

Poem #11

“Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven” by William Butler Yeats

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.



Yeats was an Irish poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature. This poem is from the period when he wrote primarily about mythology and Irish legend. Aedh, the god of death in Irish mythology, was one of four characters who appear in Yeats's poetry in the middle of his writing career.

A love poem often abbreviated “The Cloths of Heaven,” this work of Yeats explores the idea of wanting to give gifts to someone you love, but having only the greatest gift of all, your dreams, to give. The poem also explores the idea that love makes you vulnerable because the person you love could hurt you by treading harshly on your dreams.

Taking it apart

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HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,

Although its meaning is deep, this poem is short and simple to understand. Imagine here in the first lines that the poet had a marvelous piece of cloth made in heaven that was beautifully woven with gold and silver strands of light.

Enwrought with golden and silver light,

The blue and the dim and the dark cloths

The gold and silver light are interwoven with the beautiful blues of the sky at morning and noon and night.

Of night and light and the half light,

I would spread the cloths under your feet:

If the poet had such a cloth, he would lay it under the feet of the person he loved. Imagine laying a work of art under someone's feet.

But I, being poor, have only my dreams;

But the poet is poor, and he doesn't have anything like this cloth. In fact, he has nothing except his own dreams.

I have spread my dreams under your feet;

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

So he lays his dreams at the feet of the person he loves, and he asks that the person tread lightly on his dreams, as lightly as she would on a beautiful heavenly cloth.

Think about how valuable someone's hopes and dreams are and why it would be important to be careful how we walked on them.

Memorizing it

This poem has a very odd ending pattern. Notice how lines 1 & 3 end with the same word. So do 2 & 4, 5 & 7, and 6 & 8. That means that of the eight lines, there are only four words they end with, which makes for a very strong rhyme scheme. Memorize this poem line by line, then couplet by couplet, then in two four-line groups, then all together. As you work on memorizing the lines, let your mind imagine the beauty of the colors and images that Yeats describes.

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