The Poets' Niche

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This April issue inaugurates a new column, The Poets' Niche, reserved each month for the great poets and poems of all time, including Anonymous. Each month a famous poet will be highlighted by way of a short biography and then feted by an example or two of his or her work. Readers may well recognize both poem and poet, having been introduced to him or her in school or along life's way. Since many of us are in or near retirement, I, as Niche editor, will endeavor to include poems that speak to life's meaning and life's vicissitudes, something great poets illuminate.

Let's begin with one of the most popular poets of the 20th century, Irishman William Butler Yeats, who in 1923 received the Nobel Prize in Literature for what the Nobel Committee described as "inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation." He was the first Irishman so honored. He died in 1939 at the age of 74 and was celebrated around the world.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

By 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.

You can sense the seductive meter and rhythm, the yearning to be away from London, where "he stands on the roadway, or on the pavements grey," and back in County Sligo, his boyhood haunt, where Innisfree Island floats in the middle of Lough (Lake) Gill. Modern recording techniques allow us to hear the poet himself at http://tinyurl.com/4daynoh. And this remarkable recording underscores the importance of hearing a poem recited out loud. To hear the poet himself recite his most famous poem is an even bigger experience.

This poem was inspired by Henry David Thoreau's account of *Walden Pond.* Like Thoreau, Yeats longs for the peace and tranquility represented by the " bee-loud glade," the chirping of crickets, and the flapping of birds' wings. How often have I heard ex-pats say that, while north of the border, they too long to leave the urban bustle and noise and be back at Lakeside to hear again "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore." Perhaps, like Yeats, we "hear it in the deep heart's core." (Note how "deep heart's core" echoes the emphatic rhythm of "bee-loud glade.") That final line—"I hear it in the deep heart's core"—is a crucial statement for Yeats, not only in this poem but also in his life's work as a whole.

I like this poem because it captures the longing many of us feel to live more simply.