

## WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

▣ Looking over the large crowd at the first meeting of the Rhymers' Club in 1890, William Butler Yeats dryly observed, "The one thing certain is that we are too many." While he included himself in their number, all the assembled knew he was first among them. So he remained the rest of his life, and after, as one of the most acclaimed literary figures in the last hundred years and certainly the best known of Irish poets. Playwright and man of the theater, folklorist, scholar, adept in many a mysterious realm as well, Yeats had a gift for making music out of ordinary speech and an uncanny knack for finding striking metaphors and coining memorable phrases.

Decades before he became a senator in the newly independent Irish nation, the poet saw himself as a leader, indeed a symbol of his country, a bard in the grand tradition, equipped with special knowledge needed for his times. Perceiving the growing fragmentation of civilization, he had an apocalyptic vision and believed that poetry could provide "a last defense against the chaos of the world." Thus he developed a system of thought and personal symbols, attempting to organize his knowledge into an integrated whole. Few poets have been so ambitious or have made such extensive preparations for their vocation as Yeats, whose studies ran the gamut in literature, philosophy, and beyond, from myth and legend to arcane wisdom and esoteric lore.

Yeats's life was almost equally divided between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and his prolific work likewise falls into two major phases. Up to the early 1900s he was influenced by the English Romantic poetry of a century earlier and by his studies of the prophetic and mystical poetry of William Blake, French Symbolism, the occult, and the dreamy world of what he called "The

Celtic Twilight,” with its idealized view of Irish history and spirituality. Yeats became an expert on Irish folktales; steeped in the Irish past, he was not much concerned with modern-day life. But as he worked to establish an Irish theater and became more involved in politics, his subjects and style changed to accommodate the practical realities of contemporary society. Then he met a brash young American expatriate, Ezra Pound. Already world famous and twenty years his senior, Yeats submitted to Pound’s tutelage and allowed himself to be “modernized” into a leaner, more dynamic author. The work for which he is most highly regarded was written after this renovation, including the three poems in this anthology.

William Butler Yeats was born into an Anglo-Irish Protestant family in Dublin in 1865. His father, John Butler Yeats, was a barrister who gave up the law for painting. His mother, Susan Pollexfen, came from a wealthy shipping family in the West of Ireland. As a boy Yeats spent much time at the family seat near Sligo, where his uncle, George Pollexfen, talked to him about astrology and folk religion. In 1867 the family moved to London, but returned to Ireland in the summers. Yeats attended grammar school in London and high school in Dublin. In 1884 he enrolled in the Metropolitan School of Art, where he met the poet and painter George Russell (“AE”), who interested him in mysticism. After three years Yeats gave up art for a career as a writer. His first poems appeared in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885.

Reading Darwin and Huxley extinguished his faith in the Bible but not his spiritual impulses. As he recalled: “I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel [bundle] of stories.” Mysticism, Indian philosophy, astrology, magic, supernatural systems, Rosicrucianism, reincarnation, Tarot cards, seances—all would continue to attract him. He met the Cabbalist MacGregor Mathers, who introduced him to the Order of the Golden Dawn, and in 1886 Yeats founded the Dublin Lodge of the Hermetic Society. The next year he conferred with the famed occultist Madame H. P. Blavatsky and joined the Esoteric Section of her Theosophical Society (but was later expelled by the madame herself). In London in 1887 he also met the other great Anglo-Irish author, Oscar Wilde, the designer William Morris, and Edwin J. Ellis, with whom he began the first complete edition of Blake. Over their years of labor (it was finally published in 1893) they transcribed a number of Blake’s works for the first time and discussed

the correspondences between Blake and the mystics Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg.

In 1888 Yeats published, with George Russell and Douglas Hyde (the future first president of Eire), *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, and the next year *The Wanderings of Oisín*, a collection of poems inspired by his researches. They made his name, and soon Yeats began working to create what became the Irish Literary Renaissance—the cultural ground he believed was needed first to produce a nation. It was also in 1889 that Yeats had a fateful meeting with the beautiful actress and Irish revolutionary Maud Gonne, and (he remarked) “the troubles of my life began.” Yeats was smitten with her, wrote a play for her, and became actively involved in the nationalist political movement, even the extremist Irish Republican Brotherhood for a while, in hopes of impressing her. He proposed several times but was rejected. Instead Gonne married Major John MacBride, also a revolutionary, who was executed by the British for his participation in the 1916 uprising, an event commemorated in Yeats’s “Easter 1916.” Gonne inspired a number of poems, notably the bitter “No Second Troy,” which concludes: “Why, what could she have done, being what she is? / Was there another Troy for her to burn?”

Yeats co-founded the Rhymers’ Club in London with Ernest Rhys, and at their gatherings in the Cheshire Cheese pub he conversed with the leading literary and artistic figures of the nineties. His essay collection *The Celtic Twilight* appeared in 1893, and the following year he visited Paris and encountered modern French poetry. Yeats was instinctively drawn to the Symbolists, about whose aesthetics he received excellent instruction from the poet-critic Arthur Symons when they shared rooms in 1895, the year Symons published *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. (The book would have a profound effect on the young T. S. Eliot.) From his studies of Blake, Shelley, Dante, occult and mystical lore, Irish mythology, and the Symbolists, Yeats now believed that truly significant poetry was based on systems of images. He began to assemble his own symbols, chief among them the rose (emblem of beauty, eternity, completeness) and the cross (suffering, discord, incompleteness, mortality). To these were added many others, as well as an elaborate system involving phases of the moon. He came to envision cycles of history and saw consciousness as a conflict of opposites; these concepts he represented as two cones, or gyres, intersecting with the point of one in the base of the other.

In 1895 Yeats published a new volume of *Poems*, and in 1899 *The Wind Among the Reeds*, which made him indisputably the leading poet of his time. But for most of the late nineties and the first years of the new century Yeats concentrated on the theater, after meeting Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge, the future author of *The Playboy of the Western World*. The three became close friends and collaborators, and Yeats frequently visited Lady Gregory at her home at Coole in County Galway. As his interest in politics and drama grew, Yeats became president of the Irish National Dramatic Society and then director of the Abbey Theatre, which opened in 1904 with Lady Gregory's support. Yeats eventually wrote more than two dozen plays, notably *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) and *Cathleen ni Houliban* (1902), which starred Maud Gonne in the title role. Many of his theater pieces were experimental and based on Irish folk drama. After being introduced to Noh plays by Ezra Pound, Yeats incorporated techniques of the Japanese form in his own work, creating a "theater of the mind" in minimalist plays that later influenced Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett.

While the police kept watch and believed he was a revolutionary, Yeats was in fact spending ever more time training actors, running the theater, and dealing with its problems. (At the premiere of *Playboy* in 1907, for example, "a mob of howling devils" rioted at the mention of the word "shift"—petticoats then being unmentionables.) In 1908 his father relocated permanently to New York, where he was a successful portrait painter. He had urged his son to move too, away from abstractions and the Celtic Twilight, and turn his attention to concrete reality—advice Yeats now took. Pound helped in that endeavor while acting as his secretary in the mid-teens. With T. E. Hulme, Pound had already formulated principles, some derived from Japanese poetry, that became central tenets of the Modernist movement, particularly Imagism. Applying the stringent new criteria to Yeats's manuscripts, he deleted archaic diction, deflated lofty rhetoric, and otherwise tightened and strengthened the rhythms of the poems. Yeats was not always pleased with some of the blue-penciling. When Pound edited too zealously, and without permission, the first of his poems sent to *Poetry* magazine in 1912, he demanded the original lines be restored.

In 1914 Yeats published *Responsibilities*, in which the modernist effects are evident, and he began work on the first part of his *Autobiographies*. In 1917 he bought Thoor Ballyle, a Norman tower near

Lady Gregory's Coole Park, which became his part-time residence as well as a subject and symbol in several of his poems. He also published a new collection, *The Wild Swans at Coole*. In 1917 too, after being turned down yet again by Maude Gonne and then by her daughter Iseult, Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lee. (George, as he called her, was the cousin of his former mistress, Olivia Shakespear, whose daughter Dorothy married Pound in 1914.) He was fifty-two, his bride twenty-six. Misgivings Yeats had about the marriage were dispelled when his wife began experimenting with automatic writing. The results were eerily close to his interests, and he integrated them into *A Vision* (1925), his strange compendium of prophecy, world philosophy, and symbology.

Early in 1918 Lady Gregory's son, a painter and a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, was killed in battle. In his memory Yeats composed "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," one of the finest poems to come out of the war, as well as a longer elegy, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory." In 1919 the Yeatses' daughter was born, and a son in 1921, the year *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* and *Four Plays for Dancers* were published. In 1922, with the establishment at last of the independent Irish Free State at the end of the civil war, Yeats became a senator. He surprised many in the Dáil by defending divorce and arguing for restricted use of Gaelic. (He confessed he himself had "failed to learn any language but English.") The same year his father died in New York, and Yeats published his *Later Poems* and *The Trembling of the Veil*, the part of his autobiography dealing with the 1890s. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

In his later years Yeats liked to refer to himself as "a wild old wicked man," and he kept remarkably busy. Besides the first version of *A Vision* he published what is probably his strongest individual volume, *The Tower* (1928). In 1932 he founded the Irish Academy of Letters. *The Winding Stair* was issued in 1933, along with many prose pieces and more plays. *The Collected Plays* appeared in 1934. In 1936 he edited his highly idiosyncratic selections in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. The revised version of *A Vision* appeared in 1937 and the final two plays, *Purgatory* and *The Death of Cuchulain*, in 1938.

In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," included in his last book, Yeats wrote these concluding lines: "Now that my ladder's gone, / I must lie down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag

and bone shop of the heart.” He had suffered a series of heart attacks, and while resting on the French Riviera, he died on January 28, 1939. He was buried there; after World War II his body was returned to Ireland and laid to rest near Sligo, as he wished, “under Ben Bulben.”

## 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 the vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
 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  
 Reel 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?

## LEDA AND THE SWAN

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
 Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
 By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill.  
 He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
 The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
 And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
 But feel 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 break could let her drop?

## SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

### I

That is no country for old men. The young  
 In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
 —Those dying generations—at their song,  
 The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
 Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
 Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
 Caught in that sensual music, all neglect  
 Monuments of unageing intellect.

### II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
 For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
 Nor is there singing school but studying  
 Monuments of its own magnificence;  
 And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
 To the holy city of Byzantium.

### III

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,

Come from holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
 And fastened to a dying animal  
 It knows not what it is; and gather me  
 Into the artifice of eternity.

## IV

Once out of nature I shall never take  
 My bodily form from any natural thing,  
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

## EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

▣ Edwin Arlington Robinson was born, like Yeats, in 1869 and spent a bleak childhood in Gardiner, Maine, which he renamed “Tilbury Town” and made the setting for many of his poems. He told Amy Lowell that as early as age six he wondered why he had been born. Human isolation, melancholy, and grim determination—occasionally alleviated by bursts of radiance—became his recurring themes. Robinson professed to have no interest in Nature, in the Romantic sense, and looked at life with a cool, rational eye, though his naturalistic vision was tempered by tinges of Emerson’s hopeful transcendentalism. While he used received forms and traditional rhyme and meter, his outlook is thoroughly modern, just as his diction is New England colloquial, though not as nuanced as that of his admirer Robert Frost.

Robinson spent two years (1891–1893) at Harvard as a special, nondegree student and published his first poems in the *Harvard Advocate*, as Wallace Stevens would a few years later. His experience at Harvard was mind-expanding, he said, and he credited it with saving him “from going to pieces.” In 1896 Robinson printed, at his own expense, *The Torrent and the Night Before*, which was ignored (as was

the revised version, *The Children of the Night*, the following year), and he was forced to take a job as an inspector for the New York City subway system. Robinson's fortunes finally turned in 1902 when he was "discovered" by President Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote a glowing review of his new book, *Captain Craig and Other Poems*. Roosevelt later found him a sinecure in a U.S. customs house, a position that offered the poet leisure and security from 1905 to 1910.

In 1916 Robinson achieved his first great success with *The Man Against the Sky*, and from then on he was one of the country's most popular poets. In 1923 he received the Pulitzer Prize for his *Collected Poems*; he received his second in 1925 for *The Man Who Died Twice*. He also published a trilogy based on Arthurian legends: *Merlin* (1917), *Lancelot* (1920), and *Tristram* (1927), which won him a third Pulitzer in 1928. (In this respect, only Frost has surpassed him.) Robinson died a confirmed bachelor in New York City on April 6, 1935.

## MINIVER CHEEVY

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
     Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
 He wept that he was ever born,  
     And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old  
     When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
 The vision of a warrior bold  
     Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,  
     And dreamed, and rested from his labors;  
 He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,  
     And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown  
     That made so many a name so fragrant;  
 He mourned Romance, now on the town,  
     And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,  
 Albeit he had never seen one;  
 He would have sinned incessantly  
 Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace  
 And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;  
 He missed the mediæval grace  
 Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,  
 But sore annoyed was he without it;  
 Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,  
 And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
 Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
 Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
 And kept on drinking.

## ROBERT FROST

☐ “I want to reach out to all sorts and kinds,” Robert Frost once said, and he succeeded. Four decades after his death he remains the most widely recognized poet in American history. More of his work has been memorized by more people probably than that of any modern author. In his person—the craggy features, gravelly voice, wry, grandfatherly manner—he was for many the epitome of the Poet. But the image was as carefully crafted as the poems, and the familiarity of both tended to mislead. Frost, we now know, was far from the folksy Yankee farmer image he constructed to further his career, just as his verses, seemingly so straightforward in style and direct in their messages, are darker and more complex than first thought. “These poems are written in parable,” Frost once warned, “so the wrong people won’t understand, and so be saved.”

Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Crane, and other experimentalists appear obviously modern in their technical innovations. By retaining and working subtle variations on standard forms—he

famously scorned free verse, saying it was like playing tennis with the net down—Frost seemed old-fashioned, even though he was just as up-to-date and disillusioned as the experimentalists in his outlook. He accepted the Darwinian dynamic of nature, and he liked to portray his own life as one of struggle and triumph over adversity.

Frost was born in San Francisco in 1874 and lived there until he was eleven. His father worked at several newspapers; his mother was a sometime schoolteacher. When his father died, of tuberculosis, he moved with his mother to the mill town of Lawrence, Massachusetts, where in high school Frost fell in love with Elinor Miriam White, his co-valedictorian. She enrolled at St. Lawrence College; he went to Dartmouth but dropped out after one term, afraid he might lose her. She refused to marry him until she had graduated from college, in 1895. In 1897 Frost was admitted as a special student at Harvard but left after two years, without a degree. Eventually he accumulated forty-four honorary ones, including Litt.D.'s from Oxford and Cambridge, and liked to quip that he was “educated by degrees.”

From 1900 to 1909 the Frosts lived in Derry, New Hampshire, on a farm owned by his grandfather, who also gave him an annuity—fortunately, since Frost was not a successful farmer. Without that income, which eventually reached \$800 a year, he could hardly have supported a wife and four children. His grandfather bequeathed him the farm, and together with the annuity (gifts Frost did not like to acknowledge) he was able to continue writing, in fact to produce enough poems to fill his first two books. In 1912, having had little success getting his work published, Frost sold the farm and, like many other American artists who have felt unappreciated at home, he decided to go abroad to make his way. He was not disappointed. He sailed with the family to England in September, and by October he had sold his first collection. (The contract, Frost said, was signed in three days.) He was thirty-nine.

In April 1913 *A Boy's Will* was published and was well received, thanks in no small part to his new acquaintances, the English poet Edward Thomas and another expatriate resident in London, Ezra Pound, who wrote glowing reviews and introduced him to important literary friends. Frost's second collection, *North of Boston*, soon followed in 1914. Again Pound offered helpful publicity. Even so, Frost felt Pound patronized him and never really appreciated what he was doing. (In fact, though he raved about Frost in *Poetry*, in August 1913

Pound wrote the editor, Harriet Monroe, that he found Frost “as dull as ditch water, as dull as Wordsworth,” but “set to be ‘literchur’ someday.”) After a decade of obscurity in Derry, Frost had, in only two and a half years in England, made his reputation. With the outbreak of World War I, he decided to return home.

When he arrived in February 1915 he found himself famous, as Henry Holt had already issued the American edition of *North of Boston* and quickly followed with *A Boy's Will*. Using conventional forms, particularly the sonnet, and dramatic dialogues in blank verse, Frost brought a new and distinctive quality to his lines, what he called the “sound of sense,” in which he subtly shaped tones and rhythms, the natural rise and fall of colloquial language, to capture nuances and point to hidden tensions and feelings. *North of Boston* contained such classics as “Mending Wall,” with its ironic commentary on the necessity of boundaries in human relations, and “The Death of the Hired Man” and “Home Burial,” whose themes of frustration, alienation, and failed communication form recurrent subjects throughout Frost's work. Among his most famous poems, “The Road Not Taken” opened *Mountain Interval* (1916) and alludes to his often-conflicted friend Edward Thomas, who had difficulty making decisions. (Thomas was killed in the war, at the Battle of Arras, only months after publication of the book.)

In 1917 Amherst College invited Frost to become a professor, an association he maintained the rest of his life except for intervals at Michigan, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale as poet-in-residence, a type of academic appointment he inaugurated. Frost's later books appeared at regular intervals, and he became a hugely popular reader of his own work, in his last years attracting thousands at a program. With the passing years Frost was showered with honors, including four Pulitzer Prizes; of the major awards, only the Nobel Prize, which both Eliot and Yeats won, eluded him. His most conspicuous accolade came in 1961 when he was invited to read at John F. Kennedy's inauguration, and as the wind ruffled his papers he recited “The Gift Outright.” Frost kept up a heavy schedule virtually to the end, which came in Boston on January 29, 1963.

Although a large number of his poems are tinged with melancholy, grave ambivalence about life, and black intimations—as in the suicidal reverie of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”—at his performances Frost tended to place emphasis on his lighter, wittier pieces. After his death the avuncular image he so carefully cul-

tivated was forever shattered and his dark side revealed when his letters were published, and even more so when Lawrance Thompson's exhaustive, three-volume biography appeared (1966, 1970, 1976). Fans were dismayed to discover, behind the charming mask, selfishness and hunger for fame, calculation and callousness even toward his own children, and spite and jealousy, especially toward rival poets. Recent decades of warts-and-all literary biographies have perhaps inured us to such revelations. In any case, despite the disclosures of the all-too-human being, the stature of Frost the artist was not diminished; attention returned to the work itself, which is secure in the canon. *Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, & Plays* was issued by the Library of America in 1995 and includes uncollected poems, lectures, essays, and letters as well as a chronology and notes. A one-volume edition of Thompson's biography was issued in 1981; Jeffrey Meyers's more recent and balanced *Robert Frost: A Biography* was published in 1996.

Frost was too wise to be a great optimist. By temperament and in method he was a classical modernist. He preferred grace and clarity of language to obscurity, structure to fragmentation, and strove for coherence and balance. As "one acquainted with the night," Frost often questioned the meaning of existence in his work. But in the face of despair and chaos he suggested some order might be imposed. At the very least, as his famous description has it, poems can provide "a momentary stay against confusion."

## MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
 The work of hunters is another thing:  
 I have come after them and made repair  
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

And on a day we meet to walk the line  
 And set the wall between us once again.  
 We keep the wall between us as we go.  
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
 One on a side. It comes to little more:  
 There where it is we do not need the wall:  
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
 My apple trees will never get across  
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
 If I could put a notion in his head:  
 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
 What I was walling in or walling out,  
 And to whom I was like to give offense.  
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
 He said it for himself. I see him there  
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
 He will not go behind his father's saying,  
 And he likes having thought of it so well  
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

### THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
 And sorry I could not travel both  
 And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

## STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
 But I have promises to keep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep.

## CARL SANDBURG

▣ Carl Sandburg was born to poor Swedish immigrants in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1878, the second of seven children. He left school at thirteen and took several jobs to help support the family. At seventeen he tramped and rode the rails, which strengthened his lifelong empathy with the working poor. From the hobos he met on the road he also picked up the folksongs he would go on collecting and later perform. During the Spanish-American War he served eight months in Puerto Rico, then attended Lombard College in Galesburg. He did not take a degree, but an English professor underwrote his first volume of poems, *Reckless Ecstasy* (1904).

After college Sandburg moved to Milwaukee, got a job as a newspaper reporter, and worked for the Social-Democratic party, organizing for presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs. From 1910 to 1912 he was secretary to the city's first Socialist mayor. In Milwaukee he also met and married Lillian Steichen, sister of the photographer Edward Steichen. (His biography of Steichen appeared in 1929.) The couple moved to Chicago, where Carl became an editorial writer and movie reviewer for the *Chicago Daily News* and continued to produce free verse with the long lines, reportorial catalogues, and robust democratic sentiments of an earlier newspaperman, Walt Whitman.

Harriet Monroe, who had just founded *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, admired Sandburg's verse and jump-started his poetry career in 1914 when she gave "Chicago" its debut. Some critics doubted his work was poetry at all, but Monroe championed Sandburg along with Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, whose Midwestern populism she saw as a native form of (and answer to) the transatlantic modernism Ezra Pound was promoting in her pages. Her assistant, Alice Corbin Henderson, helped Sandburg get a book contract, and when *Chicago Poems* appeared in 1916 his reputation was made. In *Cornbuskers* (1918) and *Smoke and Steel* (1920)