

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS – W. B. YEATS

by Garret Evans

Coming off the Gibson after the evening rise, we had the usual drink or two and looked over the catch, some of the flies we'd tied etc. And we then started down the trail out of the mountains. There was bright moonlight over everything – it was particularly lovely on the lichen-covered rocks along the way. As we made our way along, that fine poem by Yeats kept running through my addled mind:

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread:
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she is gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

William Butler Yeats was a wonderful man. In the English-Speaking World it's rare to find a man who holds high government office and is at the same time a Nobel Prize winning poet. In the French-Speaking World such a thing is more common. Is it that the French educational system is better? Someone should look into the whole business without further delay.

Yeats was a wonderful man – he's reflected pretty clearly in this pretty little poem. Sometimes poets are reflected in their writing and sometimes they aren't. He was a wildly romantic Irishman, a man with an artistic temperament, with a love for the world of ghosts and magic, with a love of perpetual youth, and with an insatiable hankering for a tall, bright, lovely and unobtainable woman named Maud Gonne. She was the love of his life – so of course they never married.

But far more important than all that, he was also a trout fisherman. What I want you to ponder, besides the poem which is a lovely thing that I'd happily give my right arm to have written, what I'd like you to ponder is the fact that Yeats and his contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, claimed to be flyfishermen, who cast their flies upon the troubled waters. They were both Nobel Prize winners, and they would both stoop regularly to the disgusting level of using a WORM to catch a trout. Anything for 'SUCCESS', you see ... Could it be, the fact that they were Nobel Prize winners, and the fact that they were unscrupulous WORMERS, could it be these two facts are connected? It's a pretty sad reflection to have to make on the two of these here fellas.