

Twelve River RIPPLES

Favourite Poem



Christopher Reeve chooses 'Her Praise' by William Butler Yeats.

Her Praise

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.
I have gone about the house, gone up and down
As a man does who has published a new book,
Or a young girl dressed out in her new gown,
And though I have turned the talk by hook or crook
Until her praise should be the uppermost theme,
A woman spoke of some new tale she had read,
A man confusedly in a half dream
As though some other name ran in his head.
She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.
I will talk no more of books or the long war
But walk by the dry thorn until I have found
Some beggar sheltering from the wind, and there,
Manage the talk until her name come round.
If there be rags enough he will know her name
And be well pleased remembering it, for in the old days,
Though she had young men's praise and old men's blame
Among the poor, both old and young gave her praise.

William Butler Yeats.

Favourite Poem cont.

The poem expresses Yeats's lifelong passion for Maude Gonne. He was not just enamoured of her beauty and bewitching personality, but also admired her for her extreme commitment to Irish nationalism, and her concern for the inhumane treatment of the Irish peasantry, exploited by English landowners. She was the 'troubling of his life', his unrequited feelings both a tragedy, but also inspiring some of the most beautiful love poems ever written.

It's a poem learned by heart and endeared to me from adolescence. Having become a full-time author, I particularly delight in the phrase - '*as a man does who has published a new book*', encapsulating all the creative process of initial inspiration, the joy of writing, then drudgery, despair, and even temporary abandonment, until that supreme moment of ecstasy when the book is there, in your hand, complete: it seems, '*as if by magic*'.

Christopher Reeve.