



Inniskeen Road: July Evening

Patrick Kavanagh

The bicycles go by in twos and threes -
There's a dance in Billy Brennan's barn tonight,
And there's the half-talk code of mysteries
And the wink-and-elbow language of delight.
Half-past eight and there is not a spot
Upon a mile of road, no shadow thrown
That might turn out a man or woman, not
A footfall tapping secrecies of stone.

I have what every poet hates in spite
Of all the solemn talk of contemplation.
Oh, Alexander Selkirk knew the plight
Of being king and government and nation.
A road, a mile of kingdom. I am king
Of banks and stones and every blooming thing.

Vocabulary

- **Inniskeen** - a small village and parish in County Monaghan
- **Alexander Selkirk** - Scottish sailor who was the prototype of the marooned mariner in Daniel Defoe's novel Robinson Crusoe

Pre-reading task

- Have you ever felt left out of a social occasion?
- Do you think poets and artists need to be remote and separate from society?

Questions

1. What kind of social event is taking place as the poem opens?
2. Is this a particularly glamorous or sophisticated event?
3. Is the speaker a participant in or an observer of the event?
4. What is the effect of the alliterative 'Billy Brennan's barn tonight' in the opening stanza?
5. What do you think is meant by the line 'the half-talk code of mysteries/And the wink-and-elbow language of delight'?
6. After the initial liveliness of the opening lines the scene changes. How is this portrayed?
7. The speaker feels that there are certain expectations of poets. Does he agree with these expectations?
8. Why does the poet compare himself with Alexander Selkirk?
9. The poet says 'I am king'. What is he king of? How does he feel about his 'kingdom'?
10. What would you say is the dominant tone of this poem?

Overview

The poem opens with a note of excitement and anticipation of a local social event - 'a dance in Billy Brennan's barn' however the poet does not seem to be a participant - 'the bicycles go by'. Although this is a small, rural event the poet seems excluded - 'there's the half talk code of mysteries/And the wink and elbow language of delight. It's not clear if this exclusion is self-imposed. The atmosphere changes to one of loneliness and isolation. The poet claims that poets are expected to lead a life of peace and 'contemplation' but says that poets hate it. In his isolation he compares himself to Alexander Selkirk who lived utterly alone. He declares himself king of all he surveys but seems to feel that his kingdom is worthless - 'I am king/Of banks and stones and every blooming thing'.

Key Points

- Vivid Imagery
- Ordinary life
- Narrative
- Simple language

Word Bank

- Create a bank of words you might use when writing about the poet's work.
- Some are provided for you.
- Add your own.
- You can write definitions of words you don't know.
- You can pick out suitable quotes to go with the words.

[illegible]

Mind Map

