YEATS'S EARLY LAKE ISLES

ABSTRACT

W.B. Yeats's successful early poem, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', reflects a general imaginative preoccupation with lakes in his writings as a young man. The poem shows evidence of the poet's reading in both the local history of W.G. Wood-Martin's History of Sligo *(1882) and Irish mythological studies. Besides these sources, it draws (like other early material) on a symbolic geography of lakes, rivers, and seas which comes to Yeats from P.B. Shelley's 'Alastor' and Walter Scott's The Lady of the Lake. This geography is to be seen in Yeats's very early work, such as 'The Island of Statues' (1884), and it influences longer-running projects such as the poetic drama* The Shadowy Waters *through the 1890s. Other early poems, 'The Stolen Child', 'The Danaan Quicken Tree', and 'To an Isle in the Water' help to clarify the symbolic uses of lakes, and show also how far Yeats was indebted both to Romantic predecessors and to contemporaries such as Katharine Tynan. With 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' Yeats makes decisive use of both images and metrical motifs (which may derive ultimately from Keats) in rendering a specific location as a symbolic locus for his own early anxieties and ambitions.*

In 1899, the *Pall Mall Gazette* could declare that 'Mr. Yeats is pre-eminently the poet of lakes'.[1] Undoubtedly, lakes by this point were a significant element of the young poet's more popular subject-matter. W.B. Yeats's most consequential poetic encounter with an Irish lake took place in London, towards the end of 1888; and more than forty years afterwards, his sister Lily recalled the occasion of that event in a letter:

> In Bedford Park one evening, Helen Acosta & Lolly painting & I there sewing – Willy bursting in having just written, or not even written down but just having brought forth 'Innisfree', he repeated it with all the fire of creation & his youth – he was I suppose about 24. I felt a thrill all through me and saw Sligo beauty, heard lake water lapping, when Helen broke in asking for a paint brush – she had not even pretended to listen. None of us knew what a great moment it was.[2]

It must be added that Lily Yeats, in accord with her brother's own later view of his poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', felt immediately the need to add: 'Not that 'Innisfree' is one of his greatest, but it is beautiful & perhaps the best known'. The poem itself was not published for another two years, and two years is a long time in the textual life of Yeats's poetry: so what was the poem which the young man read to the three women that evening? Something very close to it may perhaps be the version preserved in a letter written by Yeats from London to his friend (and, at that time, the more celebrated young poet) Katharine Tynan. Telling her about 'a beautiful Island of Innis free in Lough Gill Sligo,' which is 'A little rocky Island with a legended past,' he writes out 'two verses I made the other day':

I will arise and go now and go to the island of Innis free
And live in a dwelling of wattles – of woven wattles and wood work made,
Nine bean rows will I have there, a yellow hive for the honey bee
And this old care shall fade.

There from the dawn above me peace will come down dropping slow
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the household cricket sings.
And noontide there be all a glimmer, midnight be a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnets wings.[3]

Unfamiliar as some of this is, the most unfamiliar thing is the absence of Yeats's third, concluding stanza; and while it's true that he specifies 'two verses' in the letter, there is no particular reason to suppose that he would have deprived Tynan of a third, had it then existed. So, this freshly-composed lyric resolves itself in a conclusion that is full of light- and sound-effects, with 'noontide' and 'midnight' given their 'glimmer' and 'purple glow', and the final sounds made by 'the linnets wings'. (Is that one linnet, or more? It is of course in vain to hope for accurate possessive apostrophes from Yeats, and even when such things do put in an appearance, they are scarcely to be taken as authoritative guides to any intended meaning.) What we do not hear is what Lily Yeats remembered when she 'heard lake water lapping'; but she (like us) was familiar with the version of the poem that did not emerge in print until late 1890, in which 'always night and day | I hear lake water lapping with low sounds on the shore'.[4]

This is a reasonable enough thing for the poet to imagine hearing – a more realistic proposition, indeed, than that of his setting up 'nine bean rows' on the island. And yet, initially, it was not a sound that the poem contained: instead, there were bird-sounds – or rather, bird sounds that are not the voices of birds. It may be curious (though it may also be no more than a consequence of needing a rhyme) that Yeats chooses to evoke the sound of wings rather than birdsong; at the same time, it is true that the now-endangered linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*, of the finch family) sings while in flight. And the sound of birds was something which had a connection, for Yeats, with his own reasons for exploring Lough Gill when, probably in 1885 or 1886, he undertook an ambitious nocturnal hike. This is recounted many years later, around 1914, when the poet was composing his *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1916). Summers spent in Sligo, where he stayed first with his grandparents and later with his uncle George Pollexfen, were by this time the focus of a certain nostalgia for the poet; but the feelings contained in the 1888 genesis of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' prove that such nostalgia began very much closer to the times for which it pined. The entire account is both careful and revealing – careful, too, about what exactly it reveals:

> […] I told him [George Pollexfen] I was going to walk round Lough Gill and sleep in a wood. I did not tell him all my object, for I was nursing a new ambition. My father had read to me some passage out of *Walden*, and I planned to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree, and Innisfree was opposite Slish Wood where I meant to sleep.
>
> I thought that having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live, as Thoreau lived, seeking

wisdom. There was a story in the county history of a tree that had once grown upon that island guarded by some terrible monster and borne the food of the gods. A young girl pined for the fruit and told her lover to kill the monster and carry the fruit away. He did as he had been told, but tasted the fruit; and when he reached the mainland where she had waited for him, he was dying of its powerful virtue. And from sorrow and from remorse she too ate of it and died. I do not remember whether I chose the island because of its beauty or for the story's sake, but I was twenty-two or three before I gave up the dream.

I set out from Sligo about six in the evening, walking slowly, for it was an evening of great beauty; but though I was well into Slish Wood by bedtime, I could not sleep, not from the discomfort of the dry rock I had chosen for my bed, but from my fear of the wood-ranger. Somebody had told me, though I do not think it could have been true, that he went his round at some unknown hour. I kept going over what I should say if found and could not think of anything he would believe. However, I could watch my island in the early dawn and notice the order of the cries of the birds.

I came home next day unimaginably tired and sleepy, having walked some thirty miles partly over rough and boggy ground. For months afterwards, if I alluded to my walk, my uncle's general servant […] would go into fits of laughter. She believed I had spent the night in a different fashion and had invented the excuse to deceive my uncle, and would say to my great embarrassment, for I was as prudish as an old maid, 'And you had a good right to be fatigued'.[5]

It is not only the ‘general servant’ who may be excused a measure of sceptical irony here at the young Yeats’s expense; the middle-aged Yeats who writes the account is also partly in on the joke, as his readers too ought to be. Certainly, any young man of no more than twenty is unlikely to have indeed ‘conquered bodily desire and the inclination of [his] mind towards women and love’ and, much as the poetical youth of this account might have willed himself into believing in such a miracle, the older man remembering it is not one who is any longer ‘prudish as an old maid’. What he chooses especially to remember, though, is as intimately connected with poetry as it is with life – perhaps more so. The lake and its island, the myths buried in the geography, and the difficult presence of everyday reality (that wood-ranger – who turns out himself possibly to have been a myth, though one with no apparent symbolic importance) all contribute to a complex and significant landscape in which Yeats’s early poetry is seen to be taking shape.

The ‘story in the county history’ has a role to play here. Back at George Pollexfen’s house, presumably, were the two volumes, published only a few years before, of W.G. Wood-Martin’s *History of Sligo*: *County and Town* (1882). Here, Yeats’s story of the tree, its fruit, the young girl, and her lover is to be found; but just before it, the author speculates on ‘The Prehistoric appearance of the County’, and offers an account of a Lough Gill of the historical imagination which is nothing if not purple:

> Beautiful, indeed, must have been the sylvan scenery around Lough Gill in primeval days, when the slanting rays of the setting sun shone on the variegated tints of the autumnal foliage, and the sombre pines of the dense forests; the desolate appearance of the landscape might chance to be enlivened

> by the solitary cot of a Firbolg seen in pursuit of fish; the eagle on outspread wing watching his quarry beneath, or the distant howl of the wolf might fall upon the ear from the verge of the neighbouring thickets. Not a wave, not a ripple, on the surface of the waters, and the sun playing strange freaks of mirage on its bosom. After a long, warm day, deer and wild cattle stand knee-deep in the water to cool themselves, whilst one herd lows across to another from their watery resting-place. The trout and salmon are rising with eddying splash; the swift and swallow dart after their insect food with skillful swoop; and birds of prey wing their way homeward to the mountain cliffs. The sun now begins to sink; masses of purple light, edged with flame, float in an ocean of duller purple; in the west all is aglow.[6]

In Yeats's memory (which was retentive in these things), Wood-Martin's prose in that last sentence is transfigured into the verse of 'There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow'; but the poet's indebtedness to the fine-writing county historian may go further than that.[7] Undoubtedly, this is an account that is loud with the sounds of Lough Gill – of the fauna, though, since there is 'Not a wave, not a ripple, on the surface of the waters'; while the Firbolg who floats by in his 'cot' (*OED* 'cot' n.3 '*Irish*: A small roughly-made boat, used on the rivers and lakes of Ireland; a 'dug-out'') on a peaceful fishing trip (as yet unharassed, it would seem, by any of the invading Tuatha De Danaan) has found his peace there.

When Yeats remembers his own youthful dream of self-sufficiency on Innisfree, he recalls also the idyllic landscape and economy of Wood-Martin's reconstruction (albeit with his own, rather monastic, twist). 'Sligo,' says Wood-Martin, 'was a land of lakes as well as of forests […] lakes of irregular shape,

connected by stagnant shallows, "now land, now lake, and shores with forest crowned."'[8] He goes on to imagine in more detail those early lake-communities:

> On these lakes the huts of the aborigines, with their conical roofs, would appear as if floating on the water; the inmates who are neither fishing nor engaged in the chase, might be supposed to lounge lazily about on the staging, or to occupy themselves in forming weapons, or in mending their birch canoes or wicker-work cots moored near the hut. The lake-dweller from vegetable fibre made nets, with which he obtained an ample supply of fish from the waters around him; but sometimes have been found traces of grain coarsely ground, seeds, beech and hazel nuts, the remains of quadrupeds, birds, and fish, attesting the indiscriminate nature of his appetite. He had probably, too, the same fondness for drinks sweetened with wild honey, which in later ages gave to bee-keeping an important place in Brehon law. [9]

Here, too, Yeats's provision of a 'hive for the honey-bee' seems to have a solid precedent in the fancied (and not completely fanciful) early Sligo of Wood-Martin. The hut in which a 'lake-dweller' is thought to live probably influences Yeats's 'small cabin', while the materials of the 'wicker-work cots' play their part in the 'clay and wattles' of the poet's desired cabin-architecture.

Romantic as such historical reverie may be, it is not by any means as fully engaged, in imaginative terms, as Yeats's creative brooding over the subject of Lough Gill, and beyond that, on lakes more generally. For the poet did not need any county history to remind him that lakes, islands in lakes, and the 'lake water' that carried to (and carried important affinities with) the waters of the sea were formative elements

in his own creative inheritance and imagination. To skip forward a few years, 1902 found Yeats emphasizing the significance of waters for the Irish mind:

> I am certain that the water, the water of the sea, and of lakes, and of mist and rain, has all but made us Irish after its image. Images form themselves in our minds perpetually, as if they were reflected in some pool. […] Even to-day our country people speak with the dead and with some who perhaps have never died as we understand death; and even our educated people pass without great difficulty into the condition of quiet that is the condition of vision. We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer, life because of our quiet.[10]

'The water of the sea, and of lakes' brings together two kinds of water that are (in poetry at least) more generally kept apart. In this, Yeats follows a tendency which can be traced in his early writings – indeed, in some of his very earliest work. There, the waters of a lake and those of the sea both offer imaginative access to an otherworldly place of encounter between the dead and the living, and Yeats brings to them a complex tangle of influences and ambitions. The influences that come specifically from poetry – from Spenser, and from Romantic poetry – are perhaps most visible in *The Island of Statues* (composed 1884-5), which has at its centre a lake inhabited by an otherworldly Enchantress, where human would-be lovers are turned to stone: she is supplanted, in the end, by a mortal woman – but that woman, Naschina, is finally shown as fated to be her successor on the island, and something other (and more sinister) than human.[11] The ambitions of the young Yeats are most

fully articulated when (in 1886-7) *The Wanderings of Oisin* takes its hero to three islands at sea, granting him a kind of immortality that revisiting the mortal world sabotages. And there are, of course, many other early works that make a great deal out of both lake- and sea-waters. Even earlier than *The Island of Statues*, a fragment that survives from an otherwise unknown verse play of 1882-3 has its speaker recall the magical creation of an island amidst water:

> I long since crossed the mountains
> Seeking some peace from the world's throbbing,
> And sought out a little plaining fountain,
> Blaming because no nymphs had decked his valley.
> And then I spoke to it a word of might,
> And it heard the Oreads' language:
> It spread a lake of glittering light,
> Then once more I spoke that tongue
> And there rose a stately island,
> Bright with the radiance of its flowers,
> And I stood upon its dry strand.[12]

Often, Yeats's imagined lakes are the sites of romantic exhaustion or renunciation, while open waters are the places where more dramatic and decisive encounters with both the supernatural and the sexual become possible. Oisin on the ocean has Niamh (for three centuries, at least), whereas the inland lovers in *The Island of Statues* seem all doomed to unsuccess. Similarly, in 'Ephemera' (1887) lovers are pulled miserably apart 'on the lone border of the lake'; one of the few poems of romantic optimism

addressed by Yeats to Maud Gonne imagines, on the other hand, a sea-borne transformation of the pair into 'white birds on the foam of the sea', while 'haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore'.[13] That the sound of the birds takes precedence over the sound of water here is a reminder of Yeats's creative need to listen out for these things in his early work: the account of that night-time walk around Lough Gill remembers a hope to 'notice the order of the cries of the birds', and it is matched and balanced, within a page or so, by another recollection, this time of going to sea with a cousin at Ballina in Co. Mayo, when 'I had wanted the birds' cries for the poem that became fifteen years afterwards *The Shadowy Waters*, and it had been full of observation had I been able to write it when I first planned it'.[14]

Yeats took the supernatural charge of Irish waters, then, far more seriously that the likes of Wood-Martin could have done; and this supernatural dimension was also one in which romantic or sexual tensions were inescapable. When he was working on *The Wanderings of Oisin*, the poet picked up a great deal of his mythic and antiquarian learning as he went along; and one of his sources was a commentary on the Irish poem on the Battle of Gabhra by Nicholas O'Kearney. Here, Yeats learned that the Firbolgs could do more than just peacefully fish:

> We need not be surprised that the orientals believed that there were places of abode for creatures of a rational nature under the waters of the ocean, but much less when we learn the belief of the Firbolg race that the places of the just after death were in our creeks and lakes, to which the water supplied a fitting atmosphere […] There is a curious coincidence, in many respects, between the substance of the above extracts and the traditions still found among the Irish, relative to the pagan doctrine of the transmigration of souls,

> the least remarkable of which may have been the notion that the passage to *Tir na nOg* was through a narrow cave in one of our lake islets.[15]

Yeats took Oisin to the islands of Faery by having him ride across the waves; but inland waters, too, could access this other realm. Some awareness of the transmigration of lovers' souls (even – or perhaps especially – the souls of unhappy lovers) seems to underlie the lakeside close of 'Ephemera', and is particularly noticeable in the original ending of that poem (which Yeats had removed by 1895):

> The little waves that walked in evening whiteness,
> Glimmering in her drooped eyes, saw her lips move
> And whisper, 'The innumerable reeds
> I know the word they cry, "Eternity!"
> And sing from shore to shore, and every year
> They pine away and yellow and wear out,
> And ah, they know not, as they pine and cease,
> Not they are the eternal – 'tis the cry.'[16]

Already, in 1887, the wind is crying among the reeds; and what it is saying is keyed to the sound that will be 'lake water lapping with low sounds on the shore' in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. One possible meaning here is the destination of *Tir na nOg*, the Land of the Young (as sampled by Oisin), where lovers can love together; another is the cry of a frustration that is both spiritual and sexual, and may be tragically protracted. The seascape and the lake are not separate, but connected, for the journey from one to another can be made, even if with the greatest danger and difficulty.

And the danger is artistic as much as it is spiritual: Yeats is probably aware in his early writings of how easy it is for him to replace genuinely creative exploration with over-hopeful and premature declarations of discovery – the original ending of 'Ephemera' being a case in point. The symbolic geography of early Yeats, though, is more securely fixed than his poetic style. In *The Island of Statues*, the fateful island of the Enchantress already suggests the later Innisfree:

Upon the breast
Of yonder lake, from whose green banks alway
The poplars gaze across the waters grey,
And nod to one another, lies a green,
Small island, where the full soft sheen
Of evening and glad silence dwelleth aye,
For there the great Enchantress lives. [17]

Innisfree will be better than this, with its beans, linnets, and honey; but it will not have any alluring enchantresses either. How does one get to such an island? By boat, obviously; and for Yeats in 1884, this has to be a magical one:

and then I saw the boat,
Living, wide wingèd, on the waters float.
Strange draperies did all the sides adorn,
And the waves bowed before it like mown corn,
The wingèd wonder of all Faery Land.
It bore me softly where the shallow sand

Binds, as within a girdle or a ring,

The lake-embosomed isle. [18]

'Lake-embosomed isle' channels Tennyson, in whose 'Morte D'Arthur' there is more symbolism than perhaps the author was himself fully aware of, when 'an arm | Rose up from out the bosom of the lake, | Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, | Holding the sword'.[19] Yeats's lines also pack in a lot of Shelley, and this was still significantly present in the poet's mind when he wrote his 1900 essay, 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', near the end of which he specified the 'single vision' that would 'come to [Shelley] again and again': 'a vision of a boat drifting down a broad river between high hills where there were caves and towers, and following the light of one Star'.[20] In Yeats, the boat comes from elsewhere in the lake itself; but there are other ways of reaching some lakes, such as sailing up a river from the sea. As it happens, this might apply to Lough Gill, from which the Garavogue river drains to Sligo Bay; though here, clearly, Yeats has Shelley and Tennyson more than the homeland of the Pollexfens in his mind.

The passage of Shelley which is probably the most present for Yeats's symbolic geography is in the poem 'Alastor: Or, the Spirit of Solitude' (1816). It is a long one, and it depicts a tortuous journey, going upriver to a lake destination. But its further context in Shelley's poem is one with which the young Yeats must have been very familiar: the hero, named only as 'the Poet' goes in relentless pursuit of a female figure – a Muse, certainly, but also a woman – who constantly escapes his pursuit. Metaphysical bafflement seems almost the natural medium for erotic frustration:

Lost, lost, for ever lost

In the wide pathless desert of dim Sleep,
That beautiful shape! Does the dark gate of Death
Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,
O Sleep? Does the bright arch of rainbow clouds,
And pendent mountains seen in the calm lake,
Lead only to the black and watery depth, – […][21]

The lake scene conjured out of frustration here is partly meant to evoke Wordsworth (already in 1816 the pre-eminent 'Lake poet'), and to darken and complicate what to Shelley doubtless appeared far too light and simple in the mode of lake-set sublime. Beyond that lies a writer who influenced both Shelley and Wordsworth, Walter Scott, whose *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) has some scene-setting that prefigures both 'Alastor' and – more to the point – the early W.B. Yeats:

Onward, amid the copse 'gan peep
A narrow inlet, still and deep,
Affording scarce such breadth of brim,
As served the wild duck's brood to swim.
Lost for a space, through thickets veering,
But broader when again appearing,
Tall rocks and tufted knolls their face
Could on the dark-blue mirror trace;
And farther as the hunter stray'd,
Still broader sweep its channels made.
The shaggy mounds no longer stood,

Emerging from entangled wood,
But, wave-encircled, seem'd to float,
Like castle girdled with its moat;
Yet broader floods extending still
Divide them from their parent hill,
Till each, retiring, claims to be
An islet in an inland sea. [22]

Though Scott has the Highlands in mind, his teenage Irish reader would have recognised a landscape closer to home.

Shelley's Poet begins at sea, where he finds that 'A restless impulse urged him to embark | And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste';[23] he finds the mouth of the river, and pushes inland, into a landscape that is anything but peaceful, and verges rather on the horrific. In the process – to all appearances, perfectly naturally – Shelley drops in the Scots word 'windlestrae' (to be found, for example, in Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816)):

Grey rocks did peep from the spare moss, and stemmed
The struggling brook; tall spires of windlestrae
Threw their thin shadows down the rugged slope;
And nought but gnarlèd roots of ancient pines,
Branchless and blasted, clenched with grasping roots
The unwilling soil. A gradual change was here,
Yet ghastly. For, as fast years flow away,
The smooth brow gathers, and the hair grows thin

And white, and, where irradiate dewy eyes
Had shone, gleam stony orbs: so from his steps
Bright flowers departed, and the beautiful shade
Of the green groves, with all their odorous winds
And musical motions.[24]

The Enchantress's island in *The Island of Statues*, and maybe a principal Yeats theme – of once-growing flowers being contrasted with frozen stone men – owe much to this. The very landscape here shapes itself into a version of the ageing human head, as though a living face were turning into a stony skull. Shelley's Poet travels, then, into a place where youth is turned to age, and reaches a site of fateful encounter; here 'wide expand, | Beneath the wan stars and descending moon, | Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams, | Dim tracts and vast'.[25] Far as all this may appear to lie from Lough Gill and Innisfree, it sets the imaginative terms for the young Yeats's journeyings into and beyond watery regions of Sligo.

It is worth pausing over 'the drear ocean's waste', and considering the long-running (and never satisfactorily resolved) project of Yeats's poetic drama *The Shadowy Waters*. If indeed the young poet was thinking of this when he went on his dawn trip off Ballina with a cousin in the mid-1880s, then the work, which had its first printed incarnation in 1900, and was subject to multiple and far-reaching revisions (splitting it into stage- and page-versions) well into the twentieth century, begins somewhere very near the dawn of Yeats's poetic career. In all its many versions, the scene is laid on a ship at sea, but that sea has an otherworldly air, untroubled despite the episodes of bloodshed which occur and are threatened there, by supernatural and natural agents alike. In one manuscript fragment, dating from 1894-

5, the hero of Yeats's verse-drama makes a Shelleyan trip from sea, to river, to lake; at least, in the account of a hawk-headed flesh-eating Fomorian: 'when autumn winds | Harried the tides, he came to a white shore':

> When you had shaken
> The winds of Autumn on the cloudy waves
> He came to a grey cloudy, wood covered land,
> And sailed up a broad river for nine days.
> He saw where hazels fold in twilight and sleep
> The Pool of Conlas […][26]

In Irish myth the location of Connla's Well, as Yeats knew, was never likely to be a settled matter; but what was there was something upon which a number of traditional sources agreed: hazel trees, whose nuts feel into the pool where the salmon might feed on it, to become salmon of wisdom – the same salmon, in fact, that might be cooked and then touched by the young Fionn Mac Cumhaill, leaving him with his famous 'thumb of wisdom'. Nine hazels is the specified – and, so to speak, the magic – number here. Although this was soon to be dropped in the evolution of *The Shadowy Waters*, it shows how, in the mid-1890s, Yeats was still haunted by that Shelleyan voyage upriver, and the wisdom waiting at its destination.

Still earlier draft material for the play reveals more about the supernatural nourishment that may be on offer at the close of an otherworldly voyage – one which is also, at the same time, a voyage into some form of sexual fulfilment. In a prose version waiting to be worked up into verse, again from the mid-1890s, Forgael seeing his beloved says: 'Bring her a table covered with the magical fruit of the wandering

druid island that is on the western ocean,' and orders, 'Bring fruits coloured with all the colours of the dawn and of the purple night and let her eat for I lay before her the banquet of the world'.[27] This 'wandering island' is clearly not inland, and has a good deal in common with the three islands visited by Oisin; but like Connla's well, it seems to feature 'magical fruit'; fruit to be consumed, perhaps, in the 'purple night'.

At this point, it is useful to return to the 'story in the county history' which Yeats remembered when providing an account of his nocturnal walk around Lough Gill. Wood-Martin gives it in relation to Innisfree:

> On the islet, though small in size, grew the most luscious of fruit, which was, however, exclusively reserved for the use of the deities, who had placed a great monster or dragon as guard on their orchard. The daughter of the chief of the district required her lover, a young warrior named Free, to procure for her some of the forbidden fruit as a proof of his affection and valour. Free landed on the isle, succeeded in slaying the monster placed to guard the trees; but on regaining the frail canoe in which he had obtained access to the island, weak and exhausted by his exertions, and feeling need of refreshment, he tasted some of the stolen fruit.
>
> The effect on mortal constitution was fatal. He had but just strength to row to the shore, when he fell dying at the feet of his mistress. He exerted his remaining powers sufficiently to acquaint her with the cause of his fate, and the damsel, filled with remorse, immediately herself ate of the stolen fruit, and fell dead across his corpse. The two lovers were buried in the island which had proved so fatal to them.[28]

There are various ways of interpreting this story in relation to Yeats, but it is possible that 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' affords a glimpse of the poet's own reading of it: in seeking to transform the little island from a fatal trysting-place to an idyllic retreat, the island's fruits need to be transformed from those of 'the gods', subject to erotic value and demand, to those of 'wisdom', where the nine hazel trees of Connla's Well can take a human (indeed, a market-gardening) expression in nine (Thoreau-indebted) bean-rows.[29] The cost, though, is the loss of sexual opportunity; but the Innisfree story of Wood-Martin gives an example of how such opportunity can go catastrophically wrong. Where Wood-Martin, doubtless, sees reflections of Romeo and Juliet in this material, Yeats may be seeing figures of his own – not least, Forgael and Dectora in *The Shadowy Waters*, whose love-match moves with *fin de siècle* inevitability towards a death-match.

In fact, the supernatural fruits of Innisfree, which Yeats replaces so prosaically with rows of beans, did feature in his published (though not his collected) verse. A poem printed two years after 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', in *The Bookman*, is entitled 'The Danaan Quicken Tree', and it carries an explanatory note from the poet, informing readers that 'It is said that an enchanted tree grew once on the little lake-island of Innisfree, and that its berries were, according to one legend, poisonous to mortals, and according to another, able to endow them with more than mortal powers'.[30] The poem affects an attitude of romantic whimsy, one about as far from the doomed romanticism of *The Shadowy Waters* as it is possible to go:

> Beloved, hear my bitter tale! –
> Now making busy with the oar,
> Now flinging loose the slanting sail,

I hurried from the woody shore,
And plucked small fruits on Innisfree.
(Ah, mournful Danaan quicken tree!)

A murmuring faery multitude,
When flying to the heart of light
From playing hurley in the wood
With creatures of our heavy night,
A berry threw for me – or thee.
(Ah, mournful Danaan quicken tree!)

If this tale is 'bitter', it does not have anything like the bitter notes of tragedy associated with the 'story in the county history'; and as the poem goes on, the Tuatha De Danaan become a little too close for comfort to sentimentally-imagined late Victorian fairy folk. The closing appearance put in by 'Dark Joan' probably seals this poem's fate – she is (as Yeats's note earnestly informs us) 'a famous faery who often goes about the road disguised as a clutch of chickens'. Curiously, Yeats chooses to echo his own 'The Two Trees' (which the poem also recalls metrically), both in repeated addresses to the 'Beloved' and in markedly Blakean imagery, but now without any real dimension of supernatural menace or magical anticipation:

And thereon grew a tender root,
And thereon grew a tender stem,
And thereon grew the ruddy fruit
That are a poison to all men

And meat to the Aslauga Shee.

(Ah, mournful Danaan quicken tree!)

This is all curious, at most; and in the end the poem is little more than a curiosity. But as with many of the pieces discarded by the young poet, there is some point in wondering about the sources (or causes) of its weakness. It may very well be simply the case that Innisfree was the last place Yeats's poetry should have attempted to revisit; and probably that is true. Yet why did he try to do so? The poet must have known that he was revisiting not just a legend, but another poem, by another poet – Katharine Tynan's 'The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne' (1887):

There was a quicken-tree that had strange power:
He who should eat three berries of that tree
Henceforth from pain and sickness should go free;
Eating thereof, the old regained youth's flower;
Like the red wine it gladdened, or rich mead.
'Twas a great race of wizards sowed that seed.[31]

Not only did Yeats know these lines; he knew their source too, in Standish Hayes O'Grady's edition of *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne*: 'all berries that grow upon that tree there are many virtues, that is, there is in every berry of them the exhilaration of wine and the satisfying of old mead; and whoever should eat three berries of them, had he completed a hundred years, he would return to the age of thirty years'.[32] Yeats's 'ruddy fruit | That are a poison to all men' are very far from this kind of youthful restorative; the point for him rather (if this poem has a point) is

that such fruits are all very well for the fairies, but are not at all the thing for humanity. The intricate connections with Tynan here may go both ways, for her poem was published a year after Yeats's 'The Stolen Child', which opens with what is surely Innisfree (though the precision of the geography here is not all it might be), and with 'berries' of the fairies kept there:

> Where dips the rocky highland
> Of Slewth Wood in the lake,
> There lies a leafy island
> Where flapping herons wake
> The drowsy water rats;
> There we've hid our fairy vats
> Full of berries
> And of reddest stolen cherries.[33]

No convincing explanation has ever been found for Yeats's decision to change Slish Wood to Slewth [later Sleuth] Wood here, but the reason must be something to do with sound; and certainly the poet makes sure that at least the sound of the herons' wings is audible. This presence of herons on Innisfree connects it, in terms of Yeats's imagined lake isles, with the arcadian setting of *The Island of Statues*, near the beginning of which two hunters are heard in mid-exchange:

> *Almintor*. The sunlight shone
> Upon his wings. Thro' yonder green abyss
> I sent an arrow.

Antonio. And I saw you miss;

And far away the heron sails, I wis.

Almintor. Nay, nay, I miss'd him not; his days

Of flight are done.[34]

Towards the end of the play, too, the Enchantress laments that 'I go from sun and shade, | And the joy of the streams where long-limbed herons wade'.[35]

'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', of course, first broke cover in a letter to Tynan, and this was written at a time when she and Yeats were in the kind of regular and lengthy epistolary contact which might well have suggested to others (even if it did not necessarily do so to the two of them) some kind of romantic attachment. Three months before sending her that poem, Yeats had dispatched to Tynan another lake-escape set of verses, 'To an Isle in the Water'. It is fair to say that the erotic intensity of this love poem, where the beloved is repeatedly celebrated as 'shy', is turned down very low indeed:

She carries in the dishes,

And lays them in a row.

To an isle in the water

With her would I go.[36]

After further domestic bustling (the dishes are followed by candles), and a less than entirely lucid comparison of the loved one to 'a rabbit, | Helpful and shy', Yeats

closes with the declaration 'To an isle in the water | With her would I fly'.[37] Frank Kinahan, the only critic who laboured enough to find something to say about this poem – a canonical Yeats piece, though, and 'little verses' which, as late as 1932, the poet claimed 'still seem to me good in their unpretending way' – noticed that change from 'go' to 'fly', detecting in it an 'undertrace of anxiousness' and 'implied concern'.[38] Yet Diarmuid and Grainne these lovers are not, and the poem scarcely throbs with passion. If this 'Isle in the Water' is already for Yeats a version of Innisfree, then the imaginative revisiting of that island a few months later in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' is one made with an understanding of its freedom from the anxieties and concerns of sexual passion. And both poems – in their very different ways – are idylls of imagined domesticity.

This is one facet of the 'peace'that is so much longed for in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. If it is the kind of peace that can only be possible as a result of the removal of sexual feelings (or at least, their deliberate avoidance), then it is also for Yeats the kind of respite which has, as its other aspects, deprivation and frustration. The initial version of the poem hopes that 'this old care shall fade', and it is as though the 'peace' that 'will come down dropping slow' does so to the quietest of accompaniments – the singing of that 'household cricket' and the sound of the 'linnets wings'. What is absent here is birdsong of any kind; and again, this does not promise well for romance. In the earliest complete draft for *The Shadowy Waters* (from the mid-1890s), the heroine dreams of a watery elopement, remembering how:

> I dwelt in a garden where the birds sang always, and dreamt that some day a lover would come and tell me marvellous things, mysteries, secrets, enchantments, and at last he came and he sang a bard's song to the gods, and

> the birds were silent, and [he] fled with me over the sea, and our life became fragrant flames upon an altar, praising the gods with song and love.[39]

Something curious is going on here as Yeats's pre-versification begins to stir into semi-versification: 'the birds sang' is refigured as 'a bard's song', with the result that 'the birds were silent', allowing the lovers to praise 'the gods with song'. By 1900, and the first published version of the play, this motif has become death-centred, without quite letting go of its origins in 'desire':

> When men die
> They are changed and as grey birds fly out to sea,
> And I have heard them call from wind to wind
> How all that die are borne about the world
> In the cold streams, and wake to their desire,
> It may be, before the winds of birth have waked;
> Upon clear nights they leave the upper air
> And fly among the foam.[40]

The 'cold streams' here have their metaphysical forebears in Shelley's 'Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams, | Dim tracts and vast'; Forgael, it should be remembered, evolves in Yeats's scheme of *The Shadowy Waters* to be a poet, his 'bard's song' attuned to the otherworldly song of the birds. 'Peace' would be the wrong word for any of this, but it does, even so, overshadow the 'peace' that is hoped for in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.

It is well known that in *John Sherman*, the short novel Yeats published pseudonymously (as 'Ganconagh') in 1891, the hero in London (who bears a close resemblance to the London W.B. Yeats of the time) imagines something very close to 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree':

> He was set dreaming a whole day by walking down one Sunday morning to the border of the Thames – a few hundred yards from his house – and looking at the osier-covered Chiswick eyot. It made him remember an old day-dream of his. The source of the river that passed his garden at home was a certain wood-bordered and islanded lake, whither in childhood he had often gone blackberry-gathering. At the further end was a little islet called Inniscrewin. Its rocky centre, covered with many bushes, rose some forty feet above the lake. Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening at night to the ripple of the water and the quivering of the bushes – full always of unknown creatures – and going out at morning to see the island's edge marked by the feet of birds.[41]

'Inniscrewin' becomes 'Innisfree' in Yeats's 1908 reprinting of the story – though he did not collect *John Sherman* again thereafter, so this gloss on what was the most well-known of his poems was allowed to fade into the non-canonical background, at least for a time.[42] As in the poem (which had appeared in the *National Observer* a good year before the novel was published) listening is important; but it is not the

noises of birds that Sherman hears as he listens though the night: birds are conjured up only by the observation of their footprints after they have gone.

At some point between late 1888 and late 1890, Yeats completed 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', adding a third quatrain and making alterations to what had been its first written version in the letter to Tynan. In the process, sounds are added – but not the sounds of birds. Instead of the limply world-weary 'And this old care shall fade', Yeats now declares he will 'live alone in the bee-loud glade', while the new final stanza is all about the ability to hear imagined (and remembered) sounds – these being the sounds of lake water itself:

> I will arise and go now, for always night and day
> I hear lake water lapping with low sounds on the shore:
> While I stand on the roadway or on the pavements grey,
> I hear it in the deep heart's core.[43]

These are lines that themselves need to be listened to, and closely. The key effect – one which may, or may not, be understood as mimetic in relation to the 'lapping' of that 'lake water', and the 'low sounds' that result from it – is that of Yeats's final line. In rhythmic terms, it almost matches the new end of the first stanza, 'And live alone in a bee-loud glade' – that is, it ends its stanza with three stresses crowded together. This is itself, arguably, a protracted 'low sound'; but it is hardly, if we are in search of mimetic effect, the sound of lapping water. Is it instead closer to the humming of bees – something which 'bee-loud glade' might well seem to catch? It may not be completely out of place to imagine in these sounds the call of the bittern (native to the Lough Gill area), a call both distinctive in itself and with Irish poetic connections (of

which Yeats could well have been aware) in the poem 'An Bonnan Bui'. Or is the 'low sound' the sound of something altogether more rooted and unbudgeable, a sort of imaginative closed-loop that answers to what Nicholas Grene has perceived in the poem, where 'Beyond any literal geography, the lake isle stands for the self within the self, the isolation of the island contained within the containedness of the inland lake'?[44]

The metrical aspect of this repays further attention. 'The deep heart's core' is metrically an effect which (given 'bee-loud glade') looks deliberated, and may therefore be spoken of as having a source. Source-hunting with the words themselves is not especially revealing, since 'heart's core' is a phrase from *Hamlet* that was taken up by a great many poets.[45] However, the three-stress pattern is more distinctive. Matthew Campbell, notices this in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' as 'a trick picked up by Yeats' from Samuel Ferguson's Irish translation 'Cean Dubh Deelish', and its line 'Letting her locks of gold to the cold wind free'.[46] The erotic focus of Ferguson's poem (a poem which Yeats would indeed have known) makes its possible relation to the celibate fantasy of Yeats's lyric an interesting one; yet the particular metrical effect here could just as easily come from somewhere further from the poet's Irish scene, and closer to his English home. Many readers of poetry would first come across this emphatic three-stress 'foot' by reading Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'; and there are signs beyond the metrical ones that this poem sank deep into Yeats's creative memory:

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,

And no birds sing.[47]

One way of understanding Keats's ballad produces a warning story about the dangerous consequences of sexual attraction – explicitly, in this case, 'faery' attraction – and it is easy to see how this could feed into the complicated mixture of feelings with which Yeats approaches Innisfree. That the metrical effect itself is not necessarily 'Irish' seems unremarkable enough; and while Yeats certainly learned a great deal from nineteenth-century attempts to pitch distinctive national cadences in verse, he was first and foremost an English poet in terms of his metrical knowledge, instincts, and inclinations. *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1896 went too far on this subject owing to an ignorance of Anglo-Irish verse, yet it cannot be discounted out of hand:

> But, wisely as we think, he [Yeats] has not gone for his models to Erse or Gaelic poetry, nor has he attempted to interweave any Celtic conventions or idioms with the fabric of his rhythm and metre. On the contrary, we should conjecture that the chief objects of his admiration have been Lord Tennyson, Mr Swinburne, and Mr Rossetti, the traces of whose influence, though not obtrusive, are palpable enough in his versification.[48]

Palpable, at any rate, in 'the deep heart's core'. But the Keats echo sets off further chains of consequence for Yeats's poetry, as may be seen in his 1898 poem which became 'He Hears the Cry of the Sedge', and its opening where 'I wander by the edge | Of this desolate lake | Where wind cries in the sedge'.[49] More strikingly still, there is Yeats's 1893 ballad (first called 'The Stolen Bride', and partly signalling itself as a

grown-up counterpart to ‘The Stolen Child’) ‘The Host of the Air’. Here, the opening stanza ends with another ‘deep heart’s core’, or ‘no birds sing’, triple stress:

O’Driscoll drove with a song
    The wild duck and the drake
From the tall and the tufted reeds
    Of the drear Heart Lake.[50]

Again, when imagining a lake in verse, predecessors such as Scott come to Yeats’s aid – *The Lady of the Lake* has both ‘the wild duck’s brood’ and ‘Tall rocks and tufted knolls’.[51] For Yeats here, it a lake other than Lough Gill that is the setting; but here, too, it is by a lakeside that the beloved is taken away, and taken away for good. The ‘heart’s core’ and the ‘drear Heart’ have an imaginative proximity. The ‘drear ocean’s waste’ of Shelley’s ‘Alastor’ has come inland.

Naturally, Yeats’s lake poetry is not something confined to his early work; and some of the greatest poems of his maturity make use of, or are set in, lakes and lakesides. But it is in his earlier work that the elements feeding into such settings are at their most clearly exposed. Much as it suited the older Yeats to voice impatience with ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ and its reception as a popular recital piece – and much indeed as the poem *was* often exactly this – he also knew how near to the creative sources of his poetic strength it lay.

[1] 'For He on Honeydew Hath Fed' [on W.B. Yeats, *Poems* (1899)], *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 July 1899, 4: the poem instanced is 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.

[2] Lily Yeats, letter to Ruth Lane-Poole [Pollexfen], 17 June 1930, quoted in R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats*: *A Life* vol.1, *The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1997), 79.

[3] W.B. Yeats, letter to Katharine Tynan, 21 Dec. 1888, John Kelly and Eric Domville (eds.), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats* vol.1 (Oxford, 1986), 121.

[4] Lines 9-10 of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' in *The National Observer* 13 Dec. 1890. The water here laps with low sounds 'on the shore', and not 'by the shore' (as it was to do in *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892), and all subsequent versions). Here, also, there is an unambiguous plurality of linnets ('the linnets' wings' – though the apostrophe could just as easily be the journal editor's as Yeats's); again, the 1892 version establishes what was to be the enduring text, with 'the linnet's wings' – and here, of course, 'the linnet' might well still denote more than an individual bird.

[5] W.B. Yeats, *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1916), William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (eds.), *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* vol. 3, *Autobiographies* (New York, 1999), 84-5.

[6] W.G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo*: *County and Town* vol.1 (Dublin, 1882), 62-3.

[7] It is reasonable to suppose that Yeats remembered the natural scene described here better and for much longer than he remembered Wood-Martin's written words. In later life, Yeats returned to the poem's 'purple glow' and its origins. The Irish words *inis* (island) and *fraoch* (heather) were taken by the poet to explain the place name. Speaking in a BBC broadcast from Belfast on 8 September 1931, he recalled: 'When I was a young lad in the town of Sligo I read Thoreau's essays and wanted to live in a hut on an island in Lough Gill called Innisfree, which means Heather Island […] I think there is only one obscurity in the poem; I speak of noon as a 'purple flow'; I must have meant by that the reflection of heather in the water'. Again, in what was to be his final radio broadcast, recorded in London on 29 October 1937, he said that 'there is nothing hard to understand except that I speak of noon as 'a purple glow'', and explained that 'The purple glow is the reflection of the heather'. See Colton Johnson (ed.), W.B. Yeats, *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* vol. 10, *Later Articles and Reviews*: *Uncollected Articles, Reviews, and Radio Broadcasts Written after 1900* (New York: 2000), 224, 290.

[8] Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo*, vol.1, 68. The quoted line of poetry here is John Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX, 117.

[9] Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo*, vol.1, 68.

[10] W.B. Yeats, 'New Chapters of the Celtic Twilight: V, Earth, Fire and Water', *The Speaker*, 15 Mar. 1902, 666; repr. in Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey (eds.), *Mythologies* (Basingstoke, 2005): see editorial note there on Yeats and water in evocation (269-70).

[11] On Spenser's influence on the early work (and especially on *The Island of Statues*), see Wayne K. Chapman, *Yeats and English Rebnaissance Literature* (New York, 1991), Ch.3.

[12] W.B. Yeats, MS fragment of the opening speech of a (lost, or more probably never continued) verse-play, National Library of Ireland, NLI 30839. Reproduced and transcribed in George Bornstein, *The Early Poetry* 2: *"The Wanderings of Oisin" and Other Early Poems to 1895* (Ithaca, 1994), 420-425.

[13] W.B. Yeats, 'Ephemera', l.17, repr. in Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (eds.), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London, 1956), 80; 'The White Birds', ll.1 and 12, 9, *Variorum Edition*, 122. 'Ephemera' (which was first published in *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889)) is usually dated by critics and editors as 1884; but this date (deriving solely from a much later note provided for Richard Ellmann by George Yeats) is almost certainly much too early. 'The White Birds' was composed in 1891, and first appeared in *The Countess Kathleen and various Legends and Lyrics* (1892).

[14] W.B. Yeats, *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1916), *Autobiographies*, 86.

[15] Nicholas O'Kearney, *The Battle of Gabhra*, *Tranactions of the Ossianic Society*, I (1854), 26-7.

[16] W.B. Yeats, 'Ephemera' ll.27-34 in *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889), *Variorum Edition*, 81.

[17] W.B. Yeats, *The Island of Statues* (first published in the *Dublin University Review*, 1885) I, ii: 32-8, *Variorum Edition*, 653.

[18] *The Island of Statues*, I, iii: 53-60; *Variorum Edition*, 657.

[19] Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'Morte D'Arthur' (1834; first publ. 1842), ll. 29-32.

[20] W.B. Yeats, 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', first published in his *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903); repr. in George Bornstein and Richard J. Finneran (eds.), *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* vol. 4 *Early Essays* (New York, 2007), 71.

[21] P.B. Shelley, 'Alastor, Or, The Spirit of Solitude' (1816), ll. 209-15, W.M. Rossetti (ed.), *Complete Poetical Works* (London, 1871) vol.1, 258.

[22] Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake* (London, 1810), I, xiii.

[23] Shelley, 'Alastor', ll. 304-5; *Complete Poetical Works*, 260.

[24] Shelley, 'Alastor', ll. 526-36; *Complete Poetical Works*, 264-5.

[25] Shelley, 'Alastor', ll. 352-5; *Complete Poetical Works*, 266.

[26] Quoted from the transcription in Michael J. Sidnell, George P. Mayhew, and David R. Clark, *Druid Craft*: *The Writing of* The Shadowy Waters (Amherst, MA, 1971), 91-2.

[27] *Druid Craft*, 60, 78.

[28] W.G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo* vol.1, 64. In the 8th century Irish text *Táin Bó Fraích* (The Cattle-Raid of Fráech) the hero is at one stage sent magical life-prolonging rowan berries, which are guarded by a dragon. Fráech defeats this monster, though he is gravely wounded in the process, and requires supernatural help in his recovery. This seems to be an analogue for the story provided (though with a tragic twist) by Wood-Martin.

[29] In *Walden*: *Or, Life in the Woods* (Boston, 1854), H.D. Thoreau writes of 'my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted', claiming that 'I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted' (168). W.B. Yeats's father had recommended *Walden*, and read portions aloud to the poet in his youth. While Yeats remembered the role played in the poem by *Walden* well into his late years (see n. 7 above), the significance of Wood-Martin's Free (or the Irish Fráech) in relation to the island's name seems to have faded into the heather.

[30] W.B. Yeats, 'The Danaan Quicken Tree', *The Bookman*, May 1893, repr. in *Variorum Edition*, 742-3.

[31] Katharine Tynan, 'The Pursuit of Diarmid and Garinne', V, *Shamrocks* (1887), 32.

[32] Standish Hayes O'Grady (ed. and trans.), *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne* (Dublin, 1881), 11.

[33] W.B. Yeats, 'The Stolen Child', *The Irish Monthly*, Dec. 1886; repr. in *Variorum Edition*, 86-7.

[34] *The Island of Statues* I, i: 113-18, *Variorum Edition*, 649.

[35] *The Island of Statues*, II, iii: 216-17, *Variorum Edition*, 674.

[36] W.B. Yeats, 'To an Isle in the Water', *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889), *Variorum Edition*, 89.

[37] At one point, the poet may have believed that he was developing phrases from the Irish here, though in fact he was not doing this. Introducing the poem in 1932, he claimed 'I asked a man who pretended to know Irish to tell me the meaning of the words, 'Shule, shule, shularoon' – they are the burden of a well-known Irish ballad. He said they meant 'Shy as a rabbit, helpful and shy.' They meant nothing of the kind, he was a liar, but he gave me the theme of a poem which I call 'To an Isle in the Water'' (BBC broadcast, 10 April 1932, ed. with commentary by Warwick Gould, 'W.B. Yeats's "Poems about Women: A Broadcast"', in Deirdre Toomey (ed.), *Yeats and Women* (Basingstoke, 1997), 384-402 (at 387)).

[38] Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism*: *Contexts of the early Work and Thought* (London, 1988), 187.

[39] *Druid Craft*, 57.

[40] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (London, 1900), ll. 81-8; *Variorum Edition*, 750.

[41] W.B. Yeats (pesud. 'Ganconagh'), *John Sherman and Dhoya* (London, 1891),122-3.

[42] 'Inniscrewin' is very likely a name fabricated by Yeats himself: on this, and on the work's textual history, see See Richard J. Finneran (ed.), *John Sherman and Dhoya, Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* vol.12 (New York, 1991), xxvii and xxxiii-xxxiv.

[43] W.B. Yeats, The Lake Isle of Innisfree' in *The National Observer* 13 Dec. 1890, ll. 9-12.

[44] Nicholas Grene, *Yeats's Poetic Codes* (Oxford, 2008), 87.

[45] *Hamlet* III, ii: 78: 'In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart'. In nineteenth-century poetry, 'heart's core' is so widespread as to be effectively a cliché of poetic diction: so much so, that Swinburne uses the phrase (along with thickly jammed runs of stressed syllables) in his parody of Robert Browning, in 'John Jones's Wife' III, 'On the Sands' (*The Heptalogia* (1880)), ll. 102-4: 'yet some vein might be | (Could one find it alive in the heart's core's pulse, cleave | Through the life-springs'. A user of the cliché whose poem Yeats did almost certainly read was Edward Dowden, in 'Love-Tokens (*Poems* (1876), l.8: 'All shame deserts my blood to the heart's core'. 'To the heart's core' is also common in nineteenth-century prose, especially in religious or devotional contexts. One poetry-related use which Yeats probably read was that by 'O', writing on 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson', who praised 'Lament for Thomas Davis' in *The Irish Monthly* (Aug. 1884), 399: 'How truly patriotic it is, how musical in its sorrow, how Irish to the heart's core in feeling, illustration, flow, and diction!'

[46] Matthew Campbell, *Irish Poetry Under The Union, 1801-1924* (Cambridge, 2013), 11; Samuel Ferguson, 'Cean Dubh Deelish' l.6, *Lays of the Western Gael* (London, 1865), 216.

[47] John Keats, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, ll. 1-4, H.B. Forman (ed.), *The Poetical Works* (London, 1883). Other three-stress feet in the poem are ‘And made sweet moan’ (l. 24), ‘I love thee true’ (l. 28), ‘On the cold hill side’ (l. 36 and l. 44); ‘And no birds sing’ is repeated as the final line (l. 48).

[48] [John Hepburn Millar], *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1896, 719.

[49] W.B. Yeats, ‘Aodh to Dectora’ I (in the sequence ‘Aodh to Dectora: Three Songs’) *The Dome* (May, 1898), *Variorum Edition*, 165.

[50] W.B. Yeats, ‘The Stolen Bride’, *The Bookman* (Nov. 1893), *Variorum Edition*, 143.

[51] See n. 22 above.