

**Michael Robartes and The  
Dancer**

**1921**

**William Butler Yeats**

# CONTENTS:

Michael Robartes and the Dancer  
Solomon and the Witch  
An Image from a Past Life  
Under Saturn  
Easter, 1916  
Sixteen Dead Men  
The Rose Tree  
On a Political Prisoner  
The Leaders of the Crowd  
Towards Break of Day  
Demon and Beast  
The Second Coming  
A Prayer for my Daughter  
A Meditation in Time of War  
To be Carved on a Stone at Ballylee

# MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER

He. Opinion is not worth a rush;  
In this altar-piece the knight,  
Who grips his long spear so to push  
That dragon through the fading light,  
Loved the lady; and it's plain  
The half-dead dragon was her thought,  
That every morning rose again  
And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.  
Could the impossible come to pass  
She would have time to turn her eyes,  
Her lover thought, upon the glass  
And on the instant would grow wise.

She. You mean they argued.

He. Put it so;  
But bear in mind your lover's wage  
Is what your looking-glass can show,  
And that he will turn green with rage  
At all that is not pictured there.

She. May I not put myself to college?

He. Go pluck Athena by the hair;  
For what mere book can grant a knowledge  
With an impassioned gravity  
Appropriate to that beating breast,  
That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?  
And may the devil take the rest.

She. And must no beautiful woman be  
Learned like a man?

He. Paul Veronese  
And all his sacred company  
Imagined bodies all their days  
By the lagoon you love so much,  
For proud, soft, ceremonious proof  
That all must come to sight and touch;  
While Michael Angelo's Sistine roof  
His 'Morning' and his 'Night' disclose  
How sinew that has been pulled tight,  
Or it may be loosened in repose,  
Can rule by supernatural right  
Yet be but sinew.

She. I have heard said  
There is great danger in the body.

He. Did God in portioning wine and bread  
Give man His thought or His mere body?

She. My wretched dragon is perplexed.

He. I have principles to prove me right.  
It follows from this Latin text  
That blest souls are not composite,  
And that all beautiful women may  
Live in uncomposite blessedness,  
And lead us to the like--if they  
Will banish every thought, unless  
The lineaments that please their view  
When the long looking-glass is full,  
Even from the foot-sole think it too.

She. They say such different things at school.

# SOLOMON AND THE WITCH

And thus declared that Arab lady:  
'Last night, where under the wild moon  
On grassy mattress I had laid me,  
Within my arms great Solomon,  
I suddenly cried out in a strange tongue  
Not his, not mine.'

And he that knew  
All sounds by bird or angel sung  
Answered: 'A crested cockerel crew  
Upon a blossoming apple bough  
Three hundred years before the Fall,  
And never crew again till now,  
And would not now but that he thought,  
Chance being at one with Choice at last,  
All that the brigand apple brought  
And this foul world were dead at last.  
He that crowed out eternity  
Thought to have crowed it in again.  
A lover with a spider's eye  
Will find out some appropriate pain,  
Aye, though all passion's in the glance,

For every nerve: lover tests lover  
With cruelties of Choice and Chance;  
And when at last that murder's over  
Maybe the bride-bed brings despair  
For each an imagined image brings  
And finds a real image there;  
Yet the world ends when these two things,  
Though several, are a single light,  
When oil and wick are burned in one;  
Therefore a blessed moon last night  
Gave Sheba to her Solomon.'

'Yet the world stays':  
'If that be so,  
Your cockerel found us in the wrong  
Although he thought it worth a crow.  
Maybe an image is too strong  
Or maybe is not strong enough.'

'The night has fallen; not a sound  
In the forbidden sacred grove  
Unless a petal hit the ground,  
Nor any human sight within it  
But the crushed grass where we have lain;

And the moon is wilder every minute.  
Oh, Solomon! let us try again.'



# AN IMAGE FROM A PAST LIFE

He. Never until this night have I been stirred.  
The elaborate star-light has thrown reflections  
On the dark stream,  
Till all the eddies gleam;  
And thereupon there comes that scream  
From terrified, invisible beast or bird:  
Image of poignant recollection.

She. An image of my heart that is smitten  
through  
Out of all likelihood, or reason,  
And when at last,  
Youth's bitterness being past,  
I had thought that all my days were cast  
Amid most lovely places; smitten as though  
It had not learned its lesson.

He. Why have you laid your hands upon my  
eyes?  
What can have suddenly alarmed you  
Whereon 'twere best

My eyes should never rest?

What is there but the slowly fading west,  
The river imaging the flashing skies,  
All that to this moment charmed you?

She. A sweetheart from another life floats  
there

As though she had been forced to linger  
From vague distress  
Or arrogant loveliness,  
Merely to loosen out a tress  
Among the starry eddies of her hair  
Upon the paleness of a finger.

He. But why should you grow suddenly afraid  
And start--I at your shoulder--

Imagining

That any night could bring  
An image up, or anything  
Even to eyes that beauty had driven mad,  
But images to make me fonder.

She. Now she has thrown her arms above her  
head;

Whether she threw them up to flout me,  
Or but to find,  
Now that no fingers bind,  
That her hair streams upon the wind,  
I do not know, that know I am afraid  
Of the hovering thing night brought me.

# UNDER SATURN

Do not because this day I have grown  
saturnine

Imagine that some lost love, unassailable  
Being a portion of my youth, can make me  
pine

And so forget the comfort that no words can  
tell

Your coming brought; though I acknowledge  
that I have gone

On a fantastic ride, my horse's flanks were  
spurred

By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen,  
And of a Middleton, whose name you never  
heard,

And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks,  
although he died

Before my time, seem like a vivid memory.

You heard that labouring man who had served  
my people. He said

Upon the open road, near to the Sligo quay--

No, no, not said, but cried it out--'You have  
come again  
And surely after twenty years it was time to  
come.'

I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain  
Never to leave that valley his fathers called  
their home.

November 1919

# EASTER, 1916

I have met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteenth-century houses.  
I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn:  
All changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent  
In ignorant good will,  
Her nights in argument  
Until her voice grew shrill.

What voice more sweet than hers  
When young and beautiful,  
She rode to harriers?  
This man had kept a school  
And rode our winged horse.  
This other his helper and friend  
Was coming into his force;  
He might have won fame in the end,  
So sensitive his nature seemed,  
So daring and sweet his thought.  
This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy;  
He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
Transformed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone  
Through summer and winter seem  
Enchanted to a stone

To trouble the living stream.  
The horse that comes from the road.  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute change;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it  
Where long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call.  
Minute by minute they live:  
The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.  
O when may it suffice?  
That is heaven's part, our part  
To murmur name upon name,  
As a mother names her child  
When sleep at last has come  
On limbs that had run wild.  
What is it but nightfall?  
No, no, not night but death;



Was it needless death after all?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead.  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in a verse--  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

September 25, 1916

# SIXTEEN DEAD MEN

O but we talked at large before  
The sixteen men were shot,  
But who can talk of give and take,  
What should be and what not?  
While those dead men are loitering there  
To stir the boiling pot.

You say that we should still the land  
Till Germany's overcome;  
But who is there to argue that  
Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?  
And is their logic to outweigh  
MacDonagh's bony thumb?

How could you dream they'd listen  
That have an ear alone  
For those new comrades they have found  
Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,  
Or meddle with our give and take  
That converse bone to bone.

# THE ROSE TREE

'O words are lightly spoken'  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
'Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree;  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea.'

'It needs to be but watered,'  
James Connolly replied,  
'To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side,  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden's pride.'

'But where can we draw water'  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
'When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.'

# ON A POLITICAL PRISONER

She that but little patience knew,  
From childhood on, had now so much  
A grey gull lost its fear and flew  
Down to her cell and there alit,  
And there endured her fingers touch  
And from her fingers ate its bit.

Did she in touching that lone wing  
Recall the years before her mind  
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,  
Her thought some popular enmity:  
Blind and leader of the blind  
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?

When long ago I saw her ride  
Under Ben Bulban to the meet,  
The beauty of her country-side  
With all youth's lonely wildness stirred,  
She seemed to have grown clean and sweet  
Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird:

Sea-borne, or balanced on the air  
When first it sprang out of the nest  
Upon some lofty rock to stare  
Upon the cloudy canopy,  
While under its storm-beaten breast  
Cried out the hollows of the sea.

# THE LEADERS OF THE CROWD

They must to keep their certainty accuse  
All that are different of a base intent;  
Pull down established honour; hawk for news  
Whatever their loose phantasy invent  
And murmur it with bated breath, as though  
The abounding gutter had been Helicon  
Or calumny a song. How can they know  
Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has  
shone,  
And there alone, that have no solitude?  
So the crowd come they care not what may  
come.  
They have loud music, hope every day  
renewed  
And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.

# TOWARDS BREAK OF DAY

Was it the double of my dream  
The woman that by me lay  
Dreamed, or did we halve a dream  
Under the first cold gleam of day?

I thought 'there is a waterfall  
Upon Ben Bulban side,  
That all my childhood counted dear;  
Were I to travel far and wide  
I could not find a thing so dear.'  
My memories had magnified  
So many times childish delight.

I would have touched it like a child  
But knew my finger could but have touched  
Cold stone and water. I grew wild  
Even accusing heaven because  
It had set down among its laws:  
Nothing that we love over-much  
Is ponderable to our touch.

I dreamed towards break of day,  
The cold blown spray in my nostril.  
But she that beside me lay  
Had watched in bitterer sleep  
The marvellous stag of Arthur,  
That lofty white stag, leap  
From mountain steep to steep.



# DEMON AND BEAST

For certain minutes at the least  
That crafty demon and that loud beast  
That plague me day and night  
Ran out of my sight;  
Though I had long pernned in the gyre,  
Between my hatred and desire,  
I saw my freedom won  
And all laugh in the sun.

The glittering eyes in a death's head  
Of old Luke Wadding's portrait said  
Welcome, and the Ormonds all  
Nodded upon the wall,  
And even Stafford smiled as though  
It made him happier to know  
I understood his plan;  
Now that the loud beast ran  
There was no portrait in the Gallery  
But beckoned to sweet company,  
For all men's thoughts grew clear  
Being dear as mine are dear.

But soon a tear-drop started up  
For aimless joy had made me stop  
Beside the little lake  
To watch a white gull take  
A bit of bread thrown up into the air;  
Now gyring down and perching there  
He splashed where an absurd  
Portly green-pated bird  
Shook off the water from his back;  
Being no more demoniac  
A stupid happy creature  
Could rouse my whole nature.

Yet I am certain as can be  
That every natural victory  
Belongs to beast or demon,  
That never yet had freeman  
Right mastery of natural things,  
And that mere growing old, that brings  
Chilled blood, this sweetness brought;  
Yet have no dearer thought  
Than that I may find out a way  
To make it linger half a day.

O what a sweetness strayed  
Through barren Thebaid,  
Or by the Mareotic sea  
When that exultant Anthony  
And twice a thousand more  
Starved upon the shore  
And withered to a bag of bones:  
What had the Caesars but their thrones?

# THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and  
everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words  
out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at  
last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

# A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

Once more the storm is howling and half hid  
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
But Gregory's Wood and one bare hill  
Whereby the haystack and roof-levelling wind,  
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child  
an hour  
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the  
tower,  
And under the arches of the bridge, and  
scream  
In the elms above the flooded stream;  
Imagining in excited reverie  
That the future years had come,  
Dancing to a frenzied drum,  
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not  
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,  
Being made beautiful overmuch,  
Consider beauty a sufficient end,  
Lose natural kindness and maybe  
The heart-revealing intimacy  
That chooses right and never find a friend.

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull  
And later had much trouble from a fool,  
While that great Queen, that rose out of the  
spray,  
Being fatherless could have her way  
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.  
It's certain that fine women eat  
A crazy salad with their meat  
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;  
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are  
earned  
By those that are not entirely beautiful;  
Yet many, that have played the fool

For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,  
And many a poor man that has roved,  
Loved and thought himself beloved,  
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

May she become a flourishing hidden tree  
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,  
And have no business but dispensing round  
Their magnanimities of sound,  
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,  
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.  
Oh, may she live like some green laurel  
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,  
The sort of beauty that I have approved,  
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,  
Yet knows that to be choked with hate  
May well be of all evil chances chief.  
If there's no hatred in a mind  
Assault and battery of the wind  
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,



So let her think opinions are accursed.  
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born  
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,  
Because of her opinionated mind  
Barter that horn and every good  
By quiet natures understood  
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,  
And that its own sweet will is heaven's will;  
She can, though every face should scowl  
And every windy quarter howl  
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bride-groom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;  
For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
Peddled in the thoroughfares.  
How but in custom and in ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,

And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

June 1919

# A MEDITATION IN TIME OF WAR

For one throb of the Artery,  
While on that old grey stone I sat  
Under the old wind-broken tree,  
I knew that One is animate  
Mankind inanimate fantasy.

# TO BE CARVED ON A STONE AT BALLYLEE

I, the poet William Yeats,  
With old mill boards and sea-green slates,  
And smithy work from the Gort forge,  
Restored this tower for my wife George;  
And may these characters remain  
When all is ruin once again.

THE END