

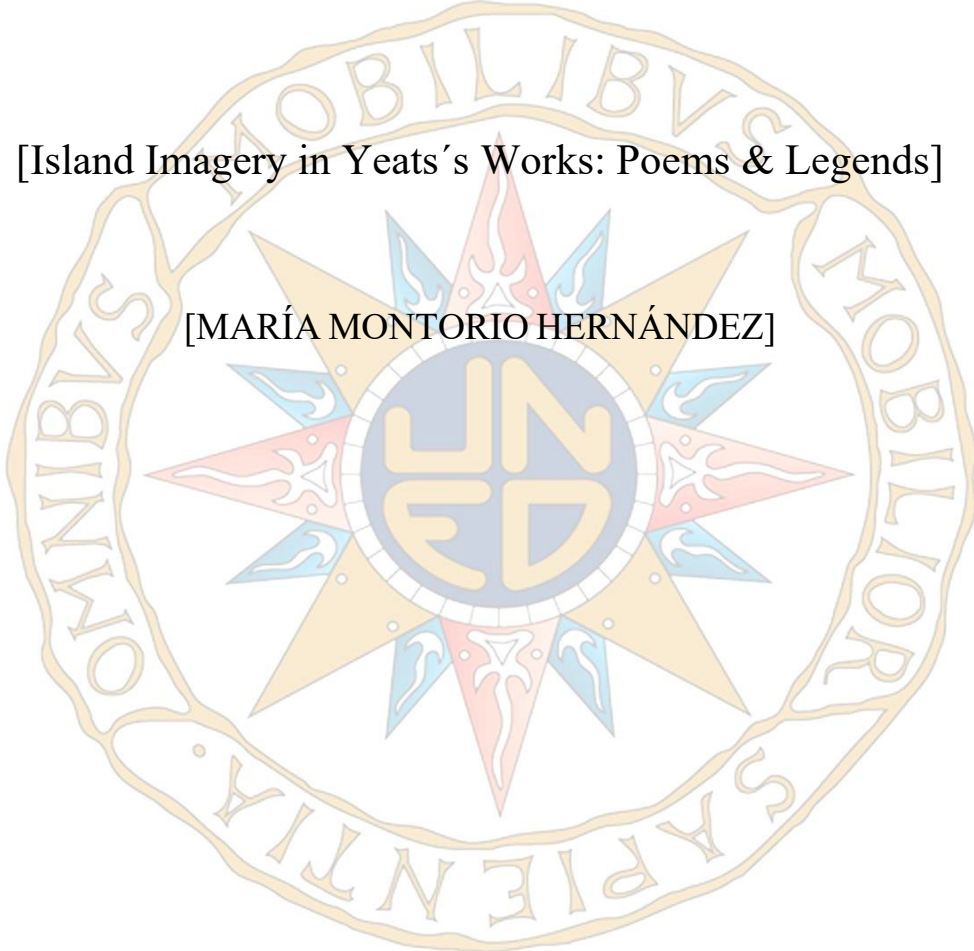


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[Island Imagery in Yeats's Works: Poems & Legends]

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# The Island Imagery in Yeats's Work: Poems & Legends by

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## Abstract of the dissertation:

Our dissertation research on the “Island Imagery” revolves around two examples of works written by the Nobel Prize W.B. Yeats: “*In The Lake Isle of Innisfree*” and “*The Lady of Gollerus*”. Regarding the latter, apart from the most paradigmatical readings of the poem, we will come across some unconventional interpretations of it. Likewise, we are glad to point to some parallelisms of the poem with the previous and later works, namely, H.D. Thoreau's *Walden* and Herbert Hughes' “*Gartan Mother's Lullaby*”. As for the legend of “The Lady of Gollerus”, we will see how the myth came to the big screen in the movie “The Secret of Roan Inish”. We will take this film for embodying several elements relating to the Irish cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** “Island”, “Imagery”, “Yeats”, “Pastoral”, “Heritage”



*Selkie statue in the Faeroe Islands*

## **Table of contents of the project**

1. Introduction.....	pg. 3
1.1. Justification of the targets.....	pgs.3-4
1.2. State of the Art.....	pgs.4-8
1.3. Methodology.....	pg. 9
2. Development of the dissertation.....	pgs.9-23
2.1. The Lake Isle of Innisfree.....	pgs.10-17
2.2. The Lady of Gollerus.....	pgs.17
2.3. The Secret of Roan Inish.....	pgs.18-22
3. Conclusion.....	pgs.22-23
4. Bibliography.....	pgs.24-25

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1. Justification of the Targets, and Approach to the Topic.**

The main purposes of this research are to find out the elements of imagery relative to the concept of the “Islands” in the work of W. B. Yeats. Thus, we will look for some identifying elements of islands epitomized in two examples of Yeats' work, namely, the poem “*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*” and the legend “*The*

*Lady of Gollerus*". In the latter, we will analyze the island symbolism in, as a paradisaic place where the poet might find spiritual release from urban life, albeit, in the former, we might see a portrait of in-betweenness territory between the legend and reality. Through such paradigms, we will be able to see their later influence on other types of popular cultural manifestations, namely the lyric in popular songs, and on the other hand, their traceability on the big screen. By means of representing the idea of "*Irish cultural Heritage*", we will compare "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*", with the popular song "*The Gartan's Mother Lullaby*" to trace the similarities between them. Other than that, we will use the film "*The Secret of Roan Inish*" as a film inspired by "*The Lady of Gollerus*", Yeats's legend coping with the myth of a *selkie* which is a mythological being: half-woman, half-seal, living off the coasts of Scotland and Ireland. (Yeats, *Fairy, and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*)

## 1.2. State of the Art

Islands in Yeats's Work may be portrayed as paradisaic places like in "*The Lake of Innisfree*" (Normandin 25). In this poem, we will see how Yeats, through a distant memory of his childhood remaining in this place, yearns to get back there to find release from urban life and problems. Innisfree is an islet located on the Lough Gill (in the county of Sligo, which name means Heather Island). This place recalls an epiphanic moment when the landscape, the local legends, and the underlying magic that surrounds this island, soaked Yeats's imagination, and contributed to shaping his later works as if they were *pastoral*. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the definition of *pastoral* is a fictionalized imitation of rural life, usually the life of an imaginary Golden Age, in which the loves of shepherds and shepherdesses play a prominent part; its ends are sometimes sentimental and romantic, but sometimes satirical or political (Congleton and Brogan ). Then, Innisfree is portrayed as an idyllic place to ideal to find wisdom through the growing row beans and the knowledge provided by its consumption. According to Yeats's view, the inner essence of the beans might

treasure the universal knowledge of things. In this sense, throughout the Beans as a magical Token of truth, Yeats shows himself as the *Fili* - the druid who holds all this wisdom. These beliefs are coupled with Yeats's esoteric beliefs as a member of the theosophical society of *The Golden Dawn*. It is a Hermetic Order active during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. *The Golden Dawn's* teachings focused on magic, divination, and magical development, and it drew inspiration from a wide range of esoteric and mystical sources, including Kabbalah, alchemy, tarot, astrology, and the writings of ancient Greek and Egyptian philosophers. Yeats was introduced to this order in the late 1800s and became deeply involved in the group's activities. As we know, Yeats is particularly interested in the group's teachings on symbolism and psychic transformation, to gain insight into the deeper mysteries of life. He also drew on the group's teachings and practices in his own writing, as in "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*".

The Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, which Yeats entered a few weeks before he wrote the poem, "required abstention from meat, alcohol, and sex" (Ross 566). Innisfree, with its life of bean-growing solitude, parallels the ascetic conditions of the poet's London activities. (Normandin 27)

On the one hand, we should point to the period of Yeats's writing when "*In the Lake Isle of Innisfree*" is written, it corresponds to the *Celtic Revival* era. In this regard, Yeats is one of the most outstanding torchbearers of this artistic movement which is characteristic of wanting to recover the Celtic roots of the Irish Ancient Heritage. Therefore, it is possible that, whether other authors would have taken Yeats's "*In the Lake Isle of Innisfree*" as a source of inspiration for their own work, or even, that Yeats himself may be behind the authorship of some of the works ascribed to those writers themselves. This could be the case of Herbert Hughes, an author belonging to such a cultural movement, and, as well Yeats, fond of compiling the cultural and folk tradition of the Irish people. At this point, we should underline a serendipitous discovery that we have come across during the elaboration of this dissertation. Specifically, we have found a significant number of similarities between the poem "*In the Lake Isle of Innisfree*" and a well-known piece of popular Irish song, which is "*The Gartan's Mother Lullaby*" hypothetically composed by Hughes in 1904.

On the other hand, the purpose of recovering the Celtic roots in Yeats is likely to be also traced back to his words when he refers to his plan of leading an ascetic life in Innisfree, “[...] *Nine bean-rows will I have there [...]*”. This quotation reminds us of the work of a previous American author who narrates a similar experience undertaken forty years ago: H.D. Thoreau, in his autobiographical novel *Walden*.

Thoreau grew beans during his stay at Walden Pond, and in a chapter titled “The Bean-Field” he claims, “I was determined to know beans” (206). [...] Thoreau’s cultivation of beans with his pursuit of wisdom”. (Normandin 25)

Thoreau’s *Walden* is a celebration of simple life written as a handbook of *environmentalism*. He writes this work in 1845 when he settles to live in a “*clay-built hut*” on the shore of *Walden* Pond. He also argues that he intended to live there to experience an essential life connected and in harmony with nature. This means a sublimation of life with a bucolic outlook very close to that of Yeats in “*In the Lake Isle of Innisfree*”. In other words, living in *Walden*: growing beans and turnips, eating wild berries, and caring for animals means an authentic quest for spiritual enlightenment for Thoreau. Through the living testimony that Thoreau gives us in his description of what happened during the two years, he lived in *Walden*, he gives the reader a romantic anti-materialist vision very similar to the purpose that Yeats raises in “*In the lake isle of Innisfree*” when Yeats claim:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, and a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made [...] (Norton Anthology)

We might find a somewhat different reading of “*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*”. Thus, according to some authors like Henry Merritt, the longing for Yeats to get back to Innisfree is due to a desire to evade the adult problems, such as sexuality and its consequences.

Although grammatically ‘Innisfree’ is a poem of escape to the island, it is emphatically a poem of escape from sexual entanglement and was conceived as such from the beginning. Additionally, its rhetoric contains a powerful discourse of self-punishment; the island is to be a scene of immolation. (Merritt 103)

Such idealization of the island as a place of refuge is linked to a legend of the county of Sligo that his uncle George Pollexfen used to tell him during his stay in that place.

Initially, Yeats was drawn to the island because of a legend in William Gregory Wood-Martin's *History of Sligo* (1882). There was a clear attraction in the account for the young man, as he recalled, 'I do not remember whether I chose the island because of its beauty or for the story's sake. . .' (Merritt 103)

We may refer to the mythical creatures that live on these Islands, such as the *Selkies*. A *selkie* is a mythical creature resembling a water seal but assuming a human form on land. In some regions of Ireland and Scotland, it is popularly believed that some families descend from these fabled creatures. There is a legend of a *Selkie* in the compilation of popular legends of Ireland "*The Book of Fairy and Folk Tales, by W.B. Yeats*": it is "*The Lady of Gollerus*". The tale tells the story of a *selkie*, compelled to marry a man because he has stolen her *seal's coat*. This woman must remain with him, and the kids she bore to him unless she finds her *seal skin*. If it happens, the *selkie* returns to its original shape and comes back to its oceanic family. Below we have an overview of the story of the "*Lady of Gollerus*".

The tale of the Lady of Gollerus tells a story of a green-haired mermaid with a tale of silver and glitter. She weds a local Kerryman, who discovered has deprived her of her 'magical red cap' to prevent her from returning to the sea. One day while cleaning, she discovers the hidden cap and places it on her head. Although a loving mother and wife, she longs for her mother and father after being gone for so long. With the powers of the red cap, she leaves for the ocean never to return. (Dromgool-Regan and Burke )

On a different note, currently has sprung a trend for the taste of the *Celtic Heritage*. Regarding this tendency, the theme of the *selkie* has currently captivated the imagination of some film industry directors who decided to pick up the leitmotiv of this mythical creature to embody certain ideas connected with the portrait of a nation's history and cultural legacy.

The selkie wife tale is the most adapted form of the vast intertextual web of seal people's legends that have been told around the Northern British Isles for hundreds of years. This tragic, romantic tale between a human and a magical shape-shifting creature has captured the imagination of twentieth and twenty-first century fantasists alike. Even in the past few

years, a considerable number of literary works and films have adapted the story, placing their retellings in a contemporary context in a variety of ways. (Má, rki, and fia )

One example of those films inspired by such “[...] vast intertextual web of seal people's legends [...] that we want to point out is “*The Secret of Roan Inish*” (1996). “*The Secret of Roan Inish*” is directed by John Sayles and based on the novel “*Secret of the Ron Mor Skerry*” written by Rosalie K. Fry. It tells the story of a little girl, Fionna, who goes back to her grandparents to take care of her due to the recent loss of her mother. Fionna’s younger brother Jamie, whose prevailing blood is mainly *Selkie*’s, has been lost in the *Roan Inish* ex-pat experience. We have chosen this film because we strongly believe that we may trace back some ideas related to “collective cultural heritage” throughout it.

El secreto de la isla de las focas (The secret of Roan Inish, USA, 1995) es un filme basado en la novela “*Secret of the Ron Mor Skerry*” de Rosalie K. Fry. [...]. Precisamente porque el cuento pertenece al patrimonio cultural colectivo es legítimo usarlo, es decir, adaptarlo a las propias experiencias y manipularlo al reescribirlo con imágenes o con palabras. (Rovira )

Overall, Islands in Yeats’s Works may represent havens of tranquillity, such as in the case of “*The lake isle of Innisfree*” compared with Thoreau’s *Walden*; notwithstanding, coupled with this idea of peacefulness, we might find other different readings of this poem, such as the Island as a place to evade responsibilities of the adult World. Apart from that, we dare to point to some similarities of the poem “*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*” with one instance of a folk song, which could have taken this very poem as a source of inspiration for later it is the celebrated “*Gartan’s mother Lullaby*” composed by Herbert Hughes (author belonging to the Celtic Twilight artistic movement). On a different note, we are going to deal with the myth of *selkie* (seal-woman) that appeared in *The Book of Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, namely in the tale “*The Lady of Gollerus*”. The same myth has inspired the film *The Secret of Roan Inish*, which we have chosen to represent some ideas related to the aforesaid “*Irish Cultural Heritage*”.



### 1.3. Methodology

In reference to the methodology, we will use for this essay, we would like to apply a roughly inductive methodology. Thus, taking as reference some of the possible interpretations of *the Imagery of the Islands in Yeats' works*, we will see them as places of relief and flight from the duties and hurdles of adult life as in "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*". We will demonstrate how the different readings given to the poem of Yeats "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*", whether we can see it as a retreat away from the mundane noise, will be present also in their legends, as is the case of "*The Lady of Gollerus*", or in the film "*The Secret of Roan Inish*". At the same time, we will be able to identify all this iconography in various manifestations, namely in the lullaby in "*The Gartans Mother Lullaby*", and in the film "*The Secret of Roan Inish*". We have found this film rather compelling due to its approach to numerous symbols related to Irish *Cultural Heritage*.

## 2. Development of the dissertation

Firstly, to start the development of my dissertation we would like to refer to one of the most well-known poems of the Nobel Prize William Butler Yeats. It is "*The Lake of Innisfree*". This poem is first published in the collection *The Rose* in 1893, and it is an example of Yeats's earlier lyric poems. Throughout the three short quatrains, the poem explores the speaker's longing for the peace and harmony of his boyhood haunt, Innisfree.

"*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*" means for Yeats the quest to find peace and spiritual release through the purpose of settling down there and leading a long-life naturalistic lifestyle. This journey supposes the author longing for the mystical roots forged in his past youth. To put it in another way, the source of a somewhat magical atmosphere that surrounds all of Yeats' Work is apparently sprung in "*The lake isle of Innisfree*". In other words, we will be able to detect the first signs of mysticism and obscurantism that will then be present in the entire work of the author.

## 2.1. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1892)

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.

(Norton Anthology)



*The Lake Island of Innisfree*

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is a short poem written by W. B. Yeats in its earliest version in 1882. This poem is first published in the collection *The Rose* in 1893, and it is an example of Yeats’s earlier lyric poems. Throughout the three short

quatrains, the poem explores the speaker's longing for the peace and harmony of his boyhood haunt, Innisfree.

The lake Isle of Innisfree is an uninhabited island within Lough Gill, in Ireland, where Yeats spent his summers as a child. Yeats found inspiration for the poem as a "sudden" memory of his childhood years after. What inspires the poem is a shot of *déjà vu* when he hears a drop of water, as he is in front of a shop window in London. Innisfree is for Yeats a somewhat *locus amoenus*, this is a place to find solace in his daily problems. This concept of the *locus amoenus* has something to do with the aforesaid portrait of *pastoral*. In *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, a *locus amoenus* type of setting is described as a place which "*might equally stand for quiet leisure, necessary for sophisticated poetic learning, a simple, agreeable metaphor for otium*". Yeats himself in his autobiography chooses textually the moment when he was inspired to write that timeless poem.

"I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop window which balanced a little ball upon its jet and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem "Innisfree," my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music".

I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill". (Yeats vii, 592 p.)

To make a closer approach to the imagery of the Islands in this celebrated poem by Yeats, we will go on to analyze the most significant elements that we will find: stanza by stanza:

Stanza 1: "*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.*"

The first stanza sets the scene for the poem. The speaker shows his intentionality of leaving the bare city life for heading to the peace brought by the island of Innisfree, in the quote "*I will arise, and go now and go to Innisfree, [...] of clay*" for leading a simple life, surrounded by nature. The references to the "*nine rows of beans*" are linked to the attainment of universal knowledge. The "*bee-loud*

*glade*” embodies a sense of serenity which comes to transport the reader, up to the beginning of the poem, from the dawn by evoking the noise of the “*hive for the honey-bee*”, in a peaceful setting suggested by the words “*live alone in the bee-loud glade*”.

Stanza 2: “*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.*”

In the second stanza, the speaker explains why he wants not only to find solace in Innisfree, but also, he wants to get inspired by its stunning nature by the words “*I shall have some peace there*”, and when he claims, “*for peace comes dropping slow*”. Consequently, he believes that inner-self peace comes like drops of falling water in a pond. The author in a reading of his poem tells us how the tinkling of a drop in front of a shop window, in the middle of a dull and grey London, is able to bring back a distant and pleasant childhood memory in the county of Sligo, by the shore lake of Innisfree. It goes without saying that the lake is precisely the very symbol personifying harmony in Innisfree, in the same way, it contributes to create the sort of magical atmosphere that haunted the whole poem. Likewise, the natural majesty and stillness of the Island of Innisfree is rendered by the evocation of “*evening full of the linnet's wings*”, “*midnight's all a glimmer*” and with the reference to “*noon a purple glow*”.

Stanza 3: “*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.*”

In the final stanza, the speaker reaffirms his determination to go to Innisfree to release from the hectic urban life “*I will arise and go now, for always night and day*”. He says that he can always hear the sound of the lake water lapping against the shore, even when he is in the midst of the city's noise and chaos, in “*I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore*”. The phrase “*deep heart's core*” suggests that the speaker's longing for a peaceful life in nature is a fundamental part of his being, something that he cannot ignore or suppress.

According to some authors, we might trace some reminiscences of Thoreau in “*The Lake Island of Innisfree*”, by the meaning of Innisfree as a bucolic place. Instances of references to idyllic places in this poem are embodied in the symbol of the “*Beans*”, as elements to achieve wisdom, for example when referring to the [...] *Nine bean-rows will I have there [...]*. These *bean rows* remind us of H. D. Thoreau’s *Walden*. In a chapter of *Walden* titled “*The Bean-Field*” Thoreau claims, “*I was determined to know beans*” (Normandin 25). What Thoreau suggests with these words is that the inner nature of the beans is likely to be attained by their intake, as if it were the sublime quest to attain the universal knowledge beneath all things. We know that the thought of Yeats deepens its roots in a series of mystical beliefs, which connect with the occult through Celticism, and the purpose of spiritual enlightenment through the knowledge of the very essence of things.

To say that a person “doesn’t know beans” is to say that he or she is ignorant. C. Stuart Hunter concludes that “to know beans is to be wise. Hence one can see that it is possible for Yeats to have equated, tropologically, Thoreau’s cultivation of beans with his pursuit of wisdom” (73).(Normandin 25)

On a different note, we might find rather different interpretations of “The lake isle of Innisfree” in the research of other lecturers. Then, when Yeats plans a flight from London to Count Sligo, he might have been evading the responsibilities of sexuality in adult life. We must bear in mind that by the time he wrote this poem, he started to Join the hermetic order of *The Golden Dawn - Theosophical Society Order*. Thus, he must lead an aesthetic way of life and his distant memory of Innisfree in his childhood could have been a relief to this wishy-washy entanglement.

The Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, which Yeats entered a few weeks before he wrote the poem, “required abstention from meat, alcohol, and sex” (Ross 566). Innisfree, with its life of bean-growing solitude, parallels the ascetic conditions of the poet’s London activities. (Normandin 27)

Madame Blavatsky, leader of the “*Theosophical Society Order of The Golden Dawn*” from “May 1887 to August 1890” claimed that its members are encouraged to follow the *Pythagorean* maxim that claims abstinence from

eating beans to attain supreme knowledge. she continually refers in her writings to such ideas:

The most well-known reference to beans in Western philosophy is the Pythagorean warning to abstain from beans. In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky mentions that "Pythagoras actually persuaded an ox to renounce eating beans, by merely whispering in the animal's ear!" (1:283) (Normandin 26)

One further theory which also supports the theories of Innisfree as a place for search of abstinence is the one defended in the work of Henry Merritt "*Rising and Going: The 'Nature' of Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'*". Merritt's essay holds the idea of Innisfree as a place connected with failure, insofar as it is the place where he might imagine himself living the rest of his days with his platonic love, apparently Katherine Tynan (at this time). Coupled with this idea, we can connect the love he feels for her as only spiritual because for *Theosophical* sex meant death (at least spiritual). In this sense, Yeats's Innisfree is a place for isolation rather than fulfillment. Therefore, the island conveys the image of a place to flee from world problems, including sex.

There is, however, a darker side to Yeats's island: the retreat to it is escape, a flight from the threat of sexuality. Innisfree is a place closely linked with failure. Although he once imagined a lake-island as a place where he and a 'shy one' of his heart (presumably the poet Katharine Tynan<sup>2</sup>) could live together in simplicity ('To an Isle in the Water,' probably composed in September 1888, VP p. 89), the finally envisioned island is one in which sexuality is avoided; it represents a sort of death. Like the later city of Byzantium, it is a place free of physical 'generation.' (Merritt 103)

It seems that the idealization of Innisfree stems from the time he visited his uncle George Pollexfen. Pollexfen, surely, transmitted to him his love for the island: not only for its beautiful landscape but also for the legend that surrounds it, for this subtly mythical story is a mixture of love and death. Through this tale, we could trace back-references to the Edenic paradise, where there is a parallelism between the row beans and the apples as the fruit is forbidden. The story is written below.

On the islet, though small in size, grew the most luscious 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 enough 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. (Merritt 103-109)

In “*The Lake of Innisfree* poem”, Yeats also uses animal imagery to transmit that the place is like a haven of tranquillity. From the sounds or the image of a *bee-loud glade* to the suggested sound of a “*cricket sing*” Yeats creates a magical atmosphere that can move the reader to the delightful place it describes. This description allows us to make a tour of what happens on the island from dawn with the allusion to the hum of the bee – “*bee-loud glade*” until the twilight with the “*cricket song*”. Here, we like to cite that these references remind us of a traditional Irish Lullaby composed by Herbert Hughes, an Irish author who also belonged to the Celtic Twilight Revivalist movement, this song’s imagery is clearly like “*In the Lake of Innisfree*” metaphors. It is *The Gartan Mother’s Lullaby*. This is a traditional folk song from a northern area of Ireland, Gartan in County Donegal. “*Gartan’s Mother Lullaby*” is collected by Hughes in collaboration with other writers of the *Celtic Revivalism* artistic movement. With this in mind, some authors argue that Yeats collaborate in the composition of this lullaby, but that remains to be proven. Then, I would like to point out this casual finding as an open line for future research. This stunning cradle song refers to several figures in Irish mythology such as *Aoibheall* (King of the Northern Faeries), places in Ireland like *Tearmann*, Irish for Termon, a village near Gartan in Donegal, and words in the Irish language namely *Siabhra*, also known as *Tuatha de Danann*, or little magicians of the Pagan Irish. It is interesting to allude to this lullaby in comparison to “*In The Lake of Innisfree*” because it presents some similarities in terms of imagery, as is the case of the “*hum of the bee*” or the “*cricket’s song*”.

#### THE GARTAN MOTHER'S LULLABY

Sleep oh babe, for the red bee hums the silent twilight's fall,

Aoibheall from the grey rock comes, to wrap the world in thrall.

A leanbhan oh, my child, my joy, my love, my heart's desire,

The crickets sing you lullaby, beside the dying fire.

Dusk is drawn and the Green Man's thorn is wreathed in rings of fog,

Siabhra sails his boat till morn, upon the Starry Bog.

A leanbhan oh, the pale half-moon hath brimmed her cusp in dew,

And weeps to hear the sad sleep-tune, I sing, oh love, to you.

Faintly sweet doth the chapel bell, ring o'er the valley dim,

Tearmann's peasant voices swell, in fragrant evening hymn.

A leanbhan oh, the low bell rings, my little lamb to rest,

And angel-dreams till morning sings, its music in your head.

Sleep oh babe, for the red bee hums the silent twilight's fall,

Aoibheall from the grey rock comes, to wrap the world in thrall.

A leanbhan oh, my child, my joy, my love, my heart's desire,

The crickets sing you lullaby, beside the dying fire.

The crickets sing you lullaby, beside the dying fire.



**Image 2: Tuatha de Danann, or little magicians of the Pagan Irish, were called "siabhra" without distinction.**



Below is a LINK to hear a beautiful version of this lullaby:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgpVJAUljYA>

To cap it all, “*In The Lake of Innisfree*” is a timeless classic that may spark different interpretations: such as a paradisaic idyllic haven, as well as a place to attain wisdom or even a refuge for problems of urban hectic and noisy life. Apart from that, we would like to point out the similarities of this poem with other performances of art related to *Celtic Revivalism*, like “*Gartan’s mother Lullaby*”:

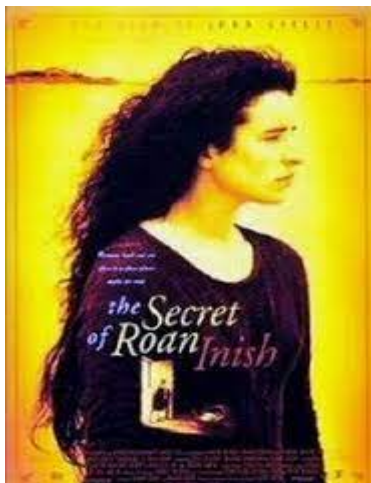
## **2.2. *The Lady of Gollerus* as a source of inspiration for the Big Screen**

Last but not certainly at least, we would like to take the example of the legend collected in Yeats *Fairy and Folk Tales of Irish Peasantry*, which title is *The Lady of Gollerus*. This legend tells the story of a *Selkie*, a mythical creature of the northern Islands of Scotland, Ireland, and Faroese, that is said to be able to transform from a seal into a human by shedding its skin. In tales, selkies are often portrayed as gentle and melancholy beings who are capable of great love and devotion, but who must eventually return to the sea. Some stories even depict selkie-human romances, in which a human falls in love with a selkie and tries to keep them on land, but the selkie always eventually misses the ocean and leaves. This tale has inspired not a few films and cartoon movies for kids of all ages. In the excerpt below, we will explain how, in the legend of Gollerus, Dick Fitzgerald (the story's main character) captured the Merrow (Selkie) to make her his spouse.

Dick guessed at once that she was a Merrow, although he had never seen one before, for espied the *cohuleen driuth*, or little enchanted cap, which the sea people use for diving down into the ocean, lying upon the strand, near her; and he had heard, that if once he could possess himself of the cap, she would lose the power of going away into the water: so he seized it with all speed, and she, hearing the noise, turned her head about as natural as any Christian. (Croker )

In relation to the story of *The Lady of Gollerus*, we would like to take an example, which in our opinion can be a paradigm of all this mythology collected in the legends of Yeats but taken to the big screen: It is *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

### 2.3. The Secret of Roan Inish



As an example of how oral tradition and legends have trespassed the threshold of the tale tradition, we would like to choose this wonderful film that portrays several tokens related to Irish heritage, ancestry, traditions, and rituals. In the same way, this film also exemplifies the changes which Irish society underwent in the time inter-wars, namely, the shift from rural to the industrial Irish economical model. This change is seen as rather negative because of the ancestral traditions left behind. The film is compelling due to its approach to numerous symbols related to politics (the Fenians), Language (Gaelic), blended religious beliefs (praying to Saint Brigid), etc.

*The Secret of Roan Inish* (1996) is a film that tells the story of a little girl who was brought up by her grandparents, because of her mother's death and the supposed alcoholism of his father. This girl, called Fionna, comes to find out the true origins of her family. *The Secret of Roan Inish* is a film based on the novel *Ron Mor Skerry* written by Rosalie K. Fry, inspired by Celtic legends, specifically, Yeats's *The Lady of Gollerus*. The film conveys the message of the initiatory journey or a quest for maturity for the girl Fionna, who manages to discover the ancestral secret of her family. Then, the Novel or the film as well may be classified as a *Bildungsroman* type of novel.

Here is a link to the trailer of the film:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfddSj3bkxk&t=2s>

To begin with, analyzing the allegorical elements of this story, we would like to highlight that since the beginning of the story, the setting of the *Roan Inish* is described as an *Arcadian place*. The definition of arcadian by the Collins Dictionary of Literary Terms is: "A poetic term for Arcadia, an ancient region of Greece with a tradition of rural, bucolic innocence". In this regard, *Roan Inish* reminds us of "*In The Lake Isle of Innisfree*", as a place to find solace and rest.

According to some experts like Rovira, as soon as Fionna set foot in her grandparent's house surroundings, she feels captivated by the landscape and by the secret haunt there. We would like to explain how started this fascination below. The scenes recounted here are vital to understanding the significance of the story's plot.

Fiona es recibida por el abuelo bajo la mirada atenta de las gaviotas y de una foca. En el primer contacto con su nuevo entorno familiar recibe información acerca de Roan Inish, la Arcadia, la isla donde en otro tiempo vivió con la familia de la que ahora se encuentra desposeída [...]

Fiona iluminada por una luz que proviene de una ventana entreabierta, dirigiendo su mirada hacia el lugar que señala la mano del abuelo [...] (Rovira )

Rovira describes above how the grandfather of Fionna, Hugh, points to *Roan Inish* as the pastoral land where his ancestors, the Coneelly, stem. In this scene of the film, the spectator gets captivated by a magical atmosphere created through landscape photography, music, and storytelling of the characters in the film. On a different note, the familiar history of the Coneelly is told by Hugh when he refers to them as a community being the original inhabitants of the isle of *Roan*. By the same token, the mandatory departure of the family from the island owing to the harsh weather conditions and labour shortages means a shift from their ancestors' typical agricultural lifestyle to a predominantly industrial society. The bucolic atmosphere created by the beautiful landscape of the film and the charming narrative of Grandpa Hugh is foreshadowed by the allusion to the loss of little Jamie, who vanished at sea during the Coneelly's abandonment of the Island. Young Jamie's loss symbolizes what is left behind when uprooted from our own cultural heritage. Meanwhile, it represents an axiomatic theme around which the whole story of the film revolves. On the one hand, this loss is apparently caused by the uprooting of the community. On the other, "The community" is a distinctive Irish symbol related to other terms such as a sense of belonging to the land (Mother Ireland).

[...] mientras cae la noche la abuela Tess cose, el abuelo Hugh hace referencia a la llegada de los Coneelly a las islas (historia de Sean Michael) y al abandono de la Arcadia familiar (que tiene como consecuencia la desaparición de Jaimie). El material con el que se

construyen estas historias es la "vida vivida" y los ritos que sirvieron para instituir la comunidad. (Rovira )

An important scene to keep in mind that comes from the previous one is where Coneelly's grandmother, Tess, comes into play. Grandma Tess, as the counterpart of Grandpa Hugh, contradicts him in his beliefs when he narrates the story of the first settler of the Island of Roan, Sean Michael, great-great-grandfather of Hugh. He explains that no man should be rescued from the sea, otherwise his fate is doomed to misfortune. To which, Grandma Tess replied that Sean Michael finished his days in jail selling weapons to the *Fenians*. Here, we can trace back political references to the *Sinn Féin*.

"El mar nos da y el mar nos quita -dice el abuelo-, esto le sucedió al padre del padre de mi padre .. (Rovira )

An important portrait that tells us about the inherited beliefs and prayers of the Irish is the praying to *Saint Brigitte* (patron saint of Ireland), which is performed by Grandma Tess. Grandma Tess represents the matriarchal symbol paradigmatic in Irishness identity. In the same way, we know that the beliefs of the Irish people are a fusion between traditional Catholicism that deepens its roots in the arrival of *Saint Patrick* to the Island and surreptitious beliefs of the *Celtic* or *pagan type*. Below we want to cite the wonderful moment when Tess stages the ritual advocated by *Saint Brigitte* (to protect the house) against evil.

"Atizo este fuego como el Señor hace con nosotros: María a los pies y Brígida en la cabecera. ¡Qué los ocho ángeles más luminosos de la Ciudad de la Gracia protejan esta casa y a toda su gente hasta que llegue el día!". (Rovira )

A secondary character, the dark-haired Tadhg, plays an important role in the transmission of the enigmatic history of the Coneelly to little Fionna. Taghd (the mad man), as a Fili - druid or wise man-, represents the storyteller who transmits orally the history of Coneelly's fairy ancestors, the *selkies*. Tadhg is a cousin of Fionna's father who has inherited the selkie's dark eyes and hair. He tells Fionna that one of each generation of the family is born with dark hair and eyes, familiarly known as *The Darks*. Such selkie descendants are not only physically like her but have special skills such as hand fishing. Tadhg is one of those *dark*s as well as little Jamie, whose disappearance recalls the poem of Yeats "*The Stolen Child*", insofar as the kid is kidnapped by the selkies, the otherworldly creatures, that represent *another branch* of Jamie's family.

Tadhg, el loco, para quien no resulta problemático recurrir a la mitología a la hora de explicar a Fiona la historia de la familia: aparece así el mito de la selkie (ser mítico celta, mitad humano, mitad foca, emparentado a su vez con las también míticas sirenas) como la estirpe de donde descienden "los oscuros", "la otra rama de la familia" tal y como afirma el mismo Tadhg. (Rovira )

These narratives blend the mythological with the ethnographical, and at the same time, in the interstices between the real world and the fictional one, we can approach the social and cultural manifestations that shape popular folklore. We must keep in mind that the ethnographical roots of the Irish population have their origin in the incursions of the Milesian peoples of northern Spain, specifically from Galician Land and Basque Country.

A large amount of gold torques, bracelets and other items have also been recovered, and altars, stellae and other archaeological finds continue to be uncovered. Several authors

have also detected close resemblances between the folk-tales and legends of Galicia and those of Ireland. (Alberro 1-20)

Last but not least, the film alludes to *Gaelic* to reflect on cultural heritage, worth the redundancy of everything referred to above. In line with these references to origins and ancestors, the *Gaelic* language represents a construct deeply rooted in Irishness identity. A mention that we consider at least curious is that in the film it is said that *"the Selkie spoke a Gaelic more ancient than the one which spoke of the grandparents of my grandparents"*. Likewise, the *Gaelic* is also present in the speech of Sean Michael (Coneelly's ancestor aforementioned), when Grandpa Hugh as the narrator explains that the *Gaelic* was forbidden at schools during the English domination period.

[...] hablaba un irlandés que sonaba más antiguo que el de /os abuelos de sus abuelos.  
(Rovira )

All things considered, we have collected these compelling examples of Yeats's legends, and their supposed examples moved onto the big screen, namely "The Secret of Roan Inish", for being absolutely lovely.

### **3. Conclusion:**

We must admit that the elaboration of this dissertation has been utterly fascinating for the serendipitous discovery of the parallelisms between the different works of Yeats's literature with other Masterpieces of Universal Literature, traditional songs, current manifestations of culture, like in films, and Timeless legends of supernatural beings converging on our own. On the one

hand, we have seen the idealist pastoral portrait of an Island, as a place from escaping of real life, in Yeats's "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*". In this regard, we have also identified some similarities of it with later works of other *Celtic Revivalist* exponents, namely, in the lullaby "*Gartan's Mother Lullaby*" composed by Herbert Hughes. On the other hand, we have selected a beautiful Yeats legend: it is "*The Lady of Gollerus*" for bridging the concept of the idyllic ideas associated with the islands and the fable creatures who may live on those islands. This story revolves around the myth of a *selkie*: a magical creature which can change its shape from seal to becoming a woman by taking out its skin. The fable of the selkie takes us directly to the current manifestations of the seventh art, through which *selkies* have come across to us as tokens embodying different ideas related to Irish heritage. In other words, we are glad to point to the paradigmatic film "*The Secret of Roan Inish*" for symbolizing the aforesaid legendary iconography of Ireland.

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