

Twelve River RIPPLES

Favourite Poem



I was asked if I had a favourite W.B. Yeats poem. 28 January is the anniversary of his death. I kind of lied. Well, I lied. (One is either pregnant or not, never just a bit). I hadn't actually opened my Collected Poems for quite a while. I said yes and opened it. Mine is Augustine Martin's collection and the 'Introduction' is controversial. But there is nothing controversial about the sheer magic and beauty of Yeats's poems. They are more than esoteric. The man is a seer. I had a bookmark at 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. Coincidentally near the knuckle of today's world. But we have had enough of today's world, so I have chosen two others.

I love 'The Cat and the Moon' partly because I love cats and I love the moon. If I stared at the moon long enough, would my pupils also range *from crescent to round*? Yeats has described *Black Minnaloushe* so carefully, so accurately, *lifting his delicate feet with catlike tread as he creeps through the grass / Alone, important and wise* that I believe he has shape-shifted into this creature, perhaps also troubled by the uncompromising moonlight which reveals so much. Yeats has painted a monochrome picture with a fine-tipped brush, and I am looking out onto it through my night-time window frame.

Favourite Poem cont.

The Cat and the Moon

The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon,
The creeping cat, looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For, wander and wail as he would,
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.
Minnaloushe runs in the grass
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet,
What better than call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

Favourite Poem cont.

Then I came upon 'Down by the Salley Gardens' and my heart went straight to its familiarity and to the lover of those white feet, now so full of self-reproach for missing the point of life in the simple wisdom of his beloved. Yeats says so

much with so little. I have heard it sung many times and it is heart-wrenching because we have all been there.

Here it is in all its simplicity:

Lynne Nesbit

Down by the Salley Gardens

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

And you can listen to it here:

[youtube.com/watch?v=C2UZReQGNVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2UZReQGNVI)