

YEATS:
'THE LAKE ISLE AT
INNISFREE'



Carl Tighe



The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (Rhythm, Rhyme, sounds)

I will a/rise and go now, and go to Inn/is/free, A 13
And a small cab/in build there, of clay and watt/les made: B 14
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the hon/ey/-bee, A 14
And live a/lone in the bee-loud glade. B 9

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropp/ing slow, A 13
Dropp/ing from the veils of the morn/ing to where the crick/et sings; B 14
There mid/night's all a glimm/er, and noon a purp/le glow, A 13
And even/ing full of the linn/et's wings. B 9

I will a/rise and go now, for al/ways night and *day* A 13
I hear lake wat/er lap/ing with low sounds by the shore; B 13
While I stand on the road/*way*, or on the pave/ments *grey*, A 13
I hear it in the deep heart's core. B 8

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (repetition of words and phrases)

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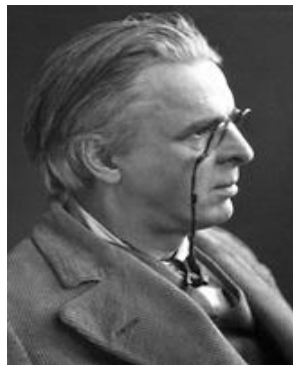
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NOTES

- In Irish Gaelic the word 'innis' means 'island'.
- The poem was inspired by the splashing sounds of a street seller's soda fountain while in London.
- Bees in Celtic mythology had secret wisdom and come from or live in Paradise.
- Nine – 3 x 3 - the most important number in Celtic mythology. Welsh and Irish literature abounds with references to it. Nine houses for the king, nine branches of the tree of wisdom, nine nights with nine women, and the old Celtic week consisted of nine days. The number symbolised the whole, a sense of unity, harmony and completeness and could only be bettered by the number 18 – that is, 9 + 9.
- Repetitions – to make it happen as if by magic: go, there, bee, peace, dropping, I will arise and go now.
- The rhyme scheme ABAB and the fairly regular 13/14 syllable line create a hypnotic kind of rocking rhythm, akin to a magic chant or spell.
- The last line posits a deep heart's core that is outside the writer – as if in the Buddhist sense of transcendence he is communing with the universe around him through his imaginative connection to this place.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin. His father was a lawyer and a well-known portrait painter. Yeats was educated in London and in Dublin, but he spent his summers in the west of Ireland in the family's summer house at Connaught and in Sligo. The young Yeats was very much part of the *fin de siècle* in London; at the same time he was active in societies that attempted an Irish literary revival. His first volume of verse appeared in 1887, but in his earlier period his dramatic production outweighed his poetry. Together with Lady Gregory he founded the Irish Theatre, which was to become

the Abbey Theatre, and served as its chief playwright until the movement was joined by John Synge. His plays usually treat Irish legends; they also reflect his fascination with mysticism and spiritualism. *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The King's Threshold* (1904), and *Deirdre* (1907) are among the best known. In 1923 Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This poem was written in 1888, and was published first in the *National Observer* (1890) and then reprinted in Yeats' second collection, *The Rose* (1893). The poem was part of the rather dreamy and mystic Celtic cultural revival that prefigured the altogether more harsh reality of the struggle for political independence in Easter Uprising in 1916 and the civil war that followed Irish Independence in 1922, after which Yeats became a senator.



Here is Ezra Pound's rather tongue in cheek response to Yeats:

The Lake Isle
By Ezra Pound

O GOD, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
 Give me in due time, I beseech you, a little tobacco-shop,
 With the little bright boxes
 piled up neatly upon the shelves
 And the loose fragrant cavendish 5
 and the shag,
 And the bright Virginia
 loose under the bright glass cases,
 And a pair of scales
 not too greasy, 10
 And the *volailles* dropping in for a word or two in passing,
 For a flip word, and to tidy their hair a bit.

O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
 Lend me a little tobacco-shop, 15
 or install me in any profession
 Save this damn'd profession of writing,
 where one needs one's brains all the time.