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Early Photographs of W.B. Yeats

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Early Photographs of W.B. Yeats, by Joseph Chaney

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William Butler Yeats, undated photograph, photographer unknown.

Early Photographs of W.B. Yeats

People in old pictures don't smile.
You'll say photography took time,
and a smile is painful to hold.

Scan the face of Yeats, the jaw clenched,
the squinting gaze set on no one.
He won't be moved. You'll see this look
among children, too. To be seized
like that, alive, stalled precisely
in time, by an inhuman eye:
could you casually consent?
Held in your repose, you face Death
at its great ease—the poised spirit,
slower than you, and in no rush
now that you've paused, to see you go.

Joseph Chaney