

Genesis of Artistic Creativity

Genius Genes
The Yeats Family
Jack B. Yeats
The Singular Yeat



Friends of the National Gallery Ireland
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GENIUS

I. Q.

- Practice

- 10,000 hours
- copying – not genius

- Gender

- Female brain more **sociable** and verbally advanced (difference between male and female)
- Not all due to opportunity

I.Q.

- I.Q. 120 + except autistic savant
- Genetic
 - Ordinary creativity – almost 50%
 - Genius creativity – 90% plus
 - Multiple genes – small effect

Genius and Madness

❖ Seneca

“No great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness.”

❖ Shakespeare

“The lunatic, the lover and the poet/are of imagination all compact.”

❖ Dryden

“Great wits are sure to madness near ally’d – and thin partitions do their bounds divide.”

❖ Cesare Lombroso (1890):

“The man of genius who had various characteristics of degeneration.”

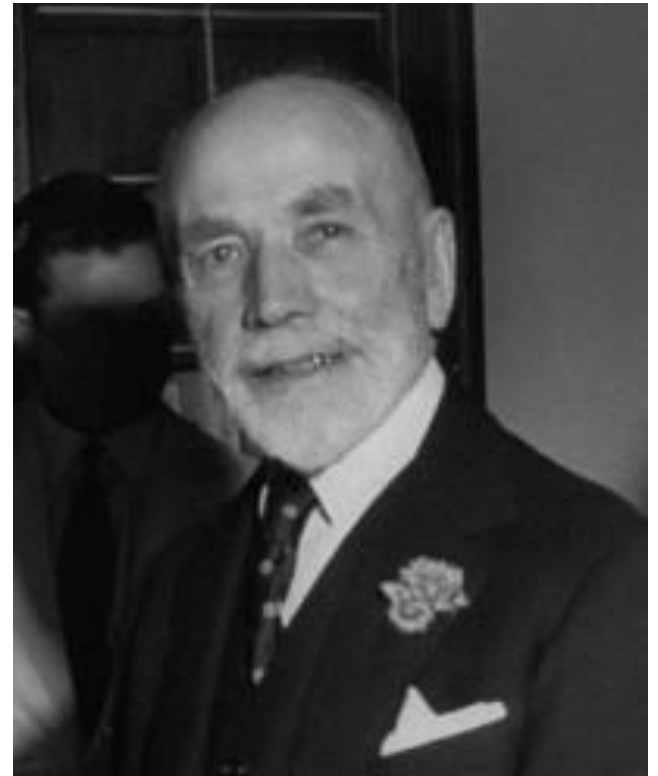
Act of Genius

- Original
- Novel
- Bring about a change in our understanding of a subject

Definition of Genius

Bernard
Berenson:

*‘The capacity for
productive
reaction against
ones training’.*



Genes and Genius

Multiple genes of small effect

Genes effect:

1. Traits of persistence
2. Concentration
3. Curiosity
4. Certain types of stimulation



Characteristics of Creative Individuals

- Perseverance
- Drive for perfection
- Disregard for opinions of other
- Curiosity

Characteristics of Creative Individuals

- Naivety
- Adventuresomeness
- Rebelliousness
- Individualism



JACK YEATS

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Family History of Jack Yeats Traits (Pyle 1970, 89)

- ❖ Unconventional
- ❖ Curious
- ❖ Imaginative
- ❖ Mystical
- ❖ Novelty and Sensation-Seeking

Note: Classical Creative Artistic Family

Paternal Grandfather William Butler Yeats

- Sceptic
- Deeply orthodox
- Remarkable man
- Vanity in extreme
- Dandiacal



Paternal Grandfather

William Butler Yeats

- Wore riding breeches so tight that he ripped three in one day.
- ‘Unusual clergyman’ (Ellmann)
- Once he boxed Yeats’ father’s ears and afterwards shook hands with him and hoped he was not offended
- Paternal grandfather sent Yeats’ father to a School where floggings were famous.

Maternal Grandfather

William Pollexfen

- Severe social impairment
- Was intimate with no one even his wife
- 'Autistic' aggression – hatchet beside his bed for burglars
- Silent grandfather
- Inspired fear and deference



Maternal Grandfather

William Pollexfen

- Wanderer (query ? Autistic type)
- Loner/Eccentric
- Brave
- “Silent and Reserved”
- “Simple Trusting and Scrupulously Honest”
- Brutally tactless, honest
- “Inspired fear and deference”
- Jack said like “19th century pirate Jean Lafitte”

Jack's Inheritance (Genetic) From Pollexfens (All Autistic Traits)

- Silence
- Reserve
- Calm Elusiveness
Note people's conversations with WBY "vanished" Pyle (1970)
- Puckish Humour
- Love of Ceremony
- Upright Nature
- Independence



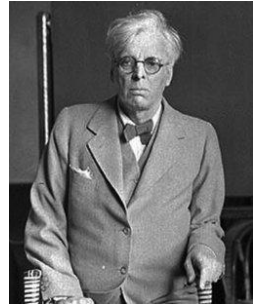
Maternal Grandmother Elizabeth Middleton

- Deeply religious and superstitious
- Into nature cures

Father

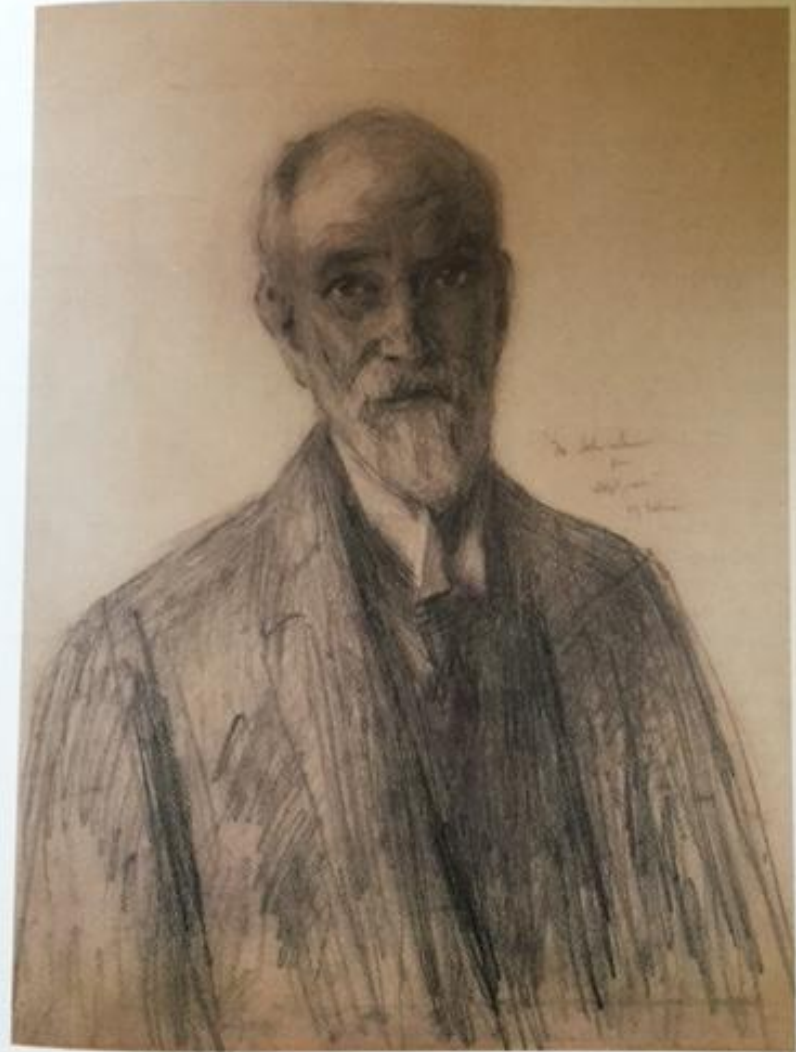
John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)

- Went from a legal career to painting
- Bohemian / Autistic Wanderer / Dogmatic
- Constant search for individual style of painting left him unsatisfied
- ‘Searching for individual style as if for the Philosopher’s Stone’ (Ellmann)



Self Potrait

Two self-portrait sketches, 1920



Father : John Butler Yeats

- ‘Too exacting’
- ‘Autistic’ search for identity
- Strange / eccentric / financially irresponsible
- Painted those whose faces interested him (without hope of payment)

Father : John Butler Yeats

- Took family wandering between Dublin, London and Sligo
- Stubborn
- John Butler Yeats' education of his son was 'a long battle of minds and formidable wills that was to last a lifetime' (John McGahern)
- Controlling, independent , individual, intellectual

Father : John Butler Yeats

- All absorbing interests in work
- Solitary man
- Sceptic
- Took delight in expressing extreme views

Self Portraits

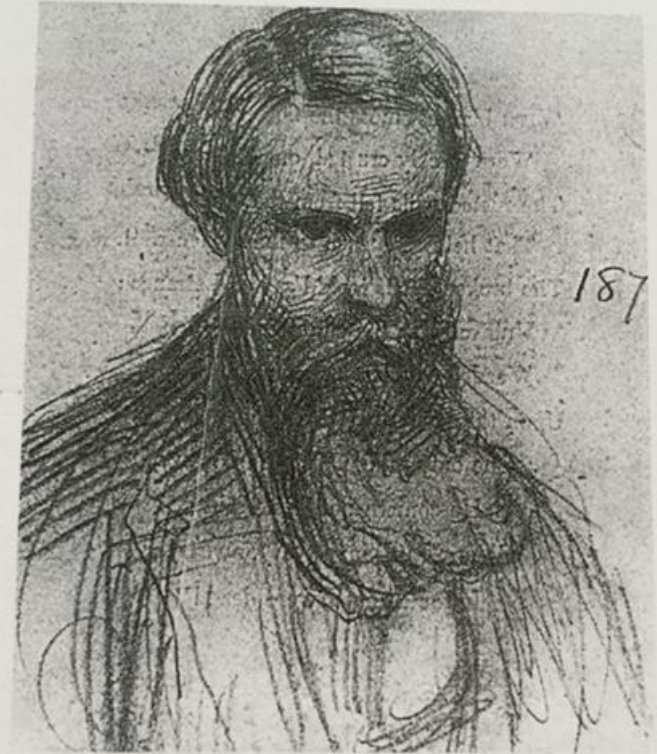
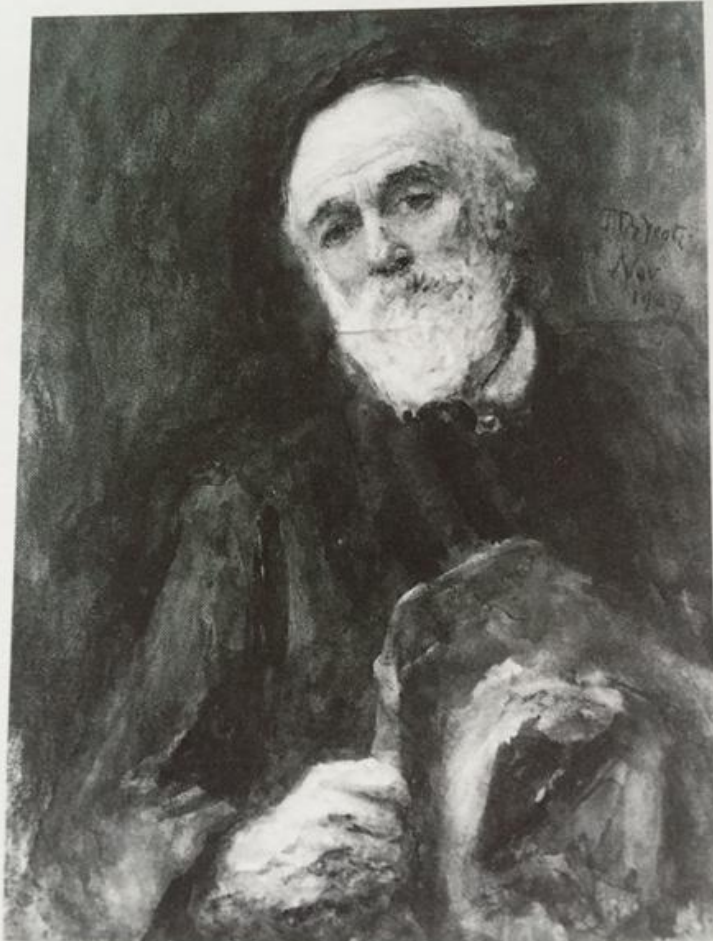


Fig. 25 J.B. Yeats, pencil self-sketch,
ca. 1875 (Michael B. Yeats Collection)

John, Father of Jack and W.B. Yeats

- JBY “Disliked being forced to do what other people planned”. Oppositional Defiant. McGahern (1999)
- Kept long term friends “who often tried, help him in later life”. McGahern (1999)
- He always had “in instinct to go against the train of his own best interests. McGahern (1999)
- Impulsively became engaged to Susan Pollexfen two weeks after meeting her. (1862)

John, Father of Jack and W.B. Yeats

- When his father died he took over the father's estate and neglected it and lost it
- Philosopher/Intellectual dogmatic
- “He did not know when to finish a painting. He worried away his work with **Ruinous** effects.”
Pyle (1989)
- JBY write “We Yeats have such bad characters” and he also said Jack often says “such luminous things”.

Mother

Susan Pollexfen (1841-1900)

- Nothing to do with theorizing
- Taciturn / gloomy
- Sensitive
- Undemonstrative
- Uncommunicative apparently emotionless



The Artists Wife

The artist's wife

ca. 1875, oil on canvas, 61 x 71 cm, NGI 1179



Susan Pollexfen (Mother)

- “Imaginative and Melancholy”. Pyle (1989)
- Reserved and Independent. Pyle (1989)
- Watercolour Painting Pyle. (1989)
- Quiet Religious interested in Nature Cures.
- Like Jack in Character

Susan Pollexfen (Mother)

- She was not sympathetic. The feelings of those around her did not concern her. She was not aware of them. She was always in an island of her own (T. Brown)
- Genetic input to Yeats – Brown states that Yeats was a Pollexfen in his refusal or inability to confront in his writings any of the pain of childhood (No. Due to his autism and problems with autobiographical memory)

Susan Pollexfen (Mother)

‘The secret of Yeats, is that his mother did not love him’

(H. McGee)

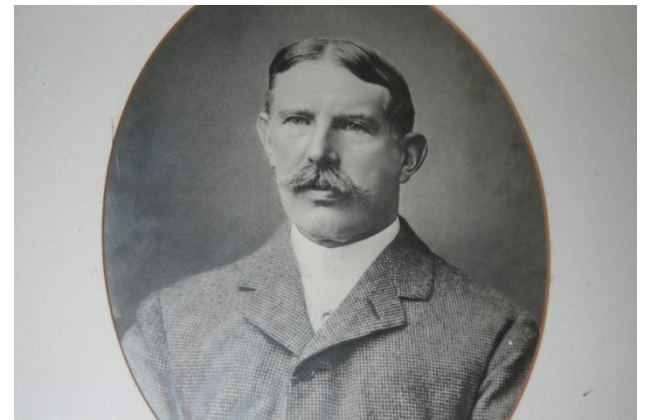
– not true

Uncle George Pollexfen

- Tongue of leather over keyhole to keep out draft.

(H. Pyle)

- Mystical and into the occult





Another Pollexfen Uncle

Tried to invent a warship that
could not be sunk because of its
hull of solid wood.



OTHER SIBLINGS OF JACK

Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats (1866- 1948)

Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats

1900-01, oil on canvas, 91 x 71 cm, NIGI 1180

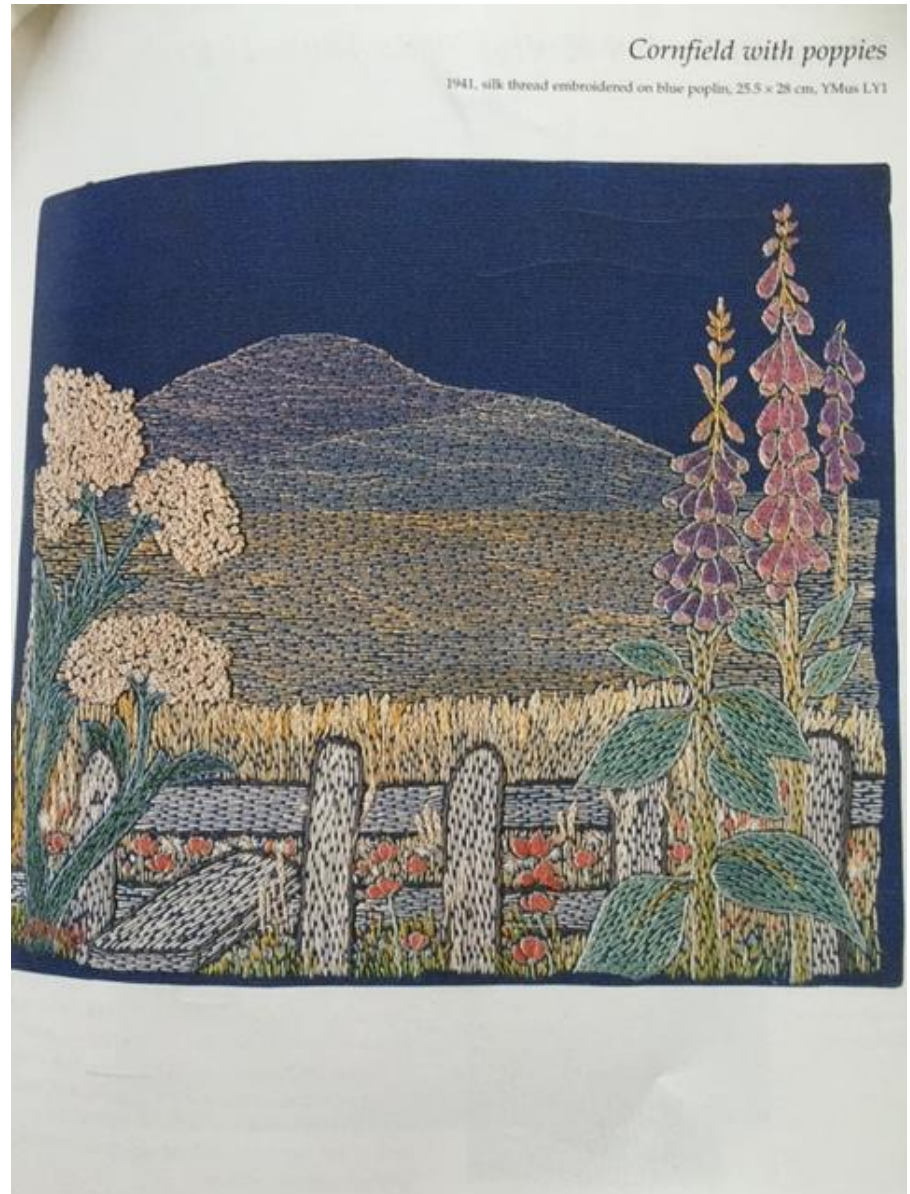


Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats (1866-1948)

Trained with
William
Morris'
daughter

Embroidery

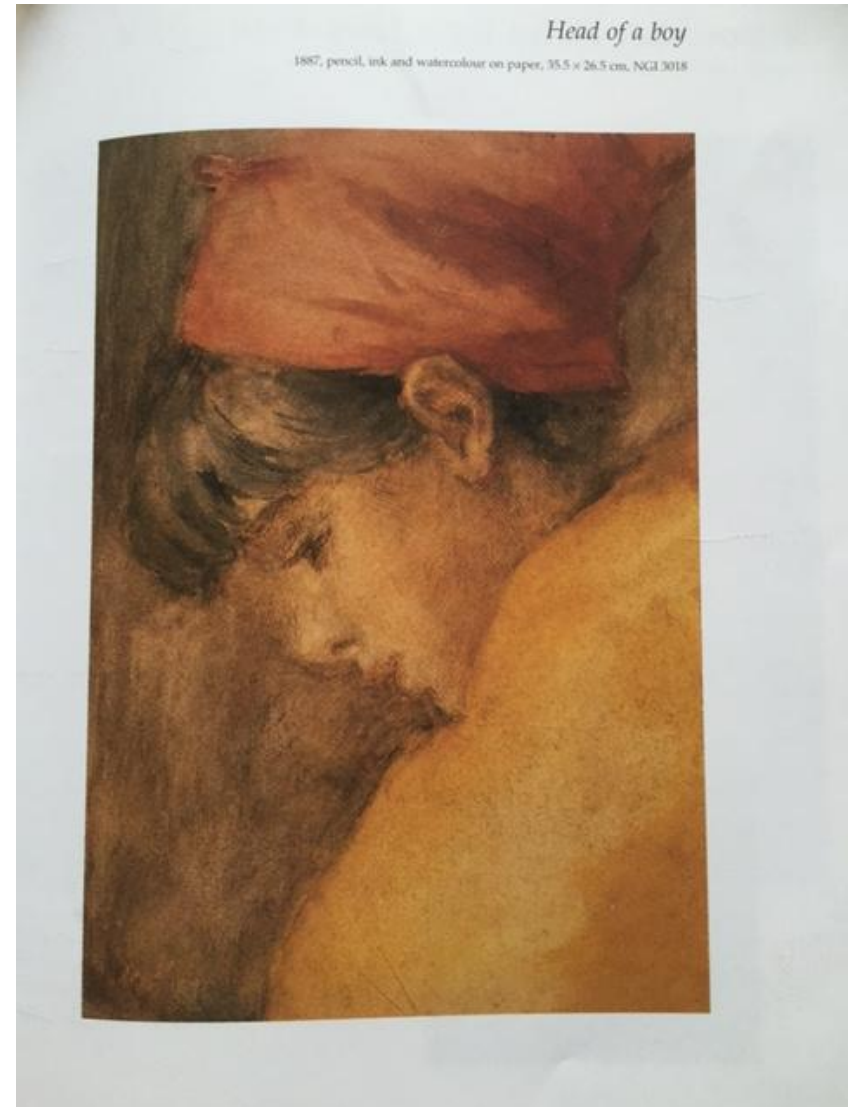
'Psychic
Tendency'



William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

Metropolitan
School of
Art, Kildare
Street,

May 1884 -
April 1886



Elizabeth Corbet (Lolly) Yeats 1868-1940

Founded Dun Emer
and Cuala Press.

Kept brother W. B. in
the arts rather
than involved in
violent political
upheavals (John
Masefield).

- I don't agree.





W.B.'S DAUGHTER



W. B. daughter

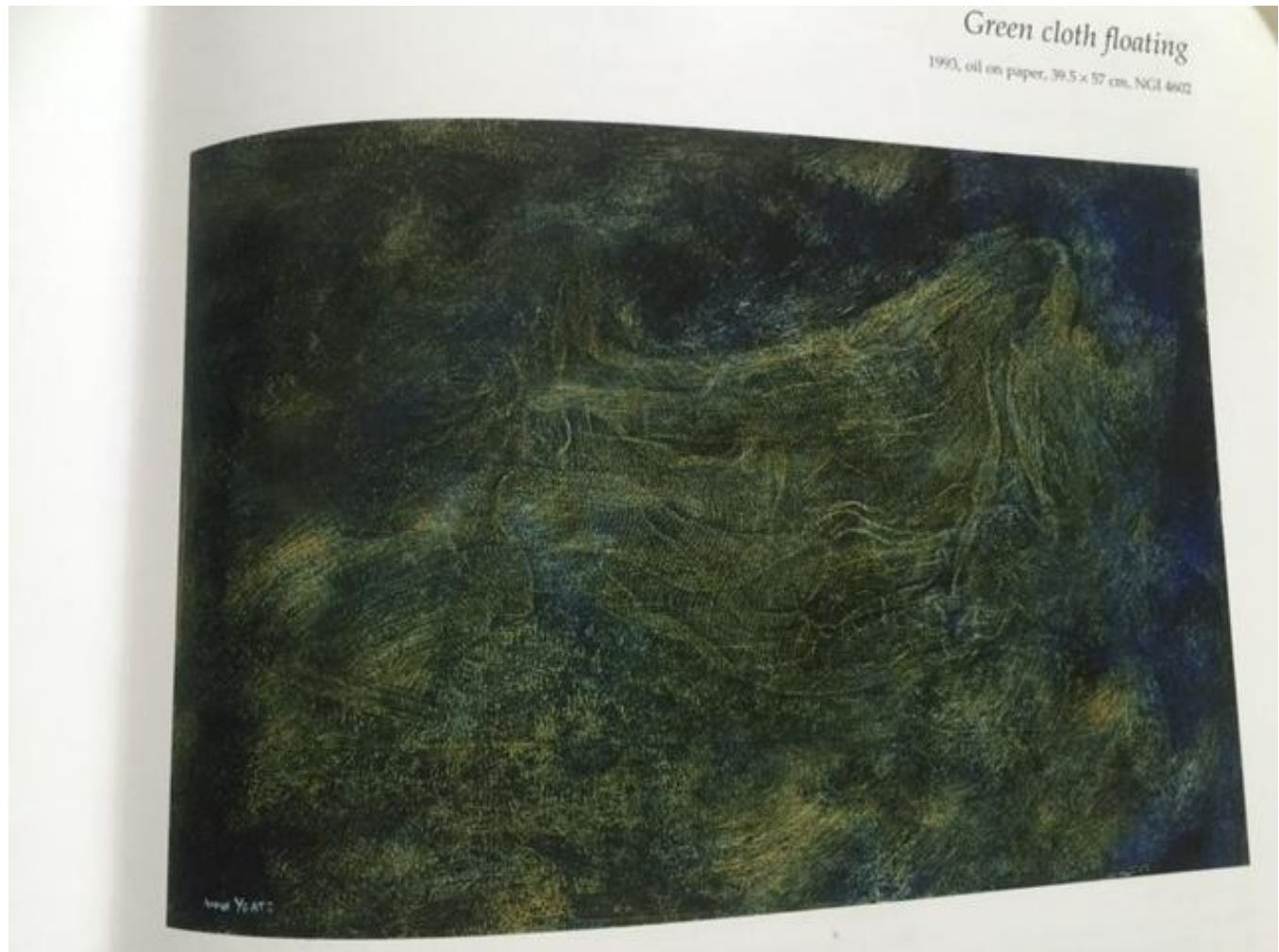
Anne Yeats

Preoccupied with technique of painting.

Antedated Pollock by “letting colour run into the hollows of coarse watercolour paper to create visual ambiguities in landscape and figure scenes”.

W. B.'s daughter

Anne Yeats





JACKYEATS

Jack Yeats (1871-1957) Non-Verbal

- His father painted him as a “**shy**, fair-haired boy, his **head bent** at a typical angle; he’s carried away in a **dream** of his own ... alert ... **inquiring**, without giving anything away” (Pyle 1989)

Note: the avoidance of eye contact

- He had the typical Autistic “role and lurch in his gate”. (Father John’s report)

Jack Yeats (1871-1957) Non-Verbal

- Father “Pyle 1989” also said that he “spent **many hours leaning over the bridge, looking into the pool** (under the bridge in Sligo) and he regrets that he did not spend many more hours in that apparently unprofitable past-time.
- Typical Autistic Activity
- - Note: Obsession with water all his life.



On the Broads

1899, watercolour on paper, 35.5 × 17 cm,
NGI 6318

Jack Non-Verbal

Pyle 1970 describes his

- “loose garments”
- “His long serious face, careworn”
- “Lean and hungry appearance”
- His gestures (Rolling gait)
- “His slow way of speech”
- “Nautical neatness”

Non-Verbal Behaviour

“**tall untidy figure**, dressed in loose clothes wearing a **nonchalantly-fastened** tie, a **rough frieze coat**, a broad rimmed hat and a Claddagh ring. He walks with a **rolling gait**, and proceeded along the street always with a picture or a **drawing pad in his hand**, sometimes passing friends by without noticing them, because his mind was on other things”. (Pyle 1970)

Note: This is all typical Autistic behaviour when put together.

Non-Verbal Behaviour

Other descriptions of him describe him as:

‘Ruminating’

and

Having a **‘typical wistful look’**



JACK YEATS

**EARLY CHILDHOOD
YEARS**

Childhood and Early Years

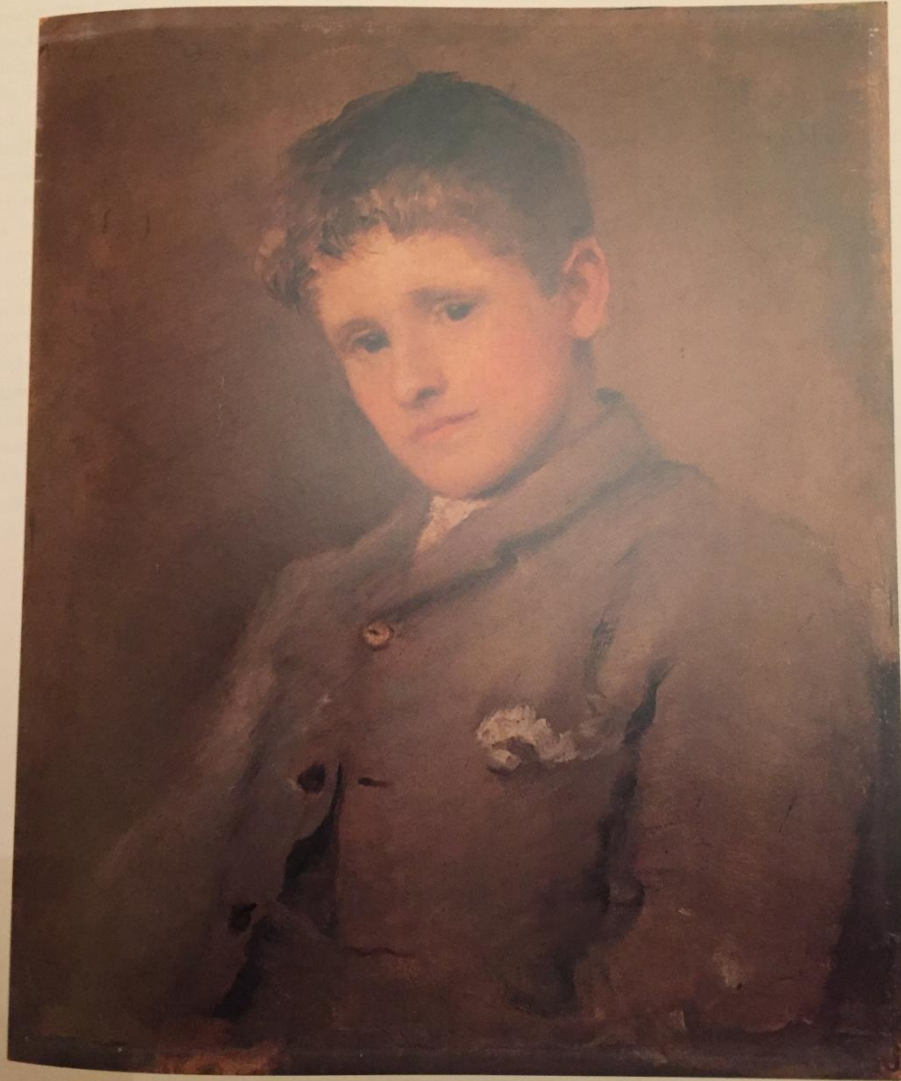
- Jack Yeats pencil from the start was never idle.
Pyle (1970)

Fig. 58 J.B. Yeats,
The bird market, ca.
1886, oil on canvas,
63.5 × 48 cm (Hugh
Lane Municipal
Gallery, Dublin)



Jack B. Yeats as a boy

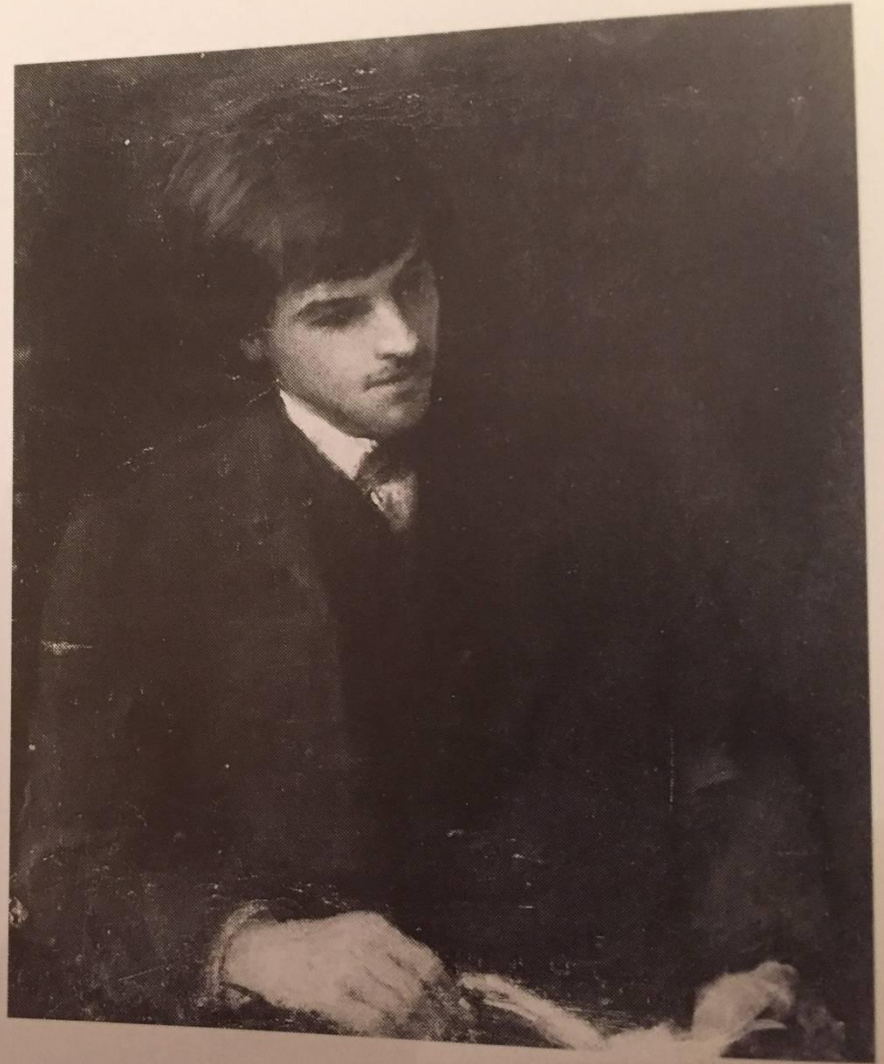
ca. 1883-84, oil on canvas, 61 × 51 cm, NGI 1142



Childhood and Early Years

- His father John stated
 - “He never showed them to anyone”.
 - “Drawings of groups engaged in some kind of drama”
- Poor student bottom of the class.

Fig. 60 J.B. Yeats,
Portrait of W.B. Yeats,
ca. 1886, oil on canvas,
76.5 × 65 cm (Hugh
Lane Municipal
Gallery, Dublin)



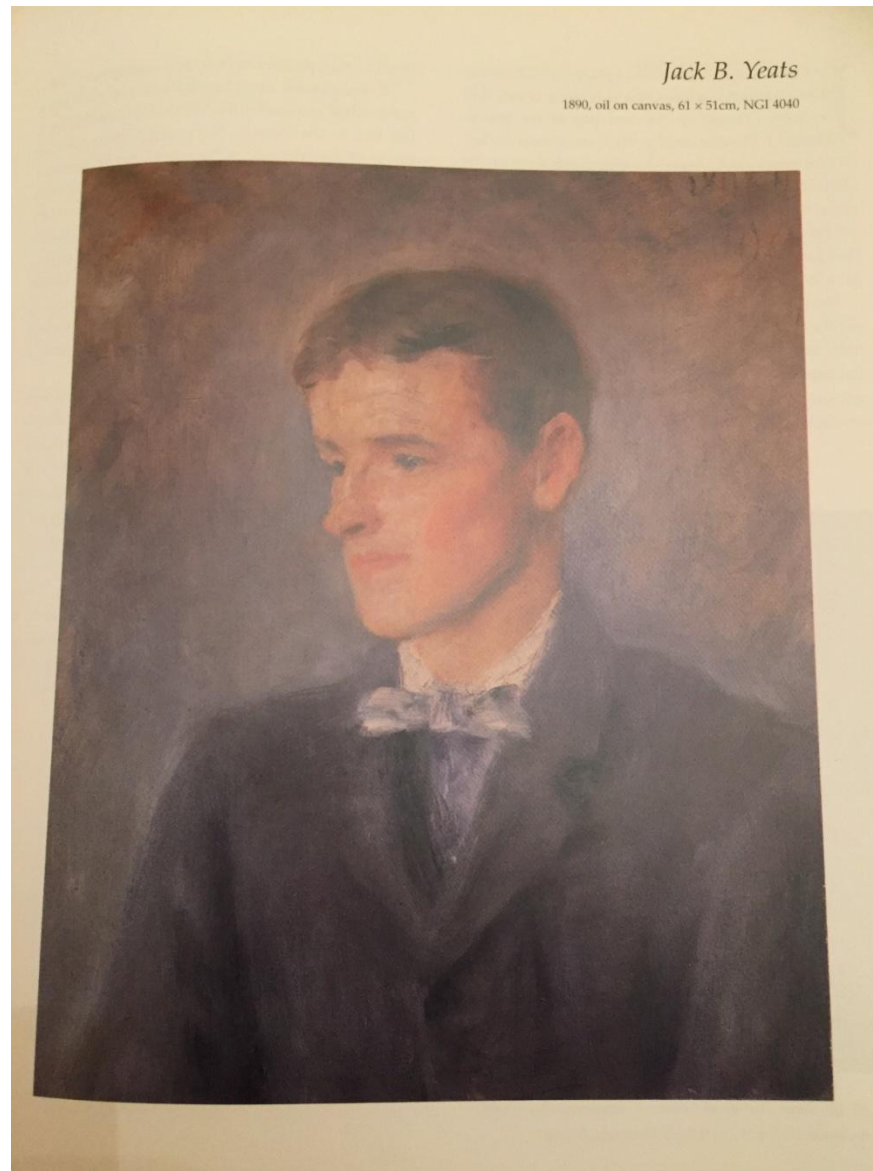
"that kept me heard 1" 71

Childhood and Early Years

Wandered the roads of Sligo studying “the skies and the hills, rather than his lessons and was quietly observing”. He had massive powers of observation. He was intellectually bright.

(Autistic behaviour.)

Early evidence of talent



Language

- Autistic reply when asked why he became a painter “because he was a son of a painter”. Pyle (1970)
- No he painted because he was driven to draw and paint from his earliest years. He had an opportunity but no choice in what he did eventually. It was a compulsion. It was the only solution he could find to the problem of life, his mental health, sanity and identity.

Jack's Autistic Narrative (Fitzgerald 2004) Language

Pyle (1970) points out that Jack kept his views to himself, mulled over them and reproduced mildly quizzical statements which no one could parry. He saw ideas in their final stages, and not as a matter for theoretical discussion ... “A carelessness about whether he communicated satisfactorily”. He conducted his thinking inside his head and then made a pronouncement.

He loved colloquial idiom “a soft day” as persons which HFA do. In a way he was always outside the group.

Autistic Humour

- Lolly (sister) said “Jack was a comical boy”.

(Pyle 1970)

Autistic Humour

- He was aware of his strange sense of humour
“I know I don’t have the same sense of humour as other people”. (Pyle 1970)
- Other Autistic characteristics (Pyle 1970) include
 - Whimsical macabre, cruel humour
 - “Childlike love of slapstick comedy”

Social Relationships

The Singular Yeat

- In the Dublin Arts Club “keeping aloof, reading in a corner quietly, gliding out of the door silently”. (Pyle 1970). Note: This is classic Autistic behaviour.
- Pyle (1970) points out that “the last time he was seen in public, the artist was walking alone, with his unmistakable sailor’s gate down the South Quays of the Liffey, completely absorbed in the rivers and ships he loved”. No change since childhood in Sligo.

Jack said - Self-Portrait

The Invisible Jack

“I travelled all my life without a ticket, I was never to be seen when the inspector came round ... (I was never one of the) “commuters”? A kind of invisible man!! (Autistic man.)

Personality

Pyle (1970) states Jack was “ever present, only physically absent”. As he himself put it, he was “the Singular Yeat”.

This is a perfect Autistic description of himself. Praise was “this singular Yeat”

(Autistic Mirage)

Personality

- His autism
 - His invisibility
 - His genius
 - His uniqueness
-
- He also described himself as “the singular Yeat” (like many family members including W.B.)
-
- Perfect Autistic Description

Personality

- He worked alone (Pyle, 1920)
- He was a massive observer
- His model was mankind, it was....the world of his experience, all inside his practical mind.



JACKS WORK

ART

Jack's view on Art

Jack's view of the Masters

He denounced old masters as painters of
“brown pictures”, there were
“journalists” – except for Goya; and
English painters as a race where
dismissed summarily”

(T. de Vere White)

Jack's view on Art

- Jack wrote “the word ‘art’ I don’t care much for because it doesn’t mean anything much to me ... I believe that all fine pictures and fine literature too, to be fine must have some of the living ginger of life in them”.

Jack – Singular Yeat

- “He worked only to please himself.
(Pyle 1970)
- He “denounced art theory”.
(Pyle 1970)
- He admired Goya and no one else. (Autistic)
- Jack was a true authentic artist of genius

Jack's Traits – Narrow Interests

Jack said “I was never perhaps born to watch the world with my horsemanship. I was generally on the ground looking on”. (Pyle 1970)

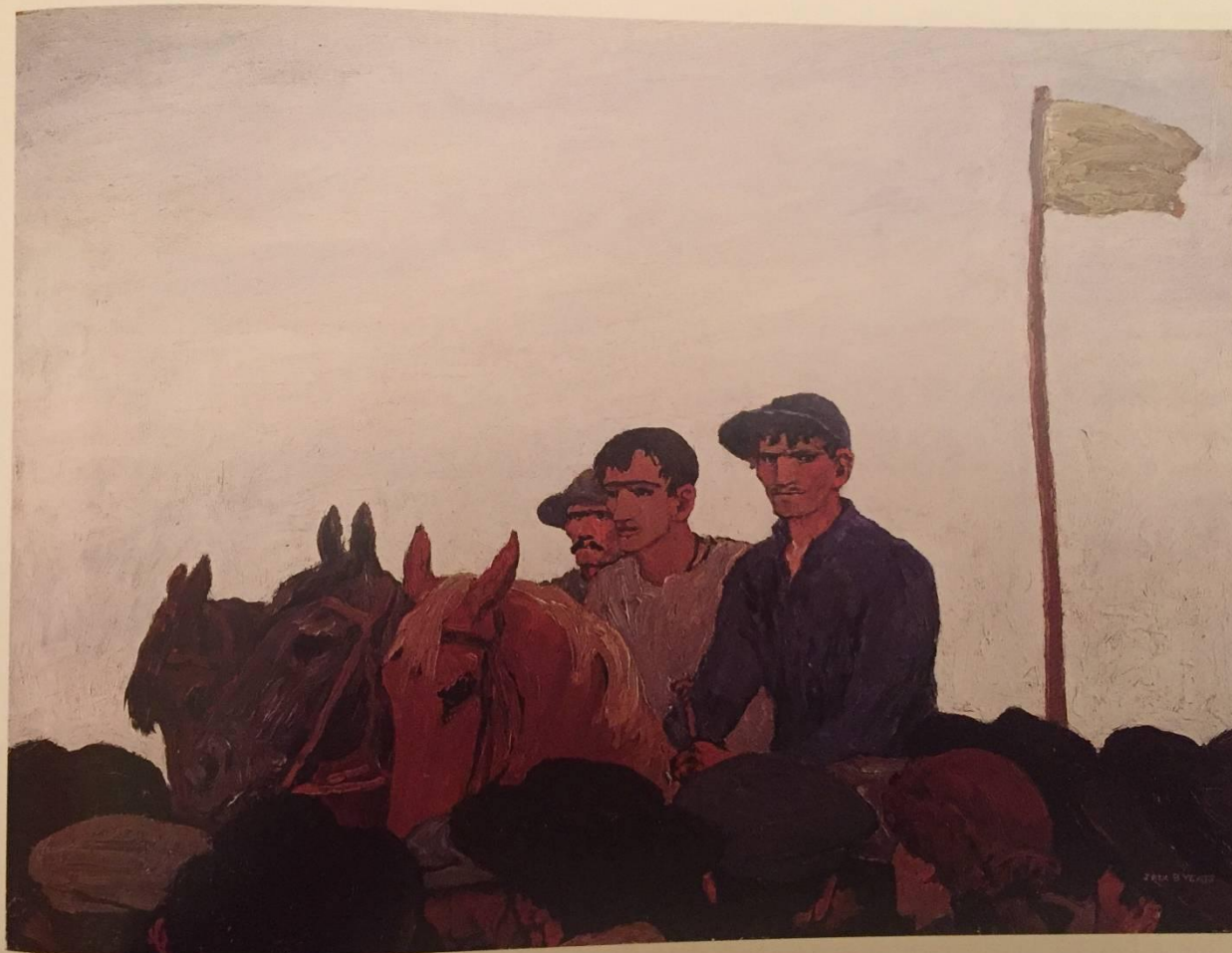
Note: The Autistic Position.

He was obsessed with horses and his “horse heart was never denied”. In London he was obsessed with the London horse drawn carriages. (Pyle 1970)



Before the start

1915, oil on canvas, 46 × 61 cm, NGI 1549



Terence de Vere White on Jack

- “Of what is noble and brave in man or beast he is more appreciative than anyone I have known”.
- He loved animals and hated women wearing “fur and feathers” (Bishop Harvey’s wife met him one day unexpectedly and was mortified and he hid her hat with feathers behind her back. (Pyle, 1970)

Repetitive 'Autistic' Painting

- Horses,
- Water, rivers, etc
- Groups of people
- Interiors of theatres
- Interiors of rooms

(Pyle 1970)

Eye for detail (Autistic trait)

He had a massive eye for detail and
sketched
squirrels,
street signs
and flags
in New York.

Preparatory Work for a Painting

- Massive capacity for observations
(I observe, therefore I am)
- Jack was a familiar unostentatious figure in the crowd, screening the sketch book within the flap of his great coat, noting down pictorially ... the idiosyncrasies of the human race". (Pyle 1970) Note: He was in the crowd by not part of it. Classic Autistic position.



PREPARATORY WORK FOR A PAINTING, METHOD AND STUDIO

Preparatory Work for a Painting

- When Jack walked he was sketching (Pyle 1970)
- gate latches
- a mole trap
- an enormous grasshopper
- a wren's nest
- a hare
- a heron rising from a cattle pool
- 'the motions of the mowers' in the fields.

Preparatory Work for a Painting

Father (John) wrote, “Jack has ambition in him or rather a pride and self-respect not too easily satisfied”

(J. Hone)

Jack's method of work

“no one creates ... the artist assembled memories”.
J. Hone. (Pyle 1970)



Jack's method of work

- Alone
- He 'fused' with his work in a psychological sense.
- In a kind of 'work trance'
W.B. – a work-spell

Tiniest distraction could destroy his work for the rest of the day.

Jack's method of work

- He put the “pipe cleaner around the door handle whilst he was at work”. (Pyle 1970) to warn his wife not to disturb him.
- Jack wrote “each painting is an event ... a creative work happens”. Pyle (1970)

Jack's method of work

- There was a very concrete element to the stimulus, the starting of a painting and “paintings should be of incidents witnessed by the artist”
(Autistic type statement)
- Pyle (1970) noted that “when he was incubating a picture he became silent, his mind withdrawn and after a while as scheming ceased he became more talkative and returned to his normal manner.

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