



HOLY FAITH PRESENTATION SCHOOL

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(CLASS 10TH - ENGLISH)

(POEM -3) WHEN YOU ARE OLD (W.B.YEATS)

SUMMARY

'When You are Old' by William Butler Yeats (13 June 1865-28 January 1939) is a heart- touching piece of art which expresses Yeats' immense love for Maud Gonne who toyed with his emotions of love to register countless cracks in his heart which bled profusely for the Irish revolutionary. He exhorts his beloved to take down his book of poem when her dimples would have transformed into wrinkles and her awe striking youthful looks would have faded away with the harmful effects of time. She would realize then that there were many who had loved her youth and her physical beauty but there was someone who adored the beauty of her 'SOUL' and loved her beyond self and not only admired the dazzling moments of her 'glad grace' but also 'the sorrows of her changing face' but alas! The poet and his love may have vanished into thin air. The book of poems penned by Yeats would make Maud realize the true and selfless love of the poet which she least cared for when she was in the flower of youth and her face would turn glum and gloomy. Sitting beside the fire, old and worn out, she would regret the past and realize that the poet's sad soul had disappeared high over the lofty mountains and vanished behind the stars never to come back.

CENTRAL IDEA

'When You Are Old' by W.B. Yeats is an expression of Yeats' intense feelings of love for his beloved Maud Gonne who seldom responded positively to his heartfelt emotions and provide utterly unfaithful. The poet images her reading his book of poems when she will step into the sunset of her life. She would surely realize the true and pure love of the poet beyond the scope of any, external paint and polish but it will be too late as the poet would not be there to wipe off those tears of Maud's realization.

IMAGES USED IN THE POEM

A number of images have been used in the poem like.

- i). Nodding by the fire
- ii) Moments of glad grace
- iii) The pilgrim soul
- iv) Sorrows of your changing face
- v) A crowd of stars



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VOCABULARY

Full of Sleep	Approaching death
Nodding by the fire	Sitting by the fire
Moments of glad grace	The time of youth when the poet's beloved was beautiful
Pilgrim soul	Pure soul of Maud Gonne which will travel to another world
Glowing bars	Burning embers in the hearth /fire place
Murmur	To whisper softly
Unrequited	Not returned
Occultism	Supernaturalism/Mysticism
Fled	Escaped/Run away
Paced	Went quickly

Q: Below is the summary of the poem. Complete it by writing the missing words/ phrases. (Here the missing words/phrases are written in bold).

Ans. W.B. Yeats wrote this poem for a woman named Maud Gonne who did not respond to his pure **feelings of love**. The poet imagines Maud Gonne as having turned **grey**, sitting by the fire and **nodding drowsily**. He impresses upon his beloved to take down his **book of poems** and dream of the **beauty** she used to have when she was in the **spring** of her life. She will realize that there were many who loved and admired her **youthful physical graces** and beauty. But as she stepped into the sunset of her life and her face **grew wrinkly**, her eyes lost and the appeal, only one man in the form of the **poet** stayed to love **the pilgrim** soul in her where others **ditched** her. He loved not only her youthful grace but also the **changingsorrows of her face**. Remembering the poet's true and selfless love, Maud Gonne would murmur with sorrow that the poet and his pure love has **fled** and paced upon **the mountains** and hid his face amid **a crowd of stars**.



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Q2: The poet has used certain poetic expressions in the poem given in the table and their meaning is given in the list below. Choose from the given list and fill in the table at the appropriate place. The first one has been done for you as an example.

EXPRESSIONS FROM THE POEM	SUGGESTION
<p>How love fled</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grey and full of sleep 2. Nodding by the fire. 3. Dream of the soft look 4. Their shadows deep 5. Moments of glad grace 6. Pilgrim soul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of deep sorrow on the death of the lover • • • • •

- a) Being drowsy and listless all the time
- b) Time of youth when the beloved was cheerful and attractive
- c) Sedation caused by warmth
- d) Pure heart referring to the soul of Maud Gonne
- e) Dark intoxicating eyes
- F) Eyes with a feeling of friendship, love etc.

Ans. 1. (a), 2.(c), 3. (f) 4. (e) , 5 (b), 6 (d)

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

Q1. How has the journey from youth to old age been described in the poem?

Ans. The journey from the dimply youth to the wrinkly old age has been beautifully described by Yeats through Maud Gonne's sad and depressing change. In our youth, we are surrounded by true or false admirers. Youthful love seems changing and spell-binding but as we tread towards the fag end of our lives, all the fake and fictitious admiration diminishes and the hollow premises of love and faithfulness flee away like migratory birds. Then we are left alone and aloof and the bitterness of life dawns on us.

Q2: What does the phrase 'Full of Sleep' mean?

Ans. The Phrase 'Full o of Sleep' refers to the dizziness and drowsiness normally felt in old age. When body remains tired and we wish to keep sitting or lying all the time, we are then, indeed, 'full of sleep'.



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Q3: How is the poet's love different from the love of those who also loved his beloved?

Ans. The poet's love is true to the core with the word 'Soul' written all over it whereas the so called love of others smelt of physicality and selfishness. The poet's love is true in essence as he himself says that he loved the 'Pilgrim soul' of Maud Gonne beyond the scope of any lustful feelings. The poet does not only love the moments of his beloved's glad grace but also the sorrows of her changing face.

Q4. What is Maud Gonne reminded of in the poem?

Ans. Maud Gonne is reminded of the fact that she would realize the truth worth and meaning of the poet's love for her in the sunset of her life. She will understand the disloyalty and the unfaithfulness of those who loved her body only and forsook her completely. She will then feel sad for not having responded to Yeats' love and even which she had not cared for.

Q5. What is the rhyme Scheme of the poem?

Ans. The poem has three quatrains. The first line of each quatrain rhymes with the fourth and the second with the third. So the rhyme scheme is abba.

Q6. 'But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you'. Explain.

Ans. The poet tells his beloved that in her old age she would come to the conclusion that only pure love lasts long and she will realize the true quality of her various lovers. Only then she will figure out the love of many people who loved only her physical charm. But there was only one who loved the pilgrim soul in her. In other words, the poet loved the charisma of her inner, not just the beauty of her body. He would keep love her even after her pilgrim soul has departed for another world.

Q7. Literary devices

Imagery
Consonance
Enjambment
Alliteration
Symbolism
Personification

Note: try to find out the examples of the said literary devices

Q8. Themes

Love, rejection and time are the major themes of the poem.

Note: explain the above themes with reference to the poem