at the Abbey Theatre

Moving on to the riots at the Abbey Theatre; let us first establish the abiding friendship between Yeats and Synge. Alongside Yeats, Synge was a key figure in the [Irish Literary Revival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic_Revival) and was one of the co-founders and director of the [Abbey Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbey_Theatre). They met in Paris in 1896 and it was Yeats who encouraged Synge to move to the Aran Islands with the words ‘Express a life that has never found expression’.

Synge was a gifted musician and played the piano, flute and violin. He had initially planned to forge a career in music but the thought of performing on stage so unnerved him that he turned to language and literature, graduating from Trinity with a BA in Irish and Ancient Hebrew in 1892. Now, Yeats was immersed in cultural nationalism at this time and considered the Aran Islands the source of Gaelic purity, being relatively untouched by outside influence. Yeats though it important to capture the stories and legends of the islands but couldn’t do so himself because he didn’t speak Irish having being educated primarily in London. Synge had a degree in Irish and a musical ear that could better than most grasp the distinct form and rhythm of language. So Yeats said to the young Synge, who was only 25 years old ‘You won’t find what you’re looking for in the works of Racine. Go to the Aran Islands’. Why did Synge listen to him? You can imagine if Yeats had issued a similar directive to Joyce the response he might have got. Well, Synge was at a crossroads. He had turned away from a music career but was unsure of himself as a writer. On a personal level Synge’s father had died when he was one from smallpox and, lacking fatherly direction, he might have been more open than most to the kindly authoritative Yeats. Furthermore, Synge had proposed to a woman named Cherie Matheson in 1895 twice and was refused twice. So, in many ways there was a logic of hierarchy to the events which brought Synge to the Aran Islands and his experiences in the Aran Islands were to form the basis for the plays about Irish rural life that Synge went on to write. .

Synge spent the next five summers in the Aran Islands, collecting stories and folklore, and perfecting his Irish. His book, [*The Aran Islands*](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Aran_Islands), was completed in 1901. Synge’s plays *The Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea* were completed in 1902 based on stories that Synge had collected in the Aran Islands. Both plays met with criticism for their portrayal of Irish life. The play widely regarded as Synge's masterpiece, *The Playboy of the Western World*, was first performed at the Abbey Theatre on 26 January 1907 and attracted a hostile reaction from sections of the Irish public. The [Freeman's Journal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freeman%27s_Journal) described it as "an unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men, and worse still upon Irish girlhood". The troubles, since known as the [*Playboy Riots*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playboy_Riots), were encouraged, in part, by [nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_nationalism) who took offence at Synge's use of the word '[shift](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemise)' which referred to a woman’s undergarments but was known at the time as a symbol representing [Kitty O'Shea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitty_O%27Shea) and adultery, and hence was seen as a slight on the virtue of Irish womanhood. Much of the crowd rioted loudly, and the actors performed the remainder of the play in [dumbshow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumbshow), that is, in silence. Yeats returned from Scotland to address the crowd on the second night having received an urgent telegraph from Lady Gregory, and decided to call in the police. Press opinion soon turned against the rioters and the protests subsided. However, management of the Abbey was shaken. They chose not to stage Synge's next play, [*The Tinker's Wedding*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tinker%27s_Wedding) (1908), for fear of further disturbances. Philistine derision of the Abbey productions had killed it. By 1909, Synge was dead and Yeats was left a disillusioned and discouraged man, hence the title ‘Poems written in Discouragement’.

Yeats later referred to this incident in a speech to the Abbey audience in 1926 on the fourth night of [Seán O'Casey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Se%C3%A1n_O%27Casey)'s [*The Plough and the Stars*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Plough_and_the_Stars), when he declared: ‘You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Synge first and then O'Casey?’

# Hugh Lane Collection

The final straw for Yeats was Dublin Corporation’s reluctance and subsequent refusal to house a collection of paintings belonging to Sir Hugh Lane, a young, wealthy, single minded art collector and nephew of Lady Gregory.

Lane had offered to donate his mainly impressionist paintings to the city on condition that they be suitably housed, he himself wanted to build a gallery on a new bridge across the Liffey. Subscriptions to fund the project were implemented, meetings were held, and arguments for and against the gallery were aired. Yeats championed Lane and the cause of art, whereas the anti-Lane party was backed by again the formidable figure of William Martin Murphy, the powerful newspaper proprietor and leader of the employers against Jim Larkin and his workers during the lockout. Public reaction was generally negative, many people pointed out, not unreasonably, that with Dublin’s slums and chronic shortage of adequate housing for human beings, building an expensive gallery for modern art was a luxury Dublin simply couldn’t afford. Prominent nationalists like Arthur Griffiths stated the gallery was extravagant folly. However, it’s not as simple as saying the poor were in opposition to the vanity project of the privileged, the opposition was primarily from the middle class ‘fumbling in their greasy tills’ who rushed to protect their business interests and investments. For example, the workers' leader, James Larkin, though raised in poverty, appreciated art and beauty and sought the cultural as well as economic and social liberation of the manual labourer. Seán O'Casey noted that Larkin wanted the rose along with the loaf of bread on a worker's table. James Larkin supported Lane's Municipal Gallery project, and declared that William Martin Murphy, for his meanness in the matter of Sir Hugh Lane's offer, would be condemned to keep an art gallery in Hell.

Dublin Corporation argued that they should be given concrete proof of a public need and demand before appropriating money for the gallery. Yeats was incensed by the negative attitude towards Lane’s paintings and, by extension, art in general, and *September 1913* is his carefully cultivated response. In it he evokes a bleak urban world of money-driven philistinism:

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

and contrasts this with the noble sacrifice of patriots such as John O’Leary, Fitzgerald, Emmet and Wolfe Tone:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone

It’s with O’Leary in the grave.

Why was the gallery so important to Yeats? Well, like William Blake, his spiritual mentor, Yeats believed that art and the imagination were not secondary to life but indispensable to it, because they enlarged and enriched the minds and souls of anyone exposed to them. For Yeats a Dublin gallery of impressionist paintings would have been a sanctuary and a vital source of culture, in a city sucked dry by politics, commerce and institutionalised religion. Yeats trip to Urbino in Northern Italy with Lady Gregory in 1907 further exerted an influence on him, he was struck permanently by the high culture which he contrasted with the ‘daily spite of this unmannerly town’, this ‘damned, undisciplined town’ as he referred to Dublin in a letter to Hugh Lane.

In fact ‘September 1913’ was originally titled, *Romance in Ireland* and subtitled *On reading much of the correspondence against the Art Gallery*. Bearing this in mind David Ross observes that the poem’s meaning shifts slightly; whereas Fitzgerald, Tone and Emmet heeded the call to battle, contemporary Ireland has failed to heed the call to an equivalent cultural battle, personified by the Hugh Lane collection. By implication it is Yeats, Lady Gregory and Hugh Lane who carry on the heroic nationalist endeavour of the 18th century with the Literary Revival.

It is worth noting here, and eloquently recorded by Gus Martin in his biography of Yeats, that the project would almost certainly have been completed if Lane had not insisted on a gallery over the Halfpenny Bridge to be designed by the English architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. His insistence on a bridge was considered by many to be ill-advised and his own choice of architect provocative. Dublin Corporation had actually agreed to vote £22,000 in 1913 towards a building and private donations in Ireland, England and America had been generous. In 1907 the Corporation had provided a property on Harcourt Street called Clonmel House but Lane considered it inadequate, what he really wanted was a purpose built gallery.

The proposed gallery drafted by Lutyens would have been beautiful to look at but in practice would have blocked the views down the Liffey and necessitated the demolition or at least the move of the Halfpenny Bridge. It was this aspect of the plan that aroused the opposition of William Martin Murphy, chairman of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce in 1913 and other members of the business community.

Lane, a single-minded man used to being indulged, was angered at the refusal and in a fit of pique, donated the entire collection to the National Gallery of England. He subsequently relented and added a codicil in his will to return the collection to Ireland but, although signed, it was never witnessed and, following his untimely death aboard the ill-fated Lusitania, the event that effectively brought the United States in to the First World War, much debate ensued over where the collection should reside. In 1959, a compromise was reached under Taoiseach Sean Lemass, whereby half of the Lane Bequest would be lent and shown in Dublin every five years. In 1993 the agreement was varied so that 31 of the 39 paintings would stay in Ireland. In 2008 The National Gallery in London arranged for the entire collection to be on display in Dublin together for the first time. The collection continues to be shared and changed hands again in May 2013.

# Structure of the Poem

In four verses and 210 words, September 1913 makes its point powerfully. The first of the poem’s four eight lane stanzas is aggressively polemical. Addressing the middle classes directly Yeats asks:

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

Commerce and religion, in these lines, are equally forms of unimaginative and unexamined obedience to an external authority. They constitute the safeguard of sense that has thwarted the passionate impulse and undone the nation. Yeats deflates the sarcasm of these lines with a sighing echo of popular sentiment ‘For men were born to pray and save’ and then arrives, with a sudden abandonment of irony, at the poem’s refrain:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone

It’s with O’Leary in the grave.

September 1913 elegises the Fenian hero John O’Leary who died in 1907 and the national spirit he represented. O’Leary returned to Dublin in 1885 after 5 years spent in an English prison for taking part in an armed insurrection in 1867 and 14 years in political exile in Paris. Yeats was immediately won over by what he considered O’Leary’s dignity and honesty and devotion to cultural nationalism rather than militant nationalism; indeed he writes in his Autobiographies that ‘O’Leary had the moral genius that moves all young people’. It was well established that it was O’Leary who converted Yeats to the cause of Irish cultural nationalism and who was, in fact, responsible for Yeats becoming an ‘Irish’ writer, persuading him to write on Irish subjects during his stay with the Yeats family in Bedford Park in London.

O’ Leary recommended to Yeats the writings of *The Young Irelanders*, a political, cultural and social movement of the 19th century, but supported Yeats in his refusal to praise second-rate literature in order to strengthen the cause of Irish nationalism, insisting on the highest standards of artistic excellence. Thus when Yeats attacked the cultural and aesthetic values of his middle-class contemporaries in ‘September 1913’ he used O’Leary as a symbol for the lost ideal of aesthetic excellence in Ireland.

Now O’Leary was apparently a landlord who never worked a day with a notorious local reputation in Tipperary town for the way he treated his tenants. In fact, the Tenants League in Tipperary was established in the first instance to address the cruelty of O’Leary and his sister Ellen to their tenants. Seen in this light, O’Leary is more of a representative of the greasy till than Romantic Ireland. Nevertheless, it is O’Leary’s romantic conception of Irish nationality coupled with pride and dignity that Yeats wished to invoke in September 1913.

The poem is resolutely fixed on the middle classes whom Yeats accuses of cowardice and calculation that betrays the spirit of O’Leary. He writes in his autobiography:

We have but a few educated men and the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which made its first public display during the nine years of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture.

For Yeats the upper-class “educated” possess a metropolitan refinement while the lower-class ‘poor’ peasantry preserve an older cultural tradition. But the middle class possess or preserve neither. O’Leary shared Yeats’s contempt for the ‘minds without culture’ of the Irish middle class and Yeats’s attitude to the middle classes appears to stem directly from O’Leary. In his *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism* (1896) O’Leary writes ‘The middle class I believe, in Ireland and elsewhere, to be distinctly the lowest class morally – that is, the class influenced by the lowest motives. The prudential virtues it has in abundance; but a regard for your own stomach and skin… is not the stuff of which virtues are made’. Elizabeth Cullingford calls this passage ‘the germ of Yeats’s poetic denigration of the merchant and the clerk’. Yeats was not alone in holding O’Leary in such high regard. On the death of O’Leary, James Joyce wrote sympathetically in Il Piccolo della Sera, faulting British imperial rule and supporting the independence movement. Indeed Joyce’s article ‘L’Ultimo Feniano’ makes worthwhile reading alongside ‘September 1913’.

Moving to the second stanza of the poem, the heroes of Ireland’s long political struggle were ‘of a different kind’ having no time to pray: not for them the gestures of faith but the actuality of martyrdom. And yet, Yeats asks in the second stanza, what could they save? Yeats here infers that the heroes died for nothing. In the third stanza he asks, was it for this – the hypocrisy of the middle class – that the ‘wild geese’ took flight, for this that ‘Edward Fitzgerald died/And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone/ All that delirium of the brave? The ‘wild geese’ were Irish soldiers who enlisted in foreign armies during the 18th century after Irish Catholics were barred from serving in the Irish military. Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone and Emmet are among Ireland’s most celebrated nationalist heroes. Fitzgerald died of wounds suffered during his arrest as a participant in the rebellion of 1798, Tone committed suicide while in prison for his part in the same rebellion, and Emmet was executed for his part in the failed insurrection of 1803. Yeats choice of the word *delirium* is a deliberate provocation and criticises the calculation of the middle classes with an ideal of reckless passion that scorns reason itself as embodied in these nationalist heroes.

In the final stanza Yeats levels the charge of hypocrisy. For all its reverence for its nationalist martyrs, the middle classes would have nothing to do with such men if they were somehow brought before the present. The resurrected heroes would meet with the cry that ‘Some woman’s yellow hair/Has maddened every mother’s son’. These lines may refer to Maud Gonne’s seductive political sway during the 1890’s. In *Autobiographies,* Yeats remembers that ‘when men and women did her bidding they did it not only because she was beautiful, but because that beauty suggested joy and freedom’ (274). These lines may also allude to the sway of Cathleen ni Houlihan, the female personification of ‘romantic Ireland’, who calls men from the comfort of the hearth to the sacrifice of the gallows, as in Yeats play Cathleen ni Houlihan.

Focusing more closely on the structure of the poem, ‘September 1913’ clearly exhibits several characteristics of Irish political ballads, showing the influence of street song and reflecting Yeat’s continuing concern that Irish writers find new and personal ways to use the traditional forms so vital to the cultural heritage of the nation. Yeats was already familiar with political ballads through the popular verse of Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders introduced to him by O’Leary. Significantly, between 1908 and 1915, Yeats had come into prolonged close contact with political ballads. During these years, the Cuala Press, under the supervision of Jack Yeats, issued a monthly series of broadsheets, of which a significant number contained popular types of street song. ‘September 1913’ shows the influence of street song and turns the conventions to modern ends. He uses the same formal devices the nationalist poets used to unify the Irish population, however, whereas nationalist poets used them to heap praise on the populace, Yeats uses the conventions to criticise, where they made heroic promises, he expresses scorn. By refusing at every turn to fulfil his audience’s expectation, Yeats achieves a brilliant satirical effect.

The street song ‘By Memory Inspired’ which deals primarily with the political martyrs of the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century is of particular interest to a consideration of ‘September 1913’.The poem praises the same men who appear so prominently in Yeats’s poem with each stanza devoted to one or several of these heroic dead and concluding with a refrain in the form of a toast: ‘Here’s a memory to the friends that are gone!’ The traditional refrain functioned as a unifying device, however, had Yeats’s listeners joined in his song, instead of affirming a great and glorious heritage, they would have found themselves lamenting the loss of an heroic past that had once been the very ‘marrow’ of Irish bones Yeats’s ironic use of the political ballad was conscious and intentional, this is clear from his letters to the poet Dorothy Wellesley in which he insisted that rhyme was crucial to capturing the authentic ‘folk-lilt’ saying ‘the sing of the sentence makes the reader expect it...the fundamental sing-song’ and herein lies the poem’s brilliance.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, Yeats’s message, expressed in ballad form, could not have been more political, there was no space for ordinary Irish people who wished to better their circumstances, or for those who considered access to art essential for the city.

This was a cruel blow to Yeats whose literary revival was entirely based on a romantic conception of Ireland. In 1892, Yeats and others founded the National Literary Society in Dublin. The revival, led by Yeats and Douglas Hyde, substantially changed the way in which things Irish were to be known and understood both in Ireland and beyond in future. The Irish Literary Revival of the period 1890-1922 empowered Irish voices to speak of their experience as central for the first time. Seamus Heaney, whose loss we mourn but whose legacy we celebrate this year, wrote of this empowerment when he argued that Irish literature is primarily informed by a ‘sense of place’ and that such a literature ‘looks out but does not necessarily look up to the metropolitan centres’.

It is this looking out that Yeats found lacking in the insularity and cultural parochialism of middle class Ireland in 1913. The poem is thus a lament for the loss of Romantic Ireland and a scathing indictment of modern Irish morality.

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**To a Shade**

***W. B. Yeats***

http://www.poetry-archive.com/i_pic.gifF you have revisited the town, thin Shade,

Whether to look upon your monument

(I wonder if the builder has been paid)

Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent

To drink of that salt breath out of the sea

When grey gulls flit about instead of men,

And the gaunt houses put on majesty:

Let these content you and be gone again;

For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man

Of your own passionate serving kind who had brought

In his full hands what, had they only known,

Had given their children's children loftier thought,

Sweeter emotion, working in their veins

Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,

And insult heaped upon him for his pains,

And for his open-handedness, disgrace;

Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set

The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,

And gather the Glasnevin coverlet

About your head till the dust stops your ear,

The time for you to taste of that salt breath

And listen at the corners has not come;

You had enough of sorrow before death--

Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.

*September 29, 1913*

**By Memory Inspired**

**Anonymous**

By Memory inspired,

And love of country fired,

The deeds of men I love to dwell upon;

And the patriotic glow

Of my spirits must bestow

A tribute to O’Connell that is gone, boys—gone:

Here’s a memory to the friends that are gone!

In October Ninety-seven—

May his soul find rest in Heaven—

William Orr to execution was led on:

The jury, drunk, agreed

That Irish was his creed;

For perjury and threats drove them on, boys—on:

Here’s the memory of John Mitchell that is gone!

In Ninety-eight—the month July—

The informer’s pay was high;

When Reynolds gave the gallows brave MacCann;

But MacCann was Reynolds’ first—

One could not allay his thirst;

So he brought up Bond and Byrne, that are gone, boys—gone:

Here’s the memory of the friends that are gone!

We saw a nation’s tears

Shed for John and Henry Shears;

Betrayed by Judas, Captain Armstrong;

We may forgive, but yet

We never can forget

The poisoning of Maguire that is gone, boys—gone:

Our high Star and true Apostle that is gone!

How did Lord Edward die?

Like a man, without a sigh;

But he left his handiwork on Major Swan!

But Sirr, with steel-clad breast,

And coward heart at best,

Left us cause to mourn Lord Edward that is gone, boys—gone:

Here’s the memory of our friends that are gone!

September, Eighteen-three,

Closed this cruel history,

When Emmet’s blood the scaffold flowed upon:

Oh, had their spirits been wise,

They might then realise

Their freedom, but we drink to Mitchell that is gone, boys—gone:

Here’s the memory of the friends that are gone!