

Adam's Curse Summary

Writer: William Butler Yeats | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Background

Adam's Curse was written by William Butler Yeats in 1902. The poem reflects Yeats' thoughts on the hard work behind creating beautiful things like poetry, love, and beauty. Yeats was influenced by his feelings for Maud Gonne, a woman he loved but who didn't return his love. The title refers to the curse on Adam after he left Eden, symbolizing how hard life became for humans.

Summary

Part 1: Talking about Poetry: The poem begins with the speaker sitting with two people—one is a close friend, and the other is a beautiful, gentle woman. They talk about how hard it is to write poetry. The speaker says it can take a long time to write even one line. If it doesn't seem natural, all the hard work feels wasted. He compares writing poetry to hard jobs like scrubbing floors or breaking stones. But people like bankers or teachers think poets are just being lazy.

Part 2: Talking about Beauty: The gentle-woman then speaks. She says that being a woman is also hard work because women have to work to be beautiful. Even though no one teaches this at school, women understand that looking good takes effort. This is something women must do, just like poets must work hard on their poems.

Part 3: Talking about Love: The speaker then talks about love. He says that in the past, people thought love was about being very polite and respectful. They would read old books and try to follow the ideas from those books. But now, love seems like a small, easy thing, not as important as it used to be.

Part 4: Growing Quiet and Thinking about Love: As the three people sit quietly, the sky grows darker, and the moon appears. The moon looks worn out, like a shell washed by the sea. The speaker shares a thought only for one person's ears. He says that he used to love this person in a special, old-fashioned way. But now, both of them feel tired and sad, just like the worn-out moon.