

# Things change with time

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



William Butler Yeats was an active participant in the Irish war for independence. Due to his experiences in the war he writes in a way that speaks negatively of the tragic event. He uses emotion, politics, imagery, and beauty in his poetry. which in the end, helps him develop his craft. His growth and experience as a poet shows from the peaceful “ Lake Isle of Innisfree” to the intense “ An Irish Airman Foresees his Death.” A review of these two pieces would cause one to quickly realize that each has a different tone. He first started his poetry in an effort to write about beauty and tranquility, but these themes quickly became transitory; he begins to use his poetry for his views on Irish politics and his feelings about the war. Yeats’ goal is to educate readers on the cultural aspects of Ireland and the political stands he finds important and worth conveying. William Butler Yeats is highly honored as of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. He was born June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, Ireland and died on January 28, 1939 in Cap Martin, France. He was the first child of his father John Butler Yeats, a well-known painter, who later had three more children. While a child his family lived in London for fourteen years, however, he made it incumbent to himself to keep his Irish roots predominant; He shows this in his poems and plays through characters, word choice, and themes.

At the age of nineteen William enrolled in Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, he was hoping to pursue a career in painting but instead found his love for poetry. Later in his life he moved back to Ireland and married his wife until death, Georgie Hyde-Lees (Authors). In his early years, Yeats wrote his first poems in love for Sligo, a city in west Ireland. Here he portrays a lot of folklore using a substantial amount of supernatural components and use

of heroes. While living in London, with his family, he still wrote strongly of Irish folklore and heroes with supernatural abilities. In 1916 Yeats became part of the nationalist cause, inspired by the Easter Rising. This was an unsuccessful six-day armed rebellion of Irish republicans against the British in Dublin. This later contributed to his flee of England and his return to Ireland. This helped him realize that he needed to finish more of his poems and plays as life is something that should not be taken for granted (Authors). Eighteen eighty-five was an important year for Yeats. He published his first poem, in the Dublin University Review, which sparked his love and passion for poetry and writing plays. During this year he also met John O'Leary, a famous patriot to the country of Ireland. O'Leary was passionate about Irish books, music, and ballads, he was known to urge on young poets to write about Irish culture. Yeats wanted to take in his ideas and apply them to his works. He later published Irish ballads, Irish folklore, and Irish legends due to the influence and friendship with O'Leary (Encyclopedia). In Yeats' poem "Lake Isle of Innisfree" he shows the peaceful nature he possessed while first starting his career in poetry. He specifically picked a very isolated region in this poem to show the reader, without a doubt, the tone of the poem. For example, Yeats writes,

I will Arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,

And a small cabin built there, of clay and wattles made:

Nine bean-rows I will have there, a hive for the honey-bee,

And live alone in the bee-loud glade (1-6). The speaker, obviously Yeats himself, is talking of a quiet place in which he would like to migrate, in hopes of building a new calm and collective life. According to the poem, it is so calm at Lake Isle that he will be able to hear the bees in the open space of the woods (glade) of where he will live. As a young poet he writes of beautiful places and events that he loves. This was one of his biggest goals when he started, he wanted to bring these surreal places of Ireland into his works and to help educate people on the Irish culture. Yeats has multiple lines where he vividly describes this place in a way that helps one mentally see it. For example, “ 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” (7-9). In this excerpt, Yeats describes the sights and sounds around him, he goes into specific detail to really recreate this place mentally for the reader. His word choice of “ Glimmer” and “ Lapping” are great adjectives that give the poem life and help one relate to the writing. His use of imagery and word choice are truly what makes this piece stand out.

Yeats’ writing in “ An Irish Airman Foresees his Death” presents the reader with a short story of an Irishman fighting in the Irish war for independence. In this writing he uses many lines to indirectly talk about his political views of the war. For example, Yeats writes, “ The years to come seemed waste of breath,/A waste of breath the years behind” (14-15). “ Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,/nor public men, nor cheering crowds,/a lonely impulse of delight/drove to this tumult in the clouds” (9-12). Here, Yeats makes it clear that the war for independence is a waste of “ breath” and that the time

already spent on the war has been no better. On the other hand, the “waste of breath” could be meant literally and that this war has brought nothing but death and how it should be over. The poet specifically says why he joined the war in the first place. He states that nobody persuaded him to join and that the reason he joined was for an impulse of delight, or rather, for himself. His growth as a poet is very prevalent in this poem. Because of the events happening around him his tone and stories have changed from tranquil to intense. Most of his poems in this time period revolved around the current issues at hand and his efforts in the war. At the beginning of the poem Yeats starts by saying “I know that I shall meet my fate” (1). He also refers to ascending into the clouds two times during the poem by writing, “Somewhere in the clouds above” and “Drove to this tumult in the clouds” (2, 7). One could say that he fought in the war as a pilot and took to the skies during a battle. Stating that there is tumult in the clouds he is explaining the chaos and confusion that went on during these dog fights. Although, the reader could say that Yeats meant he was going to heaven by ascending into the clouds.

By starting the poem with a line that explains how he will soon meet his fate it is easy to think that he may be indirectly saying that he will not make it out of the war and his final destination is up into the sky.

Finally, in Yeats’ “Easter 1916” he explains the beginning of the Irish War for Independence and how it started. He specifically talks about how Britain and Ireland ended up in the middle of a war and the opinions of Yeats on the whole ordeal. Yeats pays tribute to revolutionists who lost their lives in the

war and how he does not want to leave their names to die with them. For example, he writes, We know their dream; enough to know they dreamed and are dead; and what if excess of love bewildered them till they died?

I write it out now in a verse- MacDonagh and Macbride And Connolly and Pearse (70-77). The speaker, Yeats himself, is speaking of those close to him and also revolutionary to the war who have passed away. Many of the people he states here are poets like himself. The revolutionists dreamed of an independent Ireland and did not live long enough to see their dream come true. Stating that they loved too much and that it led them to be confused and possibly die prematurely shows their patriotism to their home country of Ireland. Yeats continues, “ Hearts with one purpose alone through summer and winter seem enchanted to a stone to trouble the living stream” (41-44).

The new goal is enchanted into stone in all the nationalists’ hearts. They now want to focus their efforts on rebelling against the country who earlier held them under its powerful rule. Throughout the poem he repeats the phrase “ A terrible beauty is born” (16, 40, 80). Although Ireland is now going to be fighting for their independence and will soon be free it comes at a cost of life. The beauty is the work towards the common goal, but the terrible portion would be all the death and destruction that war brings. Yeats includes a lot of indirect meanings in his poetry. He likes to “ beat around the bush” per say, giving many hints and key words to help the reader depict what he is really trying to say in a particular segment. It is easy to feel the tone of the poem here, you can feel the depressing and grayish mood that is shown. This gives his poetry life in many opinions, Jhan Hochman, a credited

scholar who is a freelance writer and currently teaches in Portland, also agrees. One would believe that Yeats' success is due to his great ability to describe something so well that the reader can see it with their own eyes. But, Hochman touches on the fact that the little use of imagery in "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" gives it "life" and helps support the real tone. Expressing that the lack of imagery helps give this poem its gloomy feel and helps the reader focus on the poem's tone rather than vivid explanation and colorful imagery. In addition, he claims that the speaker of the poem is supposed to be his close friend Robert Gregory instead of Yeats himself. He goes on to talk about how the speaker is choosing between whether or not to accept life or death. With these feelings come the abnormal reason for joining the war, usually one joins for his country or people, but not in this case. For example, Hochman writes, "The speaker states that the usual attraction of war did not entice him, and that he chose to become a soldier because of 'a lonely impulse of delight'" (Napierkowski 76). Toward the end of the poem he touches on the fact that the speaker helps reveal that life and death are both balanced and that selecting one option over the other is essentially choosing both. Yeats' talks about death and how Gregory will end up dying in the clouds himself.

He is ultimately relating his death to the air, which is usually used to show life and breath but instead suggests clouds and air as a metaphor of heaven. Hochman believes that the poem ends with balancing the "rational and irrational aspects of the poem" (Napierkowski 76). Talking about how the speaker answers the irrational questions in the poem with the rational world he comes from; he also touches on the irrational world of the clouds and how

it offers an impulse of delight and death. Most scholars agree that Yeats' earlier poetry is an example of a calmer and more tranquil tone. Chris Semansky, an instructor of English literature and composition at Portland community college, touches on the fact that in his earlier years Yeats yearned for peace. Escaping reality and almost daydreaming is how it is explained, he is almost imaging a perfect life or what his best-case scenario would be. Many scholars agree with Semansky that this is one of Yeats' best pieces, the lack of explanation is what makes the reader think, "What is the speaker's incentive to go to Innisfree?" since it is never directly stated in the poem. It is very easy for one to relate to his vision is that a common fantasy is to be close with nature and escape the busy lives that we live in. He also indirectly talks about how peace is abundant from morning to nightfall but instead transforms morning into veils from which peace falls and night into a place where the crickets sing. This helps the reader infer that the speaker's life at home is very chaotic, busy, and stressful.

Most people would not want to move to an island to be completely isolated by themselves, so for Yeats to describe it to be such a quiet and lonely place shows hardships in his current life. It is also said that Yeats was looking for a spiritual retreat and wanted such a quiet place to help search for himself as a person. He is a young poet when he writes this and most likely still looking to identify himself and build a healthy self-image. Towards the end of the poem he ties it back to reality and talks about standing in a street surrounded by pavement. This image gives the tone of gray and silent, which contrasts with the soothing soft image of the water. The speaker, even in the city, can still hear the sounds of nature around him. He wants for this



daydream to come true so badly he still subliminally thinks about the perfect image of this perfect place during his busy industrial life.

In conclusion, William Butler Yeats was a very nature involved and a very political poet. He liked to speak his mind, especially on the Irish war for independence, and give his political stance to education people more on a subject. As an early poet he was very calm and wrote poems of beauty and tranquility, as he aged he wrote in contrast with his earlier self. As a poet he published many amazing pieces of work and wrote in his own style and used an interesting variety of word choice to help the reader really see what Yeats was explaining.