THE CAT AND THE MOON AND CERTAIN POEMS: BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS.
PREFACE
To Lady Gregory
I dedicate this book to you because of a thought that has been in my head all day. When some years ago we produced my 'Baile's Strand', with scenes and costumes designed by Mr. Charles Ricketts, my imagination was greatly stirred, and I wanted to take up my theme once more, but to make it more mythological, more indefinite. I began to play with the idea of inventing for Cuchullain some youthful sojourn in the forest, and writing for him many love poems like those Indian poets have put into the mouth of Krishna, but addressed, not to girls who herd the cows, but to girls who herd the swine. I do not know why I preferred swine to cows except that our old legends speak so often of swineherds. Now that I have just read through the poems in this little book, I renew an impression, especially from the 'Cat and the Moon,' which I have received much more powerfully from the last act of Synge's 'Well of the Saints' and from your 'Gaol Gate' and as powerfully from 'The Grasshopper' by Mr Padraic Colum, and from a play of Mr. Daniel Corkery's—an odour, a breath, that suggests to me Indian or Japanese poems and legends. I get no such impression from the powerful art of Mr. T. C. Murray, nor from that of Mr. Macnamara, or of
Shiels, or of Mr. Lennox Robinson, nor from that of any other Irish dramatist, poet or novelist that I can remember. Why has our school, which has perhaps come to an end, been interested mainly in something in Irish life so old that one can no longer say this is Europe, that is Asia? It cannot be because of the books we have read, for we have all read such different books. Will poets and novelists and dramatists, younger than Mr. Lennox Robinson or Mr. Macnamara, take up our theme again, urged thereto by some change in the world’s thought too subtle to be attributed to any book? Perhaps; for the other day when I read that strange ‘Waste Land’ by Mr. T. C. Eliot I thought of your work and of Synge’s; and he is American born, and Englishman bred, and writes but of his own mind. That is the kind of insoluble problem that makes the best conversation, and if you will come and visit me, I will call the Dublin poets together, and we will discuss it until midnight.

W. B. Yeats, 25th. February, 1924.

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THE CAT AND THE MOON

SCENE: The scene is any bare place before a wall against which stands a patterned screen, or hangs a patterned curtain suggesting St. Colman's Well. Three Musicians are sitting close to the wall, with zither, drum and flute. Their faces are made up to resemble masks.

FIRST MUSICIAN
(singing) 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 Minaloushe stared at the moon, For wander and wail as he would The pure cold light in the sky Troubled his animal blood.

(Two beggars enter— a blind man with a lame man on his back. They wear grotesque masks. The Blind Beggar is counting the paces)

BLIND BEGGER
One thousand and six, one thousand and seven, one thousand and nine. Look well now for we should be in sight of the holy well of St. Colman. The beggar at the cross road said it was one thousand paces from where he stood and a few paces over. Look well now, can you see the big ash tree that's above it?
b
LAME BEGGAR
(getting down) No, not yet.

BLIND BEGGAR
Then we must have taken a wrong turn, flighty you always were, and maybe before the day is over, you will have me drowned in Kiltartan River or maybe in the sea itself.

LAME BEGGAR
I have brought you the right way, but you are a lazy man, Blind Man, and you make very short strides.

BLIND MAN
It's great daring you have, and how could I make a long stride and you on my back from the peep o' day?

LAME BEGGAR
And maybe the beggar of the cross-roads was only making it up when he said a thousand paces and a few paces more. You and I, being beggars, know the way of beggars, and maybe he never paced it at all, being a lazy man.

BLIND BEGGAR
Get up.— It's too much talk you have.

LAME BEGGAR
(getting up) But as I was saying, he being a lazy man— oh, oh, oh, stop pinching the calf of my leg and I'll not say another word till I'm spoken to.

(They go round the stage once, moving to drum taps, and as they move the following song is sung)

FIRST MUSICIAN
(singing) 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,
And new dance turn.

BLIND BEGGAR
Do you see the big ash tree?

LAME BEGGAR
I do then, and the wall under it, and the flat stone, and the things upon the stone; and here is a good dry place to kneel in.

BLIND BEGGAR
You may get down so. (Lame Beggar gets down) I begin to have it in my mind that I am a great fool and it was you who egged me on with your flighty talk.

LAME BEGGAR
How should you be a great fool to ask the saint to give you back your two eyes?

BLIND BEGGAR
There is many gives money to a blind man and would give nothing but a curse to a whole man, and if it was
not for one thing, but no matter any way.

LAME BEGGER
If I speak out all that’s in my mind you won’t take
a blow at me at all?

BLIND MAN
I will not this time.

LAME BEGGER
Then I’ll tell you why you are not a great fool.
When you go out to pick up a chicken, or maybe
a stray goose on the road, or a cabbage from a neigh-
bour’s garden, I have to go riding on your back; and
if I want a goose, or a chicken, or a cabbage, I must
have your two legs under me.

BLIND BEGGER
That’s true now and if we were whole men and
went different ways, there’d be as much again be-
tween us.

LAME BEGGER
And your own goods keep going from you because
you are blind.

BLIND BEGGER
Rogues and thieves ye all are, but there are some I
may have my eyes on yet.

LAME BEGGER
Because there’s no one to see a man slipping in at
the door, or throwing a leg over the wall of a yard,
you are a bitter temptation to many a poor man, &

I say it’s not right, it’s not right at all. There are
poor men that because you are blind will be delay-
ed in Purgatory.

BLIND BEGGER
Though you are a rogue, Lame Man, maybe you
are in the right.

LAME MAN
And maybe we’ll see the blessed saint this day, for
there’s an odd one sees him, and maybe that will be
a grander thing than having my two legs, though
legs are a grand thing.

BLIND BEGGER
You’re getting flighty again, Lame Man, what
could be better for you than to have your two legs?

LAME BEGGER
Do you think now will the saint put an ear on him
at all, and we without an Ave or a Paternoster to
put before the prayer or after the prayer?

BLIND MAN
Wise though you are and flighty though you are,
and you throwing eyes to the right of you and eyes
to the left of you, there’s many a thing you don’t
know about the heart of man.

LAME BEGGER
But it stands to reason that he’d be put out and he
maybe with a great liking for the Latin.
BLIND BEGGAR
I have it in mind that the saint will be better pleased at us not knowing a prayer at all, and that we had best say what we want in plain language. What pleasure can he have in all that holy company kneeling at his well on holidays and Sundays, and they as innocent maybe as himself?

LAME BEGGAR
That's a strange thing to say, and do you say it as I or another might say it, or as a blind man?

BLIND BEGGAR
I say it as a blind man, I say it because since I went blind in the tenth year of my age, I have been hearing and remembering the knowledges of the world.

LAME BEGGAR
And you who are a blind man say that a saint, and he living in a pure well of water, would soonest be talking with a sinful man.

BLIND BEGGAR
You have no sense in you, no real sense at all. Did you ever know a holy man but had a wicked man for his comrade and his heart's darling? There is not a more holy man in the barony than the man who has the big house at Laban, and he goes knocking about the roads day and night with that old lecher from the county of Mayo and he a woman hater from the day of his birth. And well you know & all

the neighbours know what they talk of by daylight and candlelight. The old lecher does be telling over all the sins he committed, or maybe never committed at all, and the man of Laban does be trying to head him off and quiet him down that he may quit telling them.

LAME BEGGAR
Maybe it is converting him he is.

BLIND BEGGAR
If you were a blind man you wouldn't say a foolish thing the like of that. He wouldn't have him different no, not if he was to get all Ireland. If he was different, what would they find to talk about, will you answer me that now?

LAME BEGGAR
We have great wisdom between us, that's certain.

BLIND BEGGAR
Now the church says that it is a good thought, and a sweet thought, and a comfortable thought, that every man may have a saint to look after him, and I, being blind, give it out to all the world that the bigger the sinner the better pleased is the saint. I am sure and certain that St. Colman would not have us two different from what we are.

LAME BEGGAR
I'll not give into that, for as I was saying, he has a great liking maybe for the Latin.
BLIND BEGGAR
Is it contradicting me you are? are you in reach of my arm? (swinging stick.)
LAME BEGGAR
I'm not, blind man, you couldn't touch me at all; but as I was saying—
FIRST MUSICIAN
(speaking) Will you be cured or will you be blessed?
LAME BEGGAR
Lord save us, that is the saint's voice and we not on our knees. (they kneel)
BLIND BEGGAR
Is he standing before us, Lame Man?
LAME MAN
I cannot see him at all. It is in the ash tree he is, or up in the air.
FIRST MUSICIAN
Will you be cured or will you be blessed?
LAME BEGGAR
There he is again.
BLIND BEGGAR
I'll be cured of my blindness.
FIRST MUSICIAN
I am a saint and lonely. Will you become blessed and stay blind and we will be together always?

BLIND BEGGAR
No, no your Reverence, if I have to choose, I'll have the sight of my two eyes for those that have their sight are always stealing my things and telling me lies, and some maybe that are near me. So don't take it bad of me, Holy Man, that I ask the sight of my two eyes.
LAME BEGGAR
No one robs him and no one tells him lies, it's all in his head, it is. He's had his tongue on me all day because he thinks I stole a sheep of his.
BLIND BEGGAR
It was the feel of his sheepskin coat put it into my head but my sheep was black they say, and he tells me, Holy Man, that his sheepskin is of the most lovely white wool so that it is a joy to be looking at it.
FIRST MUSICIAN
Lame Man, will you be cured or will you be blessed?
LAME BEGGAR
What would it be like to be blessed?.
FIRST MUSICIAN
You would be of the kin of the blessed saints and of the martyrs.
LAME BEGGAR
Is it true now that they have a book and that they write the names of the blessed in that book?
FIRST MUSICIAN
Many a time I have seen the book and your name
would be in it.

LAME MAN
It would be a grand thing to have two legs under me
but I have it in my mind that it would be a grander
thing to have my name in that book.
FIRST MUSICIAN
It would be a grander thing.
LAME BEGGAR
I will stay lame, Holy Man, and I will be blessed.
FIRST MUSICIAN
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy
Spirit I give this Blind Man sight and I make this
Lame Man blessed.

BLIND MAN
I see it all now, the blue sky and the big ash tree
and the well and the flat stone,—all as I have heard
the people say—and the things the praying people
put on the stone, the beads and the candles and the
leaves torn out of prayer-books, and the hairpins
and the buttons. It is a great sight and a blessed
sight, but I don't see yourself, Holy Man—is it up
in the big tree you are?
LAME BEGGAR
Why there he is in front of you and he laughing
out of his wrinkled face.

BLIND BEGGAR
Where, where?
LAME BEGGAR
Why there, between you and the ash tree.
BLIND BEGGAR
There's nobody there—you're at your lies again.
LAME BEGGAR
I am blessed, and that is why I can see the holy saint.
BLIND BEGGAR
But if I don't see the saint, there's something else
I can see.
LAME BEGGAR
The blue sky and green leaves are a great sight, and
a strange sight to one that has been long blind.
BLIND BEGGAR
There is a stranger sight than that, and that is the
skin of my own black sheep on your back.
LAME BEGGAR
Haven't I been telling you from the peep o' day
that my sheepskin is that white it would dazzle you.
BLIND BEGGAR
Are you so swept with the words that you've never
thought that when I had my own two eyes, I'd see
what colour was on it.
LAME BEGGAR
(very dejected) I never thought of that.
BLIND BEGGAR
Are you that flighty?

LAME BEGGAR
I am that flighty. (cheering up) But am I not blessed, and it's a sin to speak against the blessed.

BLIND BEGGAR
Well, I'll speak against the blessed, and I'll tell you something more that I'll do. All the while you were telling me how, if I had my two eyes, I could pick up a chicken here and a goose there, while my neighbours were in bed, do you know what I was thinking?

LAME BEGGAR
Some wicked blind man's thought.

BLIND BEGGAR
It was, and it's not gone from me yet. I was saying to myself I have a long arm and a strong arm and a very weighty arm, and when I get my own two eyes I know where to hit.

LAME BEGGAR
Don't lay a hand on me. Forty years we've been knocking about the roads together, and I wouldn't have you bring your soul into mortal peril.

BLIND BEGGAR
I have been saying to myself I know where to hit and how to hit and who to hit.

LAME BEGGAR
Do you not know that I am blessed. Would you be as bad as Caesar and as Herod and Nero and the other wicked emperors of antiquity?

BLIND BEGGAR
Where'll I hit him, for the love of God, where'll I hit him? (Blind Beggar beats Lame Beggar. The beating takes the form of a dance and is accompanied on drum and flute. The Blind Beggar goes out.)

LAME BEGGAR
That is a soul lost, Holy Man.

FIRST MUSICIAN
Maybe so.

LAME BEGGAR
I'd better be going, Holy Man, for he'll rouse the whole country against me.

FIRST MUSICIAN
He'll do that.

LAME BEGGAR
And I have it in my mind not to even myself again with the martyrs, and the holy confessors, till I am more used to being blessed.

FIRST MUSICIAN
Bend down your back.

LAME BEGGAR
What for, Holy Man?
FIRST MUSICIAN
That I may get up on it.
LAME BEGGAR
But my lame legs would never bear the weight of you.
FIRST MUSICIAN
I'm up now.
LAME BEGGAR
I don't feel you at all.
FIRST MUSICIAN
I don't weigh more than a grasshopper.
LAME BEGGAR
You do not.
FIRST MUSICIAN
Are you happy?
LAME BEGGAR
I would be if I was right sure I was blessed.
FIRST MUSICIAN
Haven't you got me for a friend?
LAME BEGGAR
I have so.
FIRST MUSICIAN
Then you're blessed.
LAME BEGGAR
Will you see that they put my name in the book?
FIRST MUSICIAN
I will then.

LAME BEGGAR
Let us be going, Holy Man. (They go out to drum and flute as before.)
FIRST MUSICIAN
(singing) Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlight 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.
1917.

YOUTH AND AGE
Much did I rage when young,
Being by the World oppressed,
But now with flattering tongue
It speeds the parting guest.
1924.
LEDA AND THE SWAN
A rush, a sudden wheel and hovering still
The bird descends, and her frail thighs are pressed
By the webbed toes, and that all powerful bill
Has laid her helpless face upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs!
All the stretched body's laid on the white rush
And feels the strange heart beating where it lies;
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?
1923.

MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR
I—ANCESTRAL HOUSES
Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
Life overflows without ambitious pains;
And rains down life until the basin spills,
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
As though to choose whatever shape it wills
And never stoop to a mechanical,
Or servile shape, at others beck and call.
16.

Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet Homer had not sung
Had he not found it certain beyond dreams
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung
The abounding glittering jet; though now it seems
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
And not a fountain, were the symbol which
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known;
But when the master's buried mice can play,
And maybe the great-grandson of that house
For all its bronze and marble's but a mouse.

Oh what if gardens where the peacock strays
With delicate feet upon old terraces,
Or else all Juno from an urn displays
Before the indifferent garden deities;
Oh what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways
Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease
And Childhood a delight for every sense,
But take our greatness with our violence!
What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,
And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
The pacing to and fro on polished floors
Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
With famous portraits of our ancestors;
What if those things the greatest of mankind,
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
But take our greatness with our bitterness!

II—MY HOUSE
An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
An acre of stony ground,
Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,
Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,
The sound of the rain or sound
Of every wind that blows,
The stilted water-hen
That plunged in stream again
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows.

A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,
A candle and written page.
Il Penseroso's Platonist toiled on
In some like chamber, shadowing forth

How the daemonic rage
Imagined everything.
Benighted travellers
From markets and from fairs
Have seen his midnight candle glimmering.

The river rises, and it sinks again;
One hears the rumble of it far below
Under its rocky hole.
What Median, Persian, Babylonian,
In reverie, or in vision, saw
Symbols of the soul
Mind from mind has caught:
The subterranean streams,
The tower where a candle gleams,
A suffering passion and a labouring thought?

Two men have founded here. A man-at-arms
Gathered a score of horse and spent his days
In this tumultuous spot,
Where through long wars and sudden night alarms
His dwindling score and he seemed cast-a-ways
Forgetting and forgot;
And I, that after me
My bodily heirs may find,
To exalt a lonely mind,
Befitting emblems of adversity.
III—MY TABLE
Two heavy trestles, and a board
Where Sato’s gift, a changeless sword,
By pen and paper lies,
That it may moralise
My days out of their aimlessness.
A bit of an embroidered dress
Covers its wooden sheath.
Chaucer had not drawn breath
When it was forged. In Sato’s house
Curved like new moon, moon luminous
It lay five hundred years;
Yet if no change appears
No moon: only an aching heart
Conceives a changeless work of art.
Our learned men have urged
That when and where ’twas forged
A marvellous accomplishment,
In painting or in pottery, went
From father unto son
And through the centuries ran
And seemed unchanging like the sword.
Soul’s beauty being most adored,
Men and their business took
The soul’s unchanging look;
For the most rich inheritor,
Knowing that none can pass heaven’s door
That loved inferior art,
Had such an aching heart
That he, although a country’s talk
For silken clothes and stately walk,
Had waking wits; it seemed
Juno’s peacock screamed.

IV—MY DESCENDANTS
Having inherited a vigorous mind
From my old fathers I must nourish dreams
And leave a woman and a man behind
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems
Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,
Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,
But the torn petals strew the garden plot;
And there’s but common greeness after that.

And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?
May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless ruin that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky.
The Primum Mobile that fashioned us
Has made the very owls in circles move;
And I, that count myself most prosperous
Seeing that love and friendship are enough,
For an old neighbour’s friendship chose the house
And decked and altered it for a girl’s love,
And know whatever flourish and decline
These stones remain their monument and mine.

V— THE ROAD AT MY DOOR
An affable Irregular,
A heavily built Falstaffian man,
Comes cracking jokes of civil war
As though to die by gunshot were
The finest play under the sun.

A brown Lieutenant and his men,
Half dressed in national uniform,
Stand at my door, and I complain
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,
A pear tree broken by the storm.

I count those feathered balls of soot
The moor-hen guides upon the stream,
To silence the envy in my thought;

And turn towards my chamber, caught
In the cold snows of a dream.

VI— THE STARE’S NEST BY MY WINDOW
The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening, honey bees
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; oh, honey-bees
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
VII— I SEE PHANTOMS OF HATRED AND OF THE HEART'S FULLNESS AND OF THE COMING EMPTINESS

I climb to the tower top and lean upon broken stone,
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
Frenzies, bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind’s eye.

‘Vengeance upon the murderers,’ the cry goes up
‘Vengeance for Jacques Molay.’ In cloud-pale rags, or in lace,
The rage driven, rage tormented, and rage hungry troop
Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at face,
Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide
For the embrace of nothing; and I, my wits astray
Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried
For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.

Their legs long delicate and slender, acquamarine their eyes
Magical unicorns bear ladies on their backs,
The ladies close their musing eyes. No prophesies,
Remembered out of Babylonian almanacs,
Have closed the ladies’ eyes, their minds are but a pool
Where even longing drowns under its own excess;

Nothing but stillness can remain when hearts are full,
Of their own sweetness, bodies of their loveliness.

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,
The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud or of lace
Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made lean
Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place
To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie
Nor hate of what’s to come, nor pity for what’s gone,
Nothing but grip of claw and the eye’s complacency
The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon.

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
In something that all others understand or share;
But oh, ambitious heart had such a proof drawn forth
A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,
It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,
The half read wisdom of demoniac images,
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.

THE GIFT OF HARUN-AL-RASHID
Kusta-ben-Luka is my name, I write
To Abd-al-Rabban; fellow roysterer once
Now the good Caliph's learned Treasurer,
And for no ear but his.

Carry this letter
Through the great gallery of the Treasure House
Where banners of the Caliphs' hang, night-coloured
But brilliant as the night's embroidery,
And wait war's music; pass the little gallery;
Pass books of learning from Byzantium
Written in gold upon a purple stain,
And pause at last, I was about to say,
At the great book of Sappho's song; but no
For should you leave my letter there, a boy's
Love-lorn, indifferent hands might come upon it
And let it fall unnoticed to the floor.
Pause at the Treatise of Parmenides
And hide it there, for Caliphs to world's end
Must keep that perfect, as they keep her song
So great its fame.

When fitting time has passed
The parchment will disclose to some learned man
A mystery that else had found no chronicler
But the wild Bedouin. Though I approve
Those wanderers that welcomed in their tents
What great Harun-al-Rashid, occupied
With Persian wars or Greek ambassadors,
Or those who need his bounty or his law,
Must needs neglect; I cannot hide the truth
That wandering in a desert, featureless
As air under a wing, can give birds' wit.
In after time they will speak much of me

And speak but phantasy. Recall the year
When our beloved Caliph put to death
His Vizir Jaffer for an unknown reason;
'If but the shirt upon my body knew it
I'd tear it off and throw it in the fire.'
That speech was all that the town knew, but he
Seemed for a while to have grown young again;
Seemed so on purpose, muttered Jaffer's friends,
That none might know that he was conscience struck—
But that's a traitor's thought. Enough for me
That in the early summer of the year
The mightiest of the princes of the world
Came to the least considered of his courtiers;
Sat down upon the fountain's marble edge
One hand amid the goldfish in the pool;
And thereupon a colloquy took place
That I commend to all the chroniclers
To show how violent great hearts can lose
Their bitterness and find the honeycomb.

'I have brought a slender bride into the house;
You know the saying 'Change the bride with Spring,'
And she and I, being sunk in happiness,
Cannot endure to think you tread these paths,
When evening stirs the jasmine, and yet
Are brideless.'

'I am falling into years.'
But such as you and I do not seem old
Like men who live by habit. Every day
I ride with falcon to the river's edge
Or carry the ringed mail upon my back,
Or court a woman; neither enemy,
Game-bird, nor woman does the same thing twice;
And so a hunter carries in the eye
A mimicry of youth. Can poet's thought
That springs from body and in body falls
Like this pure jet, now lost amid blue sky
Now bathing lily leaf and fishes' scale,
Be mimicry?

What matter if our souls
Are nearer to the surface of the body
Than souls that start no game and turn no rhyme!
The soul's own youth and not the body's youth
Shows through our lineaments. My candle's bright
My lantern is too loyal not to show
That it was made in your great father's reign.

And yet the jasmine season warms our blood
Great prince forgive the freedom of my speech;
You think that love has seasons, and you think
That if the spring bear off what the spring gave
The heart need suffer no defeat; but I
Who have accepted the Byzantine faith,

That seems unnatural to Arabian minds,
Think when I choose a bride I choose for ever;
And if her eye should not grow bright for mine
Or brighten only for some younger eye,
My heart could never turn from daily ruin,
Nor find a remedy.

But what if I
Have lit upon a woman, who so shares
Your thirst for those old crabbed mysteries,
So strains to look beyond our life, an eye
That never knew that strain would scarce seem bright,
And yet herself can seem youth's very fountain,
Being all brimmed with life.

Were it but true
I would have found the best that life can give,
Companionship in those mysterious things
That make a man's soul or a woman's soul
Itself and not some other soul.

That love
Must needs be in this life and in what follows
Unchanging and at peace, and it is right
Every philosopher should praise that love.
But I being none can praise its opposite.
It makes my passion stronger but to think
Like passion stirs the peacock and his mate,
The wild stag and the doe; that mouth to mouth
Is a man's mockery of the changeless soul.
And thereupon his bounty gave what now
Can shake more blossom from autumnal chill
Than all my bursting springtime knew. A girl
Perched in some window of her mother's house
Had watched my daily passage to and fro;
Had heard impossible history of my past;
Imagined some impossible history
Lived at my side; thought Time's disfiguring touch
Gave but more reason for a woman's care.
Yet was it love of me, or was it love
Of the stark mystery that has dazed my sight
Perplexed her phantasy and planned her care?
Or did the torchlight of that mystery
Pick out my features in such light and shade
Two contemplating passions chose one theme
Through sheer bewilderment? She had not paced
The garden paths, nor counted up the rooms,
Before she had spread a book upon her knees
And asked about the pictures or the text;
And often those first days I saw her stare
On old dry writing in a learned tongue,
On old dry faggots that could never please
The extravagance of spring; or move a hand
As if that writing or the figured page
Were some dear cheek.

Upon a moonless night
I sat where I could watch her sleeping form,
Walked through the house. Unnoticed and unfelt
I wrapped her in a heavy hooded cloak, and she,
Half running, dropped at the first ridge of the desert
And there marked out those emblems on the sand
That day by day I study and marvel at,
With her white finger. I led her home asleep
And once again she rose and swept the house
In childish ignorance of all that passed.
Even today, after some seven years
When maybe thrice in every moon her mouth
Murmured the wisdom of the desert Djinns,
She keeps that ignorance, nor has she now
That first unnatural interest in my books.
It seems enough that I am there; and yet
Old fellow student, whose most patient ear
Heard all the anxiety of my passionate youth,
It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace.
What if she lose her ignorance and so
Dream that I love her only for the voice,
That every gift and every word of praise
Is but a payment for that midnight voice
That is to age what milk is to a child!
Were she to lose her love, because she had lost
Her confidence in mine, or even lose
Its first simplicity, love voice and all,
All my fine feathers would be plucked away
And I left shivering. The voice has drawn
A quality of wisdom from her love's
Particular quality. The signs and shapes;
All those abstractions that you fancied were
From the great treatise of Parmenides;
All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things
Are but a new expression of her body
Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her youth.
And now my utmost mystery is out.
A woman's beauty is a storm-tossed banner;
Under it wisdom stands, and I alone—
Of all Arabia's lovers I alone—
Nor dazzled by the embroidery, nor lost
In the confusion of its night-dark folds,
Can hear the armed man speak.

THE LOVER SPEAKS
A strange thing surely that my Heart when love had come unsought
Upon the northern upland or in that poplar shade,
Should find no burden but itself and yet should be worn out.
It could not bear that burden and therefore it went mad.

The south wind brought it longing, and the east brought in despair,
The west wind made it pitiful, and the north wind afraid.
It feared to give its love a hurt with all the tempest there;
It feared the hurt that she could give and therefore it went mad.
I can exchange opinion with any neighbouring mind,  
I have as healthy flesh and blood as any rhymer's had,  
But oh my Heart could bear no more when the upland caught the wind;  
I ran, I ran from my love's side because my Heart went mad.

THE HEART, REPLIES
The Heart behind its rib laughed out, 'You have called me mad' it said.  
'Because I made you turn away and run from that young child;  
How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly bred?  
Let the cage bird and the cage bird mate and the wild bird mate in the wild.'

'You but imagine lies all day, O murderer', I replied.  
'And all those lies have but one end poor wretches to betray;  
I did not find in any cage the woman at my side.  
O but her heart would break to learn my thoughts are far away.'

'Speak all your mind' my Heart sang out, 'speak all your mind;  
who cares,'  
Now that your tongue cannot persuade the child till she mistake  
Her childish gratitude for love and match your fifty years.  
O let her choose a young man now and all for his wild sake.'

NOTES
I—THE CAT AND THE MOON
I wrote this play with the intention of including it in 'Four Plays for Dancers', but did not do so as it was in a different mood. I published the musicians' song however in 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. I have amused myself by imagining incidents and metaphors that are related to certain beliefs of mine as are the patterns upon a Persian carpet to some ancient faith or philosophy. It has pleased me to think that the half of me that feels can sometimes forget all that belongs to the more intellectual half but a few images. The night's dream takes up and plays in the same forgetful fashion with our waking thoughts. Minnaloushe and the Moon were perhaps— it all grows faint to me—a exposition of man's relation to what I have called the Antithetical Tincture, and when the Saint mounts upon the back of the Lame Beggar he personifies a certain great spiritual event which may take place when Primary Tincture, as I have called it, supersedes Antithetical— 'The burning bow....is drawn between deformity of body and of mind.' I have altogether forgotten whether other parts of the fable have, as is very likely, a precise meaning, and that is natural, for I generally forget in contemplating my copy of an old
Persian carpet that its winding and wandering vine had once that philosophical meaning, which has made it very interesting to Josef Strzygowski and was part of the religion of Zoroaster. The Well itself is within a couple of miles of my Galway house, Thoor Ballylee, and is sacred to St. Colman, and began a few years ago to work miracles again, rejuvenated by a Gaelic League procession in its honour. There is some story, which I have half forgotten, of a lame man and a blind man's arrival at it, though not of their quarrel there. I intended my play to be what the Japanese call a 'Kiogen,' and to come as a relaxation of attention between, let us say 'The Hawk's Well' and 'The Dreaming of the Bones,' &c as the Musicians would be already in their places, I have not written any verses to be sung at the unfolding and the folding of a cloth. It is all the lighter because probably unfinished, and must remain unfinished until it has been performed and I know how the Lame Man is to move. Is he to remain, after he comes from the other's back, upon one knee, or crouching till he can pick up, as I have no doubt he does, the Blind Man's stick? Or is he but to walk stiffly, or limp as if a leg were paralyzed? Whatever his movements are they must be artificial and formal, like the movement upon a puppet stage, or in a dance, & I may have to give him more words here and there to explain these movements. But it may never be played, never seem worth the trouble of making those two masks, or of writing the music and so I let it go as it is.

II—LEDA AND THE SWAN
I wrote Leda and the Swan because the editor of a political review asked me for a poem. I thought 'After the individualistic, demagogic movement, founded by Hobbes and popularised by the Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution, we have a soil so exhausted that it cannot grow that crop again for centuries.' Then I thought 'Nothing is now possible but some movement, or birth from above, preceded by some violent annunciation.' My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem, but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friend tells me that 'his conservative readers would misunderstand the poem.'

III—MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR
These poems were written at Thoor Ballylee in 1922 during the civil war. Before they were finished the Republicans blew up our 'ancient bridge' one midnight. They forbade us to leave the house,
but were otherwise polite, even saying at last 'Goodnight, thank you' as though we had given them the bridge.

SECTION SIX
In the West of Ireland we call a starling a stare, and during the civil war one built in a hole in the masonry by my bedroom window.

SECTION SEVEN STANZA II
The cry 'Vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay', Grand Master of the Templars, seems to me fit symbol for those who labour from hatred, & so for sterility in various kinds. It is said to have been incorporated in the ritual of certain Masonic societies of the eighteenth century, and to have fed class-hatred.

SECTION SEVEN STANZA IV
I have a ring with a hawk and a butterfly upon it, to symbolise the straight road of logic, and so of mechanism, and the crooked road of intuition: 'For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey.'

VI—THE GIFT OF HARUN-AL-RASHID
This poem is founded on the following passage in a

letter of Owen Ahern's, which I am publishing in 'A Vision'.

'After the murder for an unknown reason of Jaffar, head of the family of the Barmecides, Harun-al-Rashid seemed as though a great weight had fallen from him, and in the rejoicing of the moment, a rejoicing that seemed to Jaffar's friends a disguise for his remorse, he brought a new bride into the house. Wishing to confer an equal happiness upon his friend, he chose a young bride for Kusta-ben-Luka. According to one tradition of the desert, she had, to the great surprise of her friends, fallen in love with the elderly philosopher, but according to another Harun bought her from a passing merchant. Kusta, a Christian like the Caliph's own physician, had planned, one version of the story says, to end his days in a Monastery at Nisibis, while another story has it that he was deep in a violent love affair that he had arranged for himself. The only thing upon which there is general agreement is that he was warned by a dream to accept the gift of the Caliph, and that his wife a few days after the marriage began to talk in her sleep, and that she told him all those things which he had searched for vainly all his life in the great library of the Caliph and in the conversation of wise men. One curious detail has come down to us in Bedouin tradition. When awake she
was a merry girl with no more interest in matters of the kind than other girls of her age, and Kusta, the apple of whose eye she had grown to be, fearing that it would make her think his love but self-interest, never told her that she talked to him in her sleep. Michael Robartes frequently heard Bedouins quoting this as proof of Kusta-ben-Luka’s extraordinary wisdom . . . . . . . even in the other world Kusta’s bride is supposed to remain in ignorance of her share in founding the religion of the Judwali, and for this reason young girls, who think themselves wise, are ordered by their fathers and mothers to wear little amulets on which her name has been written. All these contradictory stories seem to be a confused recollection of the contents of a little old book, lost many years ago with Kusta-ben-Luka’s larger book, in the desert battle which I have already described. This little book was discovered according to tradition, by some Judwali scholar or saint, between the pages of a Greek book which had once been in the Caliph’s library. The story of the discovery may however be the invention of a much later age to justify some doctrine, or development of old doctrine, that it may have contained.’

In my poem I have greatly elaborated this bare narrative, but I do not think it too great a poetical

licence to describe Kusta as hesitating between the poems of Sappho and the treatise of Parmenides as hiding places. Gibbon says the poems of Sappho were still extant in the twelfth century, and it does not seem impossible that a great philosophical work, of which we possess only fragments, may have found its way into an Arab library of the eighth century. Certainly there are passages of Parmenides, that for instance numbered one hundred and thirty by Burkitt, and still more in his immediate predecessors, which Kusta would have recognised as his own thought. This from Herakleitus for instance ‘Mortals are Immortals and Immortals are Mortals, the one living the other’s death and dying the other’s life.’

PAGE TWENTY SIX, LINE TWO
The banners of the Abbasid Caliphs were black as an act of mourning for those who had fallen in battle at the establishment of the Dynasty.

PAGE THIRTY TWO, LINE EIGHT
‘All those gyres and cubes and midnight things’ refers to the geometrical forms which Robartes describes the Judwali Arabs as making upon the sand for the instruction of their young people, & which, according to tradition, were drawn or described in sleep by the wife of Kusta-ben-Luka.
Here ends, ‘The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems’ by William Butler Yeats. Five hundred copies of this book have been printed and published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats on paper made in Ireland, at the Cuala Press, Merrion Square, Dublin, Ireland. Finished on the first of May in the year nineteen hundred and twenty four.