

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

by W.B Yeats

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 honeybee,
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.

Glossary

Wattles – Wooden poles, intertwined with thin branches to form a wall or roof.

Glimmer – flicker of light (here used to mean the twinkle of stars).

Linnet – a small song bird, once commonly kept as a cage bird because of its beautiful singing.

Background

Yeats wrote this poem in 1888 when he was a young man, living in London. He was lonely and homesick for Ireland at the time. Looking in a shop window, he saw a toy fountain and the sound of the water reminded him of lake water. Inspired by this, he wrote "The Lake Isle of Innisfree".

Analysis

Stanza One

The poem opens very formally with the words "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree." It has been pointed out that these words echo those of the prodigal son in the Bible when he says, "I will arise and go to my father." These biblical overtones reinforce the idea of Innisfree being an almost holy place and bring to mind the prodigal son's sense of relief when he resolved to leave his chaotic, unhappy life and return to his childhood home – a place of serenity and simplicity.

The poet goes on to describe the life he will lead on the island. He will be completely self-sufficient, having "nine bean rows" and "a hive for the honey-bee". The poet's vision is of a romantic, idyllic, timeless way of life. Yeats imagines living in peace and solitude; he says he will "live alone in the bee-loud glade." The only sounds will be of nature. It seems that Yeats is rejecting the hustle and bustle of the modern world. The details in the poem give it a timeless quality; there is no hint of the modern world in Yeats' vision.

Stanza Two

In this stanza, Yeats becomes so involved with the idea of this peaceful paradise that the future tense is abandoned and he uses the present tense instead. It is almost as if, by thinking and writing about Innisfree, he imagines himself there at that moment. He tells us that "peace comes dropping slow," and "midnight's all a glimmer". He moves through each stage of the day, bringing his vision to life for us with his vivid descriptions and beautiful imagery. In the morning, the mist is like veils thrown over the lake; at noon, the purple heather blazes under the sun; the evening is full of the whirr of the linnet's wings (the linnet is a small songbird) and at night, the stars fill the sky: "midnight's all a glimmer". The sounds in this stanza are soft and slow, creating a sense of peace and calm.

Stanza Three

Yeats brings us back to the opening lines in this stanza, beginning again with the words "I will arise and go". The solemnity is reinforced and emphasised by this repetition, as is the strength of his longing. The alliteration and assonance in the line, "I hear lake water lapping

with low sounds by the shore;" emphasise the tranquillity of the scene Yeats is describing. The broad vowels in this line slow the movement of the poem. In contrast to this timeless, magical, colourful place, we are reminded of Yeats' reality at the time of writing: "While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey". The colourless grey of the pavements seems dreary and depressing and we can empathise with Yeats' yearning for the lake isle of Innisfree, a yearning he feels in "the deep heart's core." The last line is monosyllabic, which drives home the simple strength of the message.

Themes

The poet's discontent, which leads him to imagine this perfect place.

A longing to go back to nature and live a self-sufficient life.

The search for peace, wisdom and truth.

How could you use this poem in the Junior Certificate Examination?

This poem could be used to answer a question on:

- Wishes or thoughts
- An interesting place
- Sound effects or musical qualities
- A poem I would recommend
- A poem which captures the imagination
- Interesting imagery



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