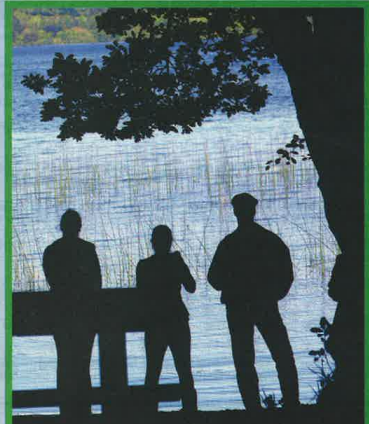


TRAVEL

ONLY MY DREAMS:

Irish Poet William Butler Yeats



Lough Gill Ireland where Yeats wrote "The Fiddler of Dooney" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree."

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death,
Horseman, pass by.

W. B. YEATS

June 13th 1865

January 28th 1939

The inscription on the grave of William Butler Yeats.

By JULIENE OSBORNE-MCKNIGHT
CORRESPONDENT

Picture the poet by moonlight. He has climbed to the top of a cnoc — a little Irish hill. The moon is full and a wind is dancing up from Sligo harbor. He presses his ear to the damp ground and waits in silence; he hopes, at last, to hear the music of the sidhe — the little people of Ireland.

In 2015, Ireland celebrated the 150th anniversary of William Butler Yeats, a poet at once deeply mystical, radically political, and unabashedly romantic. Winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Yeats was also a founder of the Abbey Theater, and an ardent Irish revolutionary who supported Irish independence from Great Britain, despite being part of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class who had ruled Ireland for nearly 400 years.

Yeats' biography is fascinating. He fell in love with fellow Anglo-Irish revolutionary Maud Gonne and proposed to her, by some accounts, more than a dozen times. She declined him repeatedly. At some point, he proposed to her daughter, who also declined.

In his youth, he belonged to the Golden Dawn, practiced magic, attempted automatic writing and séances to commune with the spirit world, but later served two terms as an Irish Senator after the Irish did achieve freedom.

Following

Yeats' trail through Ireland makes for magical travel.

Of course, you will want to begin in Dublin, perhaps taking in a revival of one of Yeats' plays at the Abbey Theater — The Countess Cathleen, Kathleen ni Houlihan, On Baile's Strand.

But then hurry into the West, toward Sligo, the home of Yeats' heart and his most spiritual writing.

Beautiful Lough Gill served as the inspiration for both "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and for "The Fiddler of Dooney" in which Yeats describes the revelry when "folk dance like a wave of the sea." His iconic poem about a tiny cabin on an island called Innisfree came to him when he was walking a London street, but harkens back to the ancient poems of the monks of Ireland who celebrated the peaceful world of "nine bean rows" and "a hive for the honey bee." Peace, Yeats tells us, will find him on that island. Beside Lough Gill, you will see why he thought so.

Yeats wrote his eerie poem "The Stolen Child" in 1886. In it, a fairy draws a human child into the Otherworld of the sidhe. It is easy to understand Yeats' inspiration beside the mossy green rocks and fairy ferns of Glencar Waterfall, which, aside from the walkway provided for visitors, has changed little since the time the poem exhorted the child to "come away... with a fairy hand in hand" because the world is "more full of weeping" than the child can understand.

Although the medieval tower of Thoor (Irish

tur or tower) Ballylee where Yeats and his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees lived is closed due to flood damage, you can still walk the lane, see the cottage and the bridge that curves above the stream. You can enjoy the deep wooded silence of the location where Yeats considered the entire history of the fortress in his poem "The Tower" and concluded that the most important thing is a bird's cry "among the deepening shades."

At Coole Park, where Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory gave birth to the Celtic Revival of the literature of ancient Ireland (and where Yeats wrote "The Wild Swans at Coole") you should visit the massive copper beech tree that contains the initials and signatures not only of Yeats but of Pygmalion's George Bernard Shaw and of John Millington Synge who wrote The Playboy of the Western World, among others.

Finally you will want to visit the poet's grave, under the shadow of his beloved mountain Ben Bulbin. Here, he exhorts death to "Cast a cold eye on Life, on Death, Horseman, pass by."

If you take your Yeats poems with you (as your author is wont to do) you can read the appropriate poem at each location and so become part of Yeats' landscape and the poems themselves.

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Yeats is buried under the shadow of Ben Bulbin in Ireland.

PHOTOS BY JULIENE OSBORNE-MCKNIGHT