

# The Lake Isle of Innisfree

W. B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939

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 Summary

The speaker says he's going to go to Innisfree to build a small, simple cabin. He'll have a little bean garden and a honeybee hive. He wants to live alone in peace with nature and the slow pace of country living. Sounds like a plan, buddy.

In the last stanza, the speaker restates that he's leaving and explains it's because every night he hears the water lapping against the shore (of Innisfree). Even though he lives in a more urban place with paved roads, deep down inside he's drawn to the rural sounds of Innisfree. It's all about rustling trees, not bustling buses for this speaker.

## The Lake Isle of Innisfree

### IN A NUTSHELL

William Butler Yeats was kind of a messy guy. By which we mean that he grew up with a lot of contradictions in his life.

He was an Irish city boy (living mostly in Dublin, and later London), but he visited his mother's hometown in County Sligo (totally country) every summer.

He received the best, most progressive education but was also drawn to good old fashioned Irish folklore.

He often wrote in traditional English styles, but also understood the Irish's desire for independence, and tried to write poems that reflected that, too.

There were so many opposing forces pulling him in different directions, and it really shows in his poetry. One poem might be influenced by Greek mythology and another by Irish folklore. One might be about the end of the world, and another might be the quiet end of his career.

He's a hodgepodge poet, and "**The Lake Isle of Innisfree**," published in 1893, is yet another example of his tendency to compare and contrast. It's a country-lovin' poem that actually takes place in a crowded, bustling city. It's all about how the speaker's dreams for the future don't quite reconcile with his present situation. As in, he wants something really bad, but he probably won't have it anytime soon. It's all about the mishmash clash between dreams and reality.

Sure, it probably wasn't too much of a stretch for Yeats to write about a city slicker who longs for the peace of the countryside, considering that as a boy he lived in Dublin and London and visited County Sligo (where the actual island of Innisfree is located) every summer for some much needed rural R and R. But this isn't just a poem about wanting some peace and quiet, and being stuck in the city. It's a whole lot more.

It's about the contradiction we have to live every day. We're stuck in one place, while we long for another. The grass is always, always, always greener on the other side of the fence, and Yeats was no stranger to that idea. His speaker is on the cusp of crossing that fence, but in the poem at least, he never quite gets there. So he lives the dream in his mind, while his body's stuck in the lackluster reality.

## THEMES

### MAN AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Conflict between man and the natural world is a common theme in literature—but not here! The speaker of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" takes a totally harmonious, tree-hugging, green-loving approach to nature. He seems to think it's the cure for all that ails him. This poem has a lot to do with the speaker wanting to feel at home, or close to his roots. It's possible that he thinks he can get closer to his roots, or his true self, by abandoning the messy, hectic life of the city and embracing a life based on the simple and predictable patterns of nature.

### HOME

Home is where the heart is, right? So while the speaker of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" appears to live in a city, it seems that in "his heart's core," home is somewhere entirely different, and he's obsessed with getting there. If we can pull anything from Yeats's biography, we might imagine that this idyllic spot on Innisfree is a place from the speaker's childhood. And hey, maybe that's how the speaker defines home—as an idealized spot in his memory of a childhood he longs to return to.

## ISOLATION

Isolation can be a pretty lonely affair, but not in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." The speaker seems to really crave some solitude, and can you blame him? He's sick of the congested city, and the only company he's after is that of the bees, the beans, and the birds. We can relate, right? After all, why do you think people have vacation homes in isolated locations—the beach, the mountains, and, of course, lakes? They want to "get away from it all." Well, so does our speaker, but maybe not just for a week or two, maybe for good.

### **WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS - HIS LIFE in short**

Born in Dublin, Ireland, on June 13, 1865, William Butler Yeats was the son of a well-known Irish painter, John Butler Yeats. He spent his childhood in County Sligo, where his parents were raised, and in London. He returned to Dublin at the age of fifteen to continue his education and study painting, but quickly discovered he preferred poetry. Born into the Anglo-Irish landowning class, Yeats became involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period, which sought to promote the spirit of Ireland's native heritage. Though Yeats never learned Gaelic himself, his writing at the turn of the century drew extensively from sources in Irish mythology and folklore. Also a potent influence on his poetry was the Irish revolutionary Maud Gonne, whom he met in 1889, a woman equally famous for her passionate nationalist politics and her beauty. Though she married another man in 1903 and grew apart from Yeats (and Yeats himself was eventually married to another woman, Georgie Hyde Lees), she remained a powerful figure in his poetry.

Yeats was deeply involved in politics in Ireland, and in the twenties, despite Irish independence from England, his verse reflected a pessimism about the political situation in his country and the rest of Europe, paralleling the increasing conservatism of his American counterparts in London, [T. S. Eliot](#) and [Ezra Pound](#). His work after 1910 was strongly influenced by Pound, becoming more modern in its concision and imagery, but Yeats never abandoned his strict adherence to traditional verse forms. He had a life-long interest in mysticism and the occult, which was off-putting to some readers, but he remained uninhibited in advancing his idiosyncratic philosophy, and his poetry continued to grow stronger as he grew older. Appointed a senator of the Irish Free State in 1922, he is remembered as an important cultural leader, as a major playwright (he was one of the founders of the famous Abbey Theatre in Dublin), and as one of the very greatest poets—in any language—of the century. W. B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and died in 1939 at the age of 73.