

Introduction:

Man is mortal and so are the physical charms and worldly graces. But the true love is ever youthful and stays with you even after death. This is the theme around which the whole poem revolves. This poem truly manifests the intense emotions of the poet for his beloved.

Explanation:

1. The poet takes his beloved to a journey into future and visualizes a time when she'll be old and feeble. Her hair will be grey old age will render her worthless. Having nothing to do, she'll laze all the time and warm herself near the hearth in winters. This is the time, when the poet suggests her to take up his collection of poems and give a careful reading to the same. It is only after a careful and deep reading of his poems, she'll get to know about the poet's genuine and consistent love for her. Since most of W.B. Yeats' poems are written about Maude Gonne, his poems will remind her about the days of her prime. She'll recall her gentle and charming looks. She'll (youth) also remember her profound, dark and attractive eyes which so many people. But Alas! Now they'll all be counted with the past.

2. With the advent of ripe age comes the maturity and true understanding as Shakespeare has rightly said, "Repentance is all". He tells Maud Gonne that she'll realize the importance of true quality of love in the later days of her life. He reminds her of the golden days of youth when a number of people loved her for her grace, gaiety, and charm. They loved her physical beauty. Their love for her could be true or false. But there can be no two opinions about the fact that among the crowd of lovers, only the poet loved her pure heart and not her body. He loved her for no other reason but love. He loved her holy and pure soul that had come to earth to undertake a very short but holy journey. He loved each and every expression of her face. In brief, he loved her pure and sincere heart unlike others who were after her physical charm.

Yeats visualizes a time when all the liveliness and youthful energy of his beloved'll be vanished. At that very time, she'll contemplate about the nature of love she'll sit lonely, and feel sad for not responding with love to the poet. The poet has personified love who waited eagerly upon his beloved and when she didn't respond, he sadly flew high above the mountains and because of his purity changed into a divine star. The poet means to say that Maud Gonne'll repent only in her later age for having lost the most precious person in her life. He assures the lady that though his love remained unrequited during his lifetime, he'll continue to love her ever after his death.

Central Idea: The poem "When you Are Old" is addressed to Maud Gonne (poet's beloved) who never responded to Yeats' intense emotions. In this poem the poet dramatizes his unrequited love by offering a future command to his beloved to take down his book of poems and read it.

The poet wants his beloved to read his poem after she has become 'old and grey' and full of sleep. The poet in this poem leaves no stone unturned to make his beloved believe that he loves her from the depths of his heart. In this poem it becomes apparent that Yeats is not just fascinated by Maud Gonne's physical charms and external beauty but his love for her is above all these parameters. The poet wants to show to his beloved his pure and constant love. He wants to make his beloved realize that there had been many men who loved her beauty and youth but with the passing years, their love took wings and got lost. He (the poet) loved her soul irrespective of her age and looks.

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