

The Lake Isle of Innisfree : A Critical Analysis

W.B. Yeats's compelling lyric 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' was published first in the 'National Observer' in 1890 and later reprinted in 'The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics' in 1892. One of Yeats's earlier poems, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' was an attempt to create a form of poetry that was purely Irish in origin rather than the one that adhered to the standards set by English poets and critics.

When Yeats was a child, his father had read to him from *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. The poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' is inspired by the poet's youthful desire to imitate Thoreau by living on Innisfree, an uninhabited island in Lough Gill. In his youth, Yeats would visit the land at Lough Gill at night, often accompanied by his cousin Henry Middleton. He suggests that when he was living in London, he would walk down Fleet Street and long for the seclusion of a pastoral site such as the isle. The sound of water coming from a fountain in a shop window reminded Yeats of the lake that he had previously seen, and it is this inspiration that Yeats credits for the creation of the poem.

'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' is a twelve-line poem divided into three quatrains and is a fine example of Yeats's earlier lyric poems. Throughout the three short quatrains, the poem explores the speaker's longing for the peace and tranquillity of Innisfree while residing in an urban environment. The speaker in this poem yearns to return to the island of Innisfree because of the peace and quiet it affords. He can escape the noise of the city and be lulled by the 'lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore'. On this small island, he can return to nature by growing beans and having bee hives, by enjoying the 'glimmer' of midnight, the 'purple glow' of noon, and the sweet sounds of linnet's wings. He can even build a cabin and stay on the island much as Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist, did on Walden Pond.

To conclude, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' is one the most enduring poems from the pen of Yeats. The tranquil, hypnotic hexameters recreate the rhythmic pulse of the poem. The simple imagery of the quiet life the speaker longs to lead lulls the reader into his idyllic fantasy, until the penultimate line jolts the speaker and the reader back into the reality of his drab urban existence: 'While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey'. The final line – 'I hear it in the deep heart's core' – is a key statement of Yeats. The implication that the truths of the 'deep heart's core' are essential to life is one that would preoccupy Yeats for the rest of his career as a poet. The struggle to remain true to the deep heart's core may be thought of as Yeats's primary undertaking as a poet.