

September 1913 summary

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

Summary

Stanza 1 - Greedy Ireland and the Lost Soul: In this stanza, Yeats says that the people of modern Ireland are now running only after money. They “fumble in a greasy till,” meaning that collecting money has become the only purpose of their lives. They still pray, but their prayers are full of fear and selfishness. The poet says that they have dried out the true joy of life. There is no more love or courage in their hearts. They live only between “prayer and savings.” At the end, Yeats sadly declares that the old, noble Ireland — where people were brave and patriotic — exists no more: “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave.”

(This stanza shows that modern Ireland has become blind with greed and has lost its noble soul forever.)

Stanza 2 - The Heroes’ Sacrifice and Today’s Hypocrisy: In this stanza, Yeats remembers the heroes of old Ireland. They were a completely different kind of people — brave, patriotic, and self-sacrificing. Their names once stopped children’s play, meaning they were the nation’s true heroes. They gave their lives for their motherland, wandering around the world, and had little time for prayer because they acted instead of talking. The line “For whom the hangman’s rope was spun” means that they faced death without fear and accepted the gallows with courage for their country. At the end, Yeats again laments that the noble and heroic Ireland is gone: “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave.”

(This stanza reveals that while the heroes of the past died for Ireland, the people of today are hypocrites — they only speak, but do nothing. That glorious Ireland is now dead.)

Stanza 3 - The Heroes’ Sacrifice and the Nation’s Ingratitude: In this stanza, Yeats recalls the great heroes of the past who gave their lives for Ireland’s freedom. The term “Wild Geese” refers to the Irish patriotic soldiers who fought abroad for their country. The poet asks with deep sorrow: Was all that blood, sacrifice, and death meant for this selfish generation? Heroes like Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet, and Wolfe Tone sacrificed everything for their motherland. They were the “delirium of the brave” — men filled with fearless and passionate courage. But the present generation has forgotten their noble sacrifice. At the end, Yeats once again mourns, “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave.” This refrain

symbolizes the poet's despair — that Ireland has lost the courage, patriotism, and moral strength it once had.

(In this stanza, the poet expresses his pain that the blood of the heroes has gone in vain, as modern Ireland has become selfish and ungrateful.)

Stanza 4 - Memory of the Heroes and the Poet's Sorrow: In this final stanza, Yeats imagines that if time could turn back and those exiled heroes could return once more, people of modern Ireland would mock them. They would say, "Some woman's yellow hair has maddened every mother's son". It means they would reduce the patriots' love for their country to mere romantic foolishness. The poet says those heroes gave away their lives easily because patriotism and honor meant everything to them. But today's people cannot understand such selflessness. At the end, Yeats speaks in a tone of quiet sadness: "But let them be, they're dead and gone, / They're with O'Leary in the grave." This line is a deep confession of grief — the heroes now belong to history, and such noble souls are no longer born.

(In this stanza, Yeats shows that modern Ireland fails to understand the sacrifice of its past heroes. The poet remembers them only with reverence and sorrow.)