

The Tower Summary

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

Summary

Part I - Conflict Between Old Age and Imagination: In the first part of the poem, Yeats speaks about the conflict between his old age and creative power. He says that his body is now weak, but his mind remains young, excited, and full of imagination. He feels that age has been tied to him "like a dog's tail," meaning that old age has become a heavy burden. He remembers his childhood days when he used to climb Ben Bulbin mountain to fish, spending his days in harmony with nature. That time of vitality and freedom is now lost. Yeats thinks that perhaps he must now bid farewell to the "Muse", that is, to poetry, and turn instead to the philosophical thoughts of Plato and Plotinus. In this part, Yeats raises a profound question: Does old age destroy imagination, or does imagination lift a man above the decay of age?

Part II - Memories, Legends, and Creative Madness: In the second part, Yeats stands around his tower and recalls memories and Irish legends. He revisits in imagination the stories of Mrs. French, Hanrahan, and a blind poet. These figures represent a blend of love, madness, and death. Hanrahan, a wandering poet created by Yeats himself, becomes the symbol of the artistic spirit — lost between passion, drink, and creative frenzy. Yeats wants to show that the artist always lives beyond ordinary boundaries, where reason and madness meet. Here he asks: "Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or woman lost?" — meaning, does imagination thrive more on fulfilled love or on lost love? In this part, reality, memory, and imagination merge into a mysterious journey of self-discovery.

Part III - Spiritual Legacy and Immortality of the Soul: In the final part, Yeats declares that it is time for him to write his spiritual will. He wishes to pass on his pride, faith, and wisdom to the young generation — to those "upstanding men" who will climb mountains and fish under the morning light with courage and passion. He rejects the abstract philosophy of Plato and Plotinus, for he believes that life and death are man's own creations. Through his "bitter soul," man has created the sun, the moon, the stars — and even his own Translunar Paradise. At the end, Yeats says, "Now shall I make my soul." This means that he will now prepare his soul in such a way that death will no longer be a thing of fear, but rather the beginning of peace and artistic fulfillment. In this part, Yeats shows that art is the only path through which man transcends death and achieves immortality.

