

The Municipal Gallery Revisited Summary

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

Summary

Part I - Images of Ireland and National History: At the beginning of the poem, Yeats stands inside Dublin's Municipal Gallery surrounded by portraits that represent thirty years of Ireland's history. He observes figures such as Casement on trial, Griffith with proud determination, Kevin O'Higgins with a calm yet restless gaze, and a revolutionary soldier kneeling for a blessing. These portraits seem alive, forming a visual chronicle of modern Ireland. Yeats realizes that this is no longer the "dead Ireland" of his youth but a reborn nation—"terrible and gay," both tragic and triumphant at once.

Part II - The Portrait of a Woman and the Aura of Memory: As Yeats walks through the gallery, he stops before the portrait of a woman—beautiful, gentle, and possessing a "Venetian grace." He recalls meeting her nearly fifty years earlier for only twenty minutes in a studio. That brief encounter has now turned into an eternal memory, filling his heart with tender emotion and the haunting sweetness of the past.

Part III - Reawakening of Beloved Faces and Friends: Yeats's heart is deeply moved as he recognizes familiar faces—Lady Augusta Gregory, her son Robert Gregory, Hugh Lane, and Hazel Lavery. These are not merely people he knew but symbols of Ireland's cultural soul. Their portraits reflect not just personal memories but also the enduring spirit of art, friendship, and patriotic sacrifice. Each face tells a story of love, creativity, and immortal dedication to Ireland.

Part IV - Lady Gregory's Portrait and the Lost Greatness: In this section, Yeats focuses on Mancini's portrait of Lady Gregory, which Synge had called "the greatest since Rembrandt." The poet feels that no brush or color could ever capture the perfect blend of her pride and humility. With sadness, Yeats realizes that time may bring new men and women, but "that selfsame excellence"—the unique greatness of Lady Gregory—will never return.

Part V - The Fall of Coole Park and Sorrow: Yeats reminisces about Coole Park, Lady Gregory's home, once a center of Ireland's cultural life. He once believed that his "children," meaning the next generation, would find "deep-rooted things" there. But now, it is gone—"that end has come." He says he has not wept, for "no fox can foul the lair the badger swept," suggesting that no dishonor can touch the sacred memory of such a noble place.

Part VI - Synge, Gregory, and the Root of Art: Yeats recalls his artistic comrades—John Synge and Lady Gregory. Together they believed that true literature and art must arise from “contact with the soil,” from the life and struggles of their own land. This connection made their work “Antaeus-like strong,” gaining strength from the earth itself. Their vision rooted Irish art in its native soil, giving voice to the nation’s spirit.

Part VII - Friendship and Human Glory: In the final part, Yeats stands before Synge’s portrait and says, “You that would judge me, do not judge alone / This book or that.” He means that his true greatness does not lie in his books but in the noble friendships that shaped his life. His proudest achievement is not fame but the companionship of kindred souls. Thus, he concludes with the immortal lines: “Think where man’s glory most begins and ends,/And say my glory was I had such friends.” This ending expresses the essence of Yeats’s philosophy—that the true glory of human life lies in friendship, ideals, and the cultural legacy we leave behind.