

W.B.YEATS (WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS)

- William Butler Yeats (13 June 1865 – 28 January 1939) was an Irish poet and one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature. A pillar of the Irish literary establishment, he helped to found the Abbey Theatre, and in his later years served two terms as a Senator of the Irish Free State. He was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and others.
- Yeats was born in Sandymount, Ireland, and educated there and in London. He spent childhood holidays in County Sligo and studied poetry from an early age, when he became fascinated by Irish legends and the occult. These topics feature in the first phase of his work, which lasted roughly until the turn of the 20th century. His earliest volume of verse was published in 1889, and its slow-paced and lyrical poems used a system of symbols and imagery to convey concepts. He was deeply interested in mystic religion and supernatural. From 1900, his poetry grew more physical and realistic. He largely renounced the transcendental beliefs of his youth, though he remained preoccupied with physical and spiritual masks, as well as with cyclical theories of life. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

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.

Summary

Stanza 1

The speaker declares that he will get up and go at this moment to a place called Innisfree, where he will build a small cabin made of "clay and wattles," or simple materials. He wishes to grow nine rows of beans and keep a hive for honeybees. He wants to live alone, hearing the sounds of the bees in the glade.

Stanza 2

At Innisfree, where the speaker plans to build his cabin and live, he expects to feel "some peace" because of the close proximity to the natural world. He will hear crickets and watch the day pass into night, with evening "full of the linnet's wings."

Stanza 3

The speaker repeats his declaration that he will "arise now and go" to Innisfree because he is constantly reminded of the sound of "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore." It is revealed that the speaker currently lives in an urban environment with "pavements grey." Yet he still hears and feels called to return to Innisfree for the peace it provides.

BREIF CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

One of the reasons why Lake Isle of Innisfree is so famous and has been such an enduring success is the way in which it uses assonance and alliteration to create haunting sound effects, resulting in a poem which has real verbal music. These sound effects almost lull us as a lullaby would lull a child, helping us to imagine the idyllic setting that is being described to us.

There are lots of examples of alliteration (the repetition of consonant sounds) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) in this stanza. Note the alliteration in "s," "p," "d," "m," and "n." Likewise there is assonance in "slow" and "grow" and "midnight," "linnet," "glimmer" and "wings." These are examples of how Yeats creates the word music that makes this poem so excellent.

Note the way as well in which the last stanza suggests that the speaker feels a mystical connection with nature that endures even in spite of the intrusions of city life. He is always able to hear the "lake water lapping" on the shore of Innisfree, in spite of the "pavements grey" of his environment. This is something he hears in his "deep heart's core," and cannot be ignored or drowned out by the urban sounds that oppress him so

Symbolism in Lake Isle of Innisfree

Although Innisfree is a real, physical place and one Yeats visited often in his childhood, in the poem it is revealed to be in many ways symbolic of the speaker's past and his idealized future. It is symbolic of the peace the speaker feels that only nature can provide. It represents a place, such as childhood, that cannot, in fact, be returned to, as both the speaker and the world have changed. Therefore, it exists as he remembers it only in his mind. However, the way the speaker describes it is reverent and resolute. He doesn't just wish to revisit Innisfree; he declares that he shall "arise

and go." Yet as clear as that declaration is, and as specific as his desires for what he will do in Innisfree are, the imagery he conjures becomes increasingly dreamlike. He thinks about the "purple glow" of noon and an "evening full of the linnet's wings." Innisfree shifts between symbolizing a real place from the speaker's past and an imaginary dream of his future.

For Yeats, Innisfree is more than just a physical place. It is also a state of mind, just as Walden was for Thoreau. Innisfree's symbolic importance has also to do with its association with the original mythological inhabitants of Ireland. As literary scholar C. Stuart Hunter points out, the nature references in the poem are linked to the Celtic tradition/motif of sacred plants and trees. Those inhabitants—known as the Tuatha Dé Danaan—frequently lured humans to their world, often through the natural environment. Yeats once wrote: "The old Gaelic literature is full of appeals of the Tribes of the goddess Danu to ... mortals whom they would bring into their country." Moreover, the pull of Innisfree is not just from the speaker's childhood memory, but also from his adult interest in the mythological elements of that landscape. Viewed through this mythological lens, the otherwise "natural" or "sensory" information in the poem about Innisfree as a location also takes on a more symbolic nature. For example, the Tuatha Dé Danaan built circular hill forts made of "wattles" from the hazel tree, and hazels were of supreme importance in Celtic mythology since they were associated with wisdom and eloquence.

Roadways

The appearance of the roadway and "pavements grey" in the final stanza of the poem is an abrupt departure from the dreamy, watery nature the speaker portrays in depth throughout the first two stanzas. Although the reader gets the sense that the speaker is not currently at his beloved

Innisfree, it comes as a sudden shock that he could be in fact residing in its opposite, the angles and hardness of a city. Yeats uses this contrast to symbolize both the thing the speaker is trying to escape and also the notion of urbanization as a direct contrast to nature. The 19th century in which Yeats wrote the poem was a century that saw modernization and industrialization in the name of progress. The speaker of the poem seems to hint that it hasn't brought him much in the way of peace. Despite the suggestion that being in a city surrounds someone with people, he wishes for nothing more than to be alone in nature. Roadways and pavement symbolize that urbanization brought about more alienation and stress than the previous way of life that was more connected to the natural world.

ANALYSIS

Structure and Meter

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is composed of three quatrains—a quatrain is a stanza consisting of four lines. Each quatrain moves the poem in a different direction. Stanza 1 provides the physical details of what the speaker intends to do. He will go and build a small cabin with nine rows of beans and a beehive, and he will live alone "in the bee-loud glade." The second stanza introduces feelings the speaker expects to feel after he goes—he "shall have some peace there"—and describes how this peace will come "dropping slow" throughout the day and night. Finally, in Stanza 3 the speaker repeats his declaration to "arise and go now." But in this stanza he provides what has motivated this sudden action. "Night and day" he hears the sound of the "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore" despite the actuality that he is in a city. In fact, he hears the sound not in his memory but "in the deep heart's core." Yeats uses these three quatrains to move the reader from an image to a feeling to a motivation.

Each quatrain has a rhyme scheme of abab and contains three longer lines with a final shorter line that provides a sense of symmetry. The poem's stresses follow an iambic pattern, where each beat has a short unstressed syllable followed by a longer stressed syllable. It shifts from hexameter (six stresses per line) to tetrameter (four iambs per line) in the last line of each quatrain. This creates a sense of completion and an ending emphasis within each quatrain. The rhythmic structure of the repetition of the rhyming and stress pattern mimics the rhythm of "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore." The stress pattern of the poem also reflects the rhythm of a heartbeat, which may be referenced in the final stanza of the poem. That is when the speaker claims to hear the lake water lapping "in the deep heart's core."

Alliteration, Assonance, Consonance, and Anaphora

Yeats's use of alliteration, assonance, and consonance throughout the poem is deft and deliberate, creating at times an almost musical quality to the lines. Alliteration is the repetition of sounds at the beginning of nearby words. Yeats uses heavy alliteration in Stanza 1 with the line, "Nine

bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee." The next line creates consonance with a new sound, "And live alone in the bee-loud glade." Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in adjacent words. The repetitive sounds in these first two lines create a mesmerizing and hypnotic tone. There is just enough difference in the vowel sounds of have, hive, and honey to cause an effective tension that slows the reader down and also creates a sense of peace.

The resemblance of vowel sounds is assonance. Stanza 2 uses assonance in the line "And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow" and assonance and consonance in "There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow." The effect continues to slow the reader down and enables them to experience the visual and auditory sensation the speaker is providing. In Stanza 3's line "I hear lake water lapping with the low sounds by the shore," Yeats uses alliteration to create a rhythmic, musical effect. The effect is complicated enough that it strikes the reader's ear musically rather than with a heavy hand.

Yeats also uses a great deal of repetition in general and anaphora, which is the repetition of phrases at the beginning of lines, throughout the poem to create a hypnotic, daydreaming, and resolute effect. He repeats the phrase "I will arise and go now" at the beginning and ending of the poem as a sort of ellipsis, declaring and emphasizing his resolution. He repeats the word go more than once, an action at odds with where the speaker actually is and the nonaction he is currently taking. He also repeats the word there in reference to Innisfree, emphasizing his idealization of it as a place. He repeats the word peace, which reiterates the feeling he is searching for. Lastly, the speaker "hears" the "lake water lapping," a sound he hears "in the deep heart's core." Hearing is repeated as a way to emphasize that an auditory sense provides the speaker's ticket to conjuring up Innisfree.

Imagery and Tone

Yeats packs a great deal of imagery and emotion into a 12-line poem. Since the first stanza dwells in physical details, the speaker paints a picture of where he plans to go and what he will

do there. The declaration of "I will" emphasizes a resolute tone rather than a dreamy one. It's not a wish the speaker describes but a clear intention as though he sees no other option for himself if he wants to feel peace. The imagery is largely visual in the first stanza, describing a cabin built "of clay and wattles," precisely nine rows of beans, and a beehive. Wattles are rods mixed with sticks, which are used to create walls. Yeats also introduces another piece of sensory information to the reader, that of "the bee-loud glade" where the speaker plans to live alone. The contrast of the sound of buzzing bees with a person being alone creates a striking sensory image for the reader. It also helps to create the poem's first contrasting tone.

The final two lines of the poem provide an indication of the speaker's time and place. The speaker is in the present moment and in an urban environment. This surprise ending causes readers to reconsider the context of the previous lines they've read. They are now colored with the knowledge that the speaker wishes to escape the "pavements grey." He wants to return to something simpler and more essential—his current situation is a counterpoint to the peace he is seeking at Innisfree. This competing imagery of urban versus the evocative natural imagery provided earlier creates tension in the poem and reinforces a tone of nostalgia and yearning.

As Stanza 2 introduces emotions into the poem, it begins to shift the tone with the word peace, which appears twice. The reader now understands that the speaker's desire to be alone is to seek this sense of peace, a sense he apparently cannot find in his current situation. The introduction of peace creates the poem's next contrast, or tension, since it implies the speaker does not feel it in his current setting and state. Despite the tranquil imagery being presented in this stanza, Yeats continues to reinforce a tension that will pay off in the third stanza when it is revealed where the speaker currently resides.

The imagery of "peace comes dropping slow" also hints that for the speaker, life is not currently made up of slowness, which he sees as the key to the peace he will find. This is another contrast that emphasizes a tense or unsatisfied tone. More auditory and visual imagery is provided, from

crickets singing to the "purple glow" of noon "and evening full of the linnet's wings." (A linnet is a small gray and brown bird with a red breast.) Finally, in Stanza 3 the speaker repeats his resolution with determination as though imagining what he will find there has only strengthened his resolve. Yeats provides more auditory imagery in the sensation of the speaker hearing "lake water lapping." A final tension reveals that the speaker is currently in a place that is nearly the opposite of Innisfree—standing on a roadway with "pavements grey." By revealing that the speaker hears the sound of the lake in "the deep heart's core," Yeats ends on an emotional tone that emphasizes the speaker's feelings for and connection to Innisfree. It also shows how disconnected he feels from his current urban environment. The speaker repeats the resolution that he will go to Innisfree. However, at the end of the poem he is still in the same place, which creates an underlying tone of sadness to the poem.

A Prayer for my Daughter

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid

*Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.*

*I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.*

*May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.*

*Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-leggèd smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.*

*In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.*

*May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.*

*My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.*

*An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?*

*Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl*

Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house

Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;

For arrogance and hatred are the wares

Peddled in the thoroughfares.

How but in custom and in ceremony

Are innocence and beauty born?

Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,

And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

Summary and Analysis of the Poem

William Butler Yeats wrote the poem "A Prayer for my Daughter," dedicated to his daughter, Anne, and concerning her future wellbeing and prospects, shortly after her birth in 1919. It was first published in his 1921 poetry collection, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. Yeats had complex views on early twentieth-century issues including sexism, feminism, and Irish Nationalism; these views are reflected in the poem. Critics claim the poem is one of the most significant Modernist poems by an Irish writer. Aside from his literary achievements, Yeats founded the Abbey Theatre and served as a Senator of the Irish Free State.

In this ten-stanza poem, Yeats questions how best to raise his daughter in politically turbulent times. He ponders how she will survive the difficult times ahead for Ireland. Significantly, Yeats feels helpless not knowing how to be a good father. He wants to give his daughter the best life he possibly can. He explores his intense emotions throughout the poem.

Yeats assumes that his daughter needs a man to look after her. He worries about what will happen to her when he is gone. It is crucial that, when she is older, she finds a wealthy husband to keep her stable and comfortable. These thoughts reflect typical nineteenth- and early twentieth-century femininity; as such, the poem is very traditional and gender conservative.

The poem opens as Yeats watches Anne sleep in a cradle. It is a stormy night and Yeats can't settle. He worries about so many things, but most of all, his daughter. Her cradle shelters her from the storm, but

one day, she will outgrow it, and then he must find other ways to protect her. Yeats refers to both the physical storm outside and the political storm brewing across Ireland.

In the second stanza, Yeats worries about what the future holds. He looks out at the sea, picturing the years ahead springing from the waves and chasing them both. He contrasts Anne's innocence against violence that is outside her control. She is the sea, and the brutal storm outside symbolizes the forces working against her. No matter what Yeats does, the storm will always chase after his daughter.

The third stanza is a prayer to an unnamed force. Yeats wants a pretty daughter, but not so beautiful that she relies on her beauty for everything. He doesn't want a proud or vain daughter who doesn't have any friends and spends all day staring in the mirror. He doesn't want her to distract men, either. She only needs enough beauty to secure a husband. Too much beauty is dangerous for a woman.

Yeats turns to Greek myth in the fourth stanza. He uses Helen of Troy as an example of a doomed woman. She was proud, vain, and arrogant. She destroyed a territory without apology. Above all, Helen drove men to catastrophic distraction. She found love, but it destroyed her, and she was miserable forever. Yeats once proposed to a beautiful woman who rejected him and then lived miserably with her chosen husband; this stanza reflects his own embittered feelings.

Since Anne must possess more than just beauty, Yeats considers the qualities she will need in stanza five. She must be compassionate and kind. The nicest people are modest. Moreover, modest and courteous people attract others to them. Politeness and manners are everything. His daughter should be attractive enough to find marriage, but not so attractive that she is cruel and unkind to men who love her.

In stanza six, Yeats considers what makes a woman happy and fulfilled. He believes that women must be innocent and virtuous. They make others feel better and they bring peace to the world. Yeats continues this theme in stanza seven. Kind and strong, self-contained women are incorruptible. Just as the storm outside can't tear leaves from sturdy trees, turmoil and war can't break a strong woman.

Yeats implores his daughter to shun passion and wild feelings in stanza eight. She must be temperate because people who love too deeply are also prone to hate. Hate destroys people and makes them do cruel things. Again, this stanza reflects how Yeats felt when his true love rejected him. He doesn't want his daughter to experience these feelings of hatred.

The ninth stanza continues the theme of victory over hatred. Women should be stoic and impregnable, not revealing their true feelings to anyone. The ideal woman makes everyone happy and comfortable even when she is broken inside or suffering from financial misfortune. Women are anchors around which everything else revolves.

Yeats completes "A Prayer for my Daughter" with a final wish. He wants her to marry a good husband from a stable family with aristocratic traditions. These families prize morality and purity above all things. She should not live a decadent life. Instead, she should rise above the storms raging around her, ascending to greater things.