

## Poor Peter

*Poor Peter* is set in the Middle Ages of Myth, of Sherwood Forest or Camelot or Christmas Carols. “Where is My Lady” which opens the cycle, also appears in my opera *Usher House*. There it is sung by the narrator, who I make to be Poe himself, and then reprised wordlessly by Madeline as she walks up from her crypt at the end. The “Beauty and grace...” refrain, although not so much the whole poem, is meant to sound as if Poe might have written it.

“Tune the Fiddle” offers a foot-stomping contrast in tempo and dynamic, and gives a hint of the sass and cheek expected of actual minstrels in festive songs. Minstrels seem to have been a rowdy lot, incidentally, judging from *Grove’s*.

The main idea of “The Ballad of Poor Peter” comes from Yeats “The Song of Wandering Aengus,” where a girl materializes magically, runs off, and is followed by Aengus forever:

“Though I am old with wandering,  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long-dappled grass,  
And pluck, till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.”

The debt of my own lines to this, particularly in my third stanza, is plain enough.

Even so, Aengus and Poor Peter are not the same. We cannot imagine Aengus singing “Tune The Fiddle.” Poor Peter has a twinkle; he is audience – aware, he invites the smile and the tear together. These traits give him a place in the world we know, as well as the world of dreams.

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