

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE



The Isle of Innisfree, Lough Gill, Co. Sligo

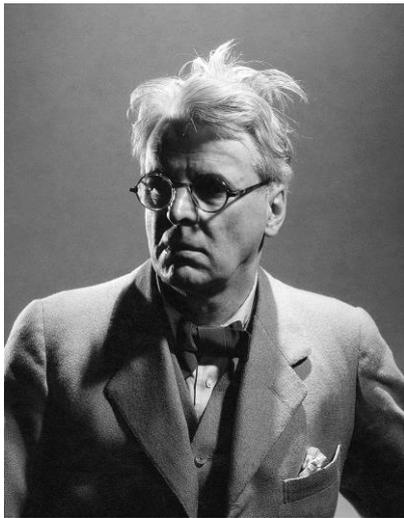
I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

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.

W. B. Yeats
(1865-1939)

W. B. YEATS



The great Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, was born in Dublin, but bought a Norman tower in County Sligo to use as a summer home. He wrote many poems about his tower, Thoor Ballylee, about the nearby Coole Park and the wild swans on its lake, about the great house Lissadell and the sisters who lived there,

*Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle,*

and about Ben Bulbin, the distinctive and imposing flat-ridged mountain under which he wanted to be buried:

*Under bare Ben Bulbin's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid*

he foretold, and composed his own epitaph, to be inscribed on his tombstone:

*Cast a cold eye
On life, on death,
Horseman, pass by!*

Sligo, the county of his grandfather, loomed large in Yeats's poetry – its landscape, its place names, its myths and its people. "It formed a prospect of glens, lakes, harbours, islands and towns which would command his imagination throughout his life and would subsequently lay claim to his body after his death," wrote Yeats's successor Seamus Heaney.

"*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*," Heaney continued, "is not only a universally known title, it is a place to be visited on Lough Gill. The poem combined traces of an early childhood adventure when he spent a night in the open on the shores of the lake. The wandering rhythm of the opening lines owes something to the airs of Irish folksong which Yeats heard in Sligo."