

The Circle Animal Desertion Summary

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

Summary

Part I - The Desertion of Imagination: In the first part, Yeats expresses his old age, loss of creative power, and spiritual emptiness. He admits, "I sought a theme and sought for it in vain," meaning he can no longer find inspiration for poetry. Once, his imagination was like a circus full of bright, living figures — kings, chariots, heroes, and women — but now they have all left him. He calls himself a "broken man," whose imagination and enthusiasm are gone. The poet feels abandoned by his own "circus animals" and is left face to face with the emptiness of his heart.

Part II - Revisiting the Old Themes: In this part, Yeats looks back on his earlier poems, such as *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *The Countess Cathleen*, and *Cuchulain*, which once brought him fame and joy. He admits that these poems were filled with romantic dreams, mythological stories, and heroic ideals. But now he realizes that the true source of these creations was his own heart — his love, pain, and loneliness. Oisín symbolized his youthful passion; *The Countess Cathleen* reflected his beloved's self-sacrifice; and *Cuchulain* represented his restless soul. Yeats now understands that his art was not born from divine inspiration but from deep human emotions — love, fear, desire, and suffering.

Part III - Return to the Heart's Reality: In the final part, Yeats reaches his deepest spiritual realization. He says, "Those masterful images because complete / Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?" meaning that his perfect poems may have seemed divine, but their roots were humble and human — "a mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street." He understands that poetry does not arise from lofty ideals but from the dirt, pain, and imperfection of the human heart. Therefore, he concludes, "Now that my ladder's gone / I must lie down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart." These famous lines express Yeats's ultimate truth: the source of all art lies within the human heart, where love, sorrow, and weakness dwell together. At the end of his life, the poet discovers that both the beginning and the end of all creativity come from the honest feelings of the human soul.