

**The Oxford Book of Modern Verse**  
by Nicholas Ruddock

At the Abbey Theatre, in 1934, she came to the attention of William Butler Yeats. In this photograph, dark hair frames her face, a moonstone, her creamy pallor typical for Ireland back then, before Ryan Air, before the Costa del Sol burnt winter away. An actress less than half his age, her voice was pitch-perfect for singing the old songs, for the recitation of poetry. He saw her first outside, leaning against a shadowed wall, backlit, a parenthesis. Inside, she sang and recited and he spoke to her, his incompetence with girls and women paring him away, saying, with your permission I could edit your verse. Oh the flattering. She was bare to the world, undisguised by metaphor. Leaning towards her, over a small desk, light flickering, he said, Margot, I find rhythm wanting in your body of work. As if she didn't know it, as if she hadn't intended it, as though she hadn't reached out for the very lack of it. Married, a mother of two, a skewed gyroscope, her chameleon moods. Finally he succumbed to her, a touch on her shoulder, unbuttoning her in Donegal in November, the hotel under direct assault by a north wind that had driven even the sheep indoors. He recovered his potency with her, a Second Coming, and in good faith he included seven of her poems in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, 1936. Then he went to Spain with his wife to translate the Upanishads, but Margot distracted him still, her pulse beating in his head, her white skin addictive, her body his nightmare, a trainwreck, brakes shot uncertain on the narrow-gauge, drive-wheel spinning, the other passengers already jumped for their lives while he stayed, unbalanced, shovelling coal into her, and the heat of her body burnt holes in his hands and his face and his falling-down underwear and his gabardine trousers which were undone to her as dawn broke to that otherwise empty bedroom, to the soporific breezes of Palma, Majorca. The morning post, her letters on a silver tray unanswered. Then Barcelona, where she cleaved and broke, alone in the Plaça de Colom, her only friends dogs and vagrants and midnight vendors of street food, cobblestones, her own footsteps leading up a staircase to an anonymous roof, to a skylight in a green and rusty metal frame, down through which she fell—not as you or I would fall, thinking *oh no oh no*—with no thought in her torn-up head at all, down through shards of glass to an earthen floor where three Catalans, surprised, used everything at hand to staunch the blood that flowed from her now-glittering veins: tablecloths, restaurant linen, napkins, aprons stained with the juice of beets and prunes and mustard, the sauce of soups and apples, daubing and pressing until they ran to the street and waved down the Guàrdia Urbana and the Guàrdia Urbana carried her away. Next she entered a series of hospitals from which she never recovered, and in our world today, 2018, no mention is made of her, of Margot Ruddock, nor is she included in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, but the wild swans at Coole still turn their heads, and falcons twist against leather restraints, and the bishops of Ireland remain as mute as ever to the sounds the wounded make.