

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

3 *The Ballad of Father O'Hart*

Good Father John O'Hart

In penal days rode out  
To a shoneen who had free lands  
And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands; 5  
Sleiveens were all his race;  
And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,  
And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,  
And Father John went down; 10  
And he wore small holes in his shoes,  
And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,  
Whom the devils have by the hair,  
From the wives, and the cats, and the children, 15  
To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages  
As he went up and down;  
And he said with a smile, 'Have peace now';  
And he went his way with a frown. 20

But if when anyone died  
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,  
He bade them give over their keening;  
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John, 25  
When, weeping score by score,  
People came into Colooney;  
For he'd died at ninety-four.

There was no human keening;  
The birds from Knocknarea 30  
And the world round Knocknashee  
Came keening in that day.

The young birds and old birds  
Came flying, heavy and sad;  
Keening in from Tiraragh, 35  
Keening from Ballinafad;

Keening from Inishmurray,  
Nor stayed for bite or sup;  
This way were all reproved  
Who dig old customs up. 40

*1889*

(From *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. 2nd. ed.  
London: Macmillan, 1950)