William Butler Yeats

1865 to 1939
Illustrious Family

- John Butler Yeats, father: painter
- Jack Yeats, brother: painter
- Lily and Lollie Yeats, sisters: publishers (established Cuala Press in Dundrum)
Jack Yeats
Literary Desires

• Wanted a national literature that would unite Catholic and Protestant sensibilities
  – Catholics: passionate, political
  – Protestants (Anglo-Irish): “good taste” and decency

• Unite this with mysticism, spiritualism, history
Irish literature should . . .

- Rise out of myth and popular lore
- Be kindred with music, speech, dance, and painting
- Achieve a “Unity of Being” in subject
National Theater

- Wanted a national theater to unite people
- Abbey Conceived in 1897 by Yeats and Lady Gregory; first productions in 1899.
Significant Women

• Augusta, Lady Gregory
  – Wealthy Anglo-Irish widow who cared for sickly Yeats at Coole Park; author

• Maud Gonne
  – Beautiful actress, revolutionary, iconoclast; Yeats’s muse

• Eva Gore-Booth

• Constance Gore-Booth, Countess Markievicz

• Georgiana Hyde-Lees
Augusta, Lady Gregory
Maud Gonne
Eva Gore-Booth
Constance Gore-Booth, Countess Markievicz
Innisfree & Swans

• Examples of lyric poetry
  – Musical (has a rhythm or beat). Lyric is from lyre, or harp.
  – Usually short
  – Presents everyday images or occurrences
  – Primarily concerned with emotions
  – Personal themes
  – Love, nature, spirituality as subjects
Lake Isle

• Early poem, written when Yeats still a Romantic [1892]

• Romantic poetry:
  – Nature
  – Spirituality
  – Emotional affect
  – Use of folklore and ancient themes
Wild Swans at Coole

• Yeats begins to approach themes that would occupy him in his later poems
• Published in 1919
• Reflects on passing of time
• Swans are eternal, full of passion, while humans wither