The Lake Isle of Innisfree

William Butler Yeats

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.

Dive in:

1. What is the mood of the speaker in this poem? What’s happening?
2. This poem has such a strong sense of rhythm; read it out loud and then change the order of the words in the first few lines so that it’s more conversational and no longer following patterned meter. Does “made of clay and wattles” feel different than “of clay and wattles made”? How about “I’ll have nice bean-rows” instead of “Nine bean-rows will I have there”?
3. How does the rhythm of the poem reflect the speaker’s desire for a slower life?
4. At the end of the poem, it’s the rhythm of the lake water lapping that the speaker hears even when on the streets in the city. What does this suggest about the speaker’s relationship with nature?
5. If you were going to recite this poem, how would you balance a natural delivery style with the strong incantatory rhythm that is central to the poem's structure?

6. Yeats wrote this poem as a young man living in London, thinking of a real place in the Irish countryside where he spent time as a child. Is there a place in nature from your childhood where you remember feeling a sense of peace? Write a short poem about this place, working to capture the sounds and images that keep it alive in your memory.

HELPFUL LINKS:

- Listen to old recordings of Yeats reading The Lake Isle of Innisfree and other poems at Penn Sound: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Yeats.php
- A Yeats expert talks about the poem here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPI8o6RvmQs
- Here Mike Scott of The Waterboys performs a version of the poem set to music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Te2LFHnEkPA

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