

CHAPTER: - 6
TOPIC: - WHEN YOU ARE OLD
W.B. YEATS

ANALYSIS

*When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;*

Paraphrase:Stanza-1

When you (my beloved) grow old and your hair turn grey, and when you look sometimes near the fire sleepily, then you should pick up this book that I am writing and read this poem. This poem then would remind you how beautiful you once used to be, and how soft and deep your eyes were when you were young.

Explanation of difficult phrases: **Nothing by the fire-** dozing as she sits near the fire in lonely winter nights. **Dream of-** think of the past youthful day is in a dreamy way. **Soft looks your eyes had once-** The poet's beloved now has soft looks. Her eyes have an enchantment about them. They lend to her face a look of charm and sweetness. But they would not always remain so. In her old age, she would only remember these soft looks with regret.

*How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;*

Paraphrase:Stanza-2

You will then remember that many men then loved you because of your joyful beauty. They loved you for your beauty, some with a true love, others safely. But then you will also remember that one man loved your soul, and loved you for the sadness of your looks.

Explanation of difficult phrases: **Glad grace-** During her youth, his beloved has a grace and a beauty that arises out of the joy living. Her youthfulness lends a charm to all her movements. **How many...grace-** This is to be connected with the idea given earlier-the beloved in her old age, remembering her days of youth. The poet tells her how she would then remember her old lovers, who are no more.

*And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.*

Paraphrase:Stanza-3

Then, as you bend down near the glowing fire in the grate, you will murmur to yourself that love has left you, and has hidden itself far away, in lofty mountains and in starry skies.

Explanation of difficult phrases: **A bending down-** His beloved in her old age, would bend down. **The glowing bars-** the iron bars in the fire-place are glowing hot because of the fire burning in it. **And bending love fled-** The poet imagines that in her old age his beloved would feel that love has left the world, and lives now in the stars and the mountains. In other words, she will feel the loneliness of old age, when all lovers will forsake her. **Paced upon-walked upon.** **And paced---Overhead-Love** no longer lives on earth, but upon lofty mountain peaks. **And hid---Stars-Love,** which visits us, in our youth for a while, rises up to the stars and becomes one with them.

SUMMARY

In this poem the poet narrates how his beloved Maud Gonne would grow old with the passage of time. Her liveliness and youthful energy would vanish and she would pass the time dozing by the fireside as old people want to do. She would perhaps pick up the volume of the poet's *Collected Poems*, and slowly go through the verses wherein the poet has declared his love for her and admired her graces and charms. She would be reminded of the loveliness of her eyes that she once possessed and of their deep shadows. At that time, she might think that many young people loved her for her beauty and youth, but there was only one whose love was sincere and genuine and it was certainly the poet himself. The poet loved her not for her physical beauty only, but also loved for her soul. It was the poet among all others who could feel for her and love her because sorrow and suffering were depicted on her face.

The perusal of the poet's love poems would set his beloved thinking longingly of the past. She would then realize the worth and importance of the poet's love. With the realization she would mutter to herself with anguish that he was no more alive. He was dead and gone and his soul must either be hovering among the mountains or it must have become part of the galaxy of the stars overhead. The poem presents a portrait of decaying and dying youth and beauty. The poet has referred to it time and again quite passionately all through his poetic career. Maud Gonne, his beloved, was a proud and headstrong girl. The poem sounds a note of warning to her. The idea is that if she does not reciprocate his love, which is not merely physical, but spiritual too, she would have to repent for her folly in her old age. Her youth and beauty would wither and vanish one day, and lovers who hover round her, lured by her bloom, would desert her one by one. Then she would smart with a sense of remorseful agony for the cruelty and callousness towards the poet. The poet intends forewarn her.

The poem has been written in three stanzas, each containing four lines. The rhyming pattern is very different and steady written in iambic pentameter, the first stanza is a b b a; the second is c d c d; the third is e f e f.

I. Answer the following questions in a word, a phrase or a sentence each: -

1. How is the journey from youth to old age described in the poem?

Ans. The poet describes the period of youth as prized with physical charms, attractive eyes, pleasant feeling of love etc., while as it describes the old age in terms of grey hairs, drowsiness, sorrow, and desolation.

2. What does the phrase full of sleep mean?

Ans. The phrase 'full of sleep' has a symbolic meaning which means old age. It indicates the natural drowsiness that comes in human beings as one grows old and approaches death

3. How is the poet's love different from those who also loved his beloved?

Ans. The poet's love stands different from those of the other lovers. Others loved his beloved for her soft looks, charming eyes, and physical beauty. The poet loved his beloved for her pilgrim soul and inner beauty. His love was spiritual, while as others was sensual.

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

Ans. Maud Gonne is reminded of her youthful days when she was charming and energetic. She is also reminded of her only true love who would love her for her pilgrim soul. Others love was short-lived while as the poet's love was persistent.

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

Ans. The line describes that there was only one lover who loved Maud Gonne truly. He loved her for her inner beauty which did remain intact for the whole life. His love continued even when she becomes old and ugly while as those whose love was false distanced themselves when her physical charms lived its days.

7. What images does the poet use in the poem?

Ans. The poet uses following images in the poem: grey hair, full of sleep, nodding by the fire, deep shadows of eyes, sorrow of changing face, glowing bars etc.

8. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

Ans. The poem is written in iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme ABBA CDDC EFFE which gives a steady rhythm to the poem.

9. What does the poem infer about the power of poetry and the written word?

Ans. The poem infers that poetry lasts and remains as a constant reminder of what was. The speaker suggests that poetry has the ability to contain a man's life in its lines and, in turn, to ensure that the life never dies.

10. The term "glad grace" is an example of what literary device?

Ans. The repetition of the 'g' sound suggests that it is an example of alliteration.

11. In what ways is the soul, to the speaker, a "pilgrim"?

Ans. The soul of the spoken to is on a pilgrimage through life. It is in a state of constant movement and experience, with its ultimate destination, through death, being heaven.

12. By having love flee to join the "crowd of stars" overhead, what is the speaker suggesting is its role in life?

Ans. Love is described as having a role of protector and guidance through life for the pilgrim soul.

13. What does the speaker want his beloved to do sitting by the fire in 'When you are old'?

March – 2015

Ans. To read the book of memories and remember her past, sitting by the fire.

14. 'Pilgrim Soul' means the soul

March – 2020

(a) which is immortal

(b) that has gone On a Pilgrimage

(c) which is in quest of true love

Ans. (c) which is in quest of true love.

II. Answer the following questions in a paragraph of 80 – 100 words each: -

III. Answer the following questions in about 200 words:

1. Whose love in 'When you are old' is true and intense? Explain.

March - 2016

Ans. It is the Poet's love that is entirely different from the love exhibited by the other suitors. He admits that there are many suitors trying to court her but he knows for sure that their love for her is not genuine and sincere. He believes that they only love the elegance and beauty of her youth which is transient. On the other hand, the poet likes her inner self. He calls it her pilgrim soul. They will find her worth loving only when she is young and beautiful. But as she grows older, and her face shrinks, depicting the differences and sorrows faced by her, he will still continue to love her with all her sorrows as well. He does so because he is in love with her inner self and not merely with her physical beauty.

2. How does the speaker distinguish his love from that of others in the poem 'When you are old'?

March – 2017

Ans. The speaker distinguishes his love from that of others by resorting to the depiction of contrast between physical beauty and inner beauty. When his beloved was young and beautiful many suitors were after her-praising her external beauty without caring for her feelings. Their love was transitory whereas the speaker loved her pilgrim soul. He was the only one who cared for her, reciprocating (sharing) her feelings, her likes and dislikes. He loved even the sorrows of her changing face. Here, he has presented a real contrast between love and infatuation.

3. 'True love is related to soul but not to the physical beauty'. How is this idea brought out in the poem 'When you are old'?

Ans. 'When You Are Old', is a love poem written by W. B. Yeats. The poet addresses the lady, he loved in his youth. When she grows old, she will be sitting by the fire side and reading the book of poems written by him. Reading the book, she will remember her past, her beauty and the many men who admired her. While all the men loved her for her beauty, he loved her soul and her soul searches for something meaningful. She will feel sad that love has vanished along with him. He loved her for her internal beauty. His true love is permanent though her beauty has waned over the years.

4. How is the speaker's passionate love for his beloved brought out in the poem 'When you are old'?

March – 2019

Ans. The poet asks his love, who is still young, to imagine a time when she is past her prime youth. She would then be an old woman with gray hair and sleepy eyes. When she is in such a state, he wants her to read a book of memories from her youth. As the woman sits beside the fire, nodding her head and leafs through her memories, she would recollect the 'soft looks' she once had and the sorrows she had suffered until then. When she recalls her faded beauty she would also recall how she was admired by many suitors who were infatuated with her physical charms. At the same time, she would also recall how there was one man who loved her unique soul which was in search of true love. She would also realize that her true love having lingered on for a while, disappeared from the earth and hid himself amidst a crowd of stars in heaven.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The speaker had madly fallen in love.
- But his beloved never responded to his love.
- One day she would become old and her hair would turn grey.
- She would lose the soft look of her deep eyes.
- She would feel drowsy and tired all the time.
- She would sit by the fireplace sleeping and warming herself.
- He wanted her to read his book of poems.
- The others loved her physical beauty.
- But he loved her pilgrim soul.
- The poet's sad soul would hide itself behind the stars.

RECAPITULATION:

- ✚ The speaker addressing his beloved
- ✚ Asks her to read the book when she becomes old
- ✚ Asks her to dream of her soft looks
- ✚ Others loved her physical beauty
- ✚ The speaker loves her pilgrim soul
- ✚ He loved her joys and sorrows
- ✚ She sits by the glowing bars
- ✚ Murmuring about how love fled

EXERCISE:

ONE MARK

1. Mention any one of the aspects that the speaker loved in his beloved in 'When You Are Old'.
2. What does the speaker want his beloved to dream of in 'When You Are Old'?
3. What does the speaker want his beloved to do when she is old in 'When You Are Old'?

FOUR MARKS

1. How does the speaker distinguish his love from that of the others in the poem 'When You Are Old'?
2. What does the speaker visualize about his beloved in 'When You Are Old'? Explain.
3. How does the speaker contrast his love with that of the other in 'When You Are Old'?

SIX MARKS

1. The speaker addresses a young lady in her old age.' Comment on the timesequence used by the poet in 'When you Are Old'
2. 'But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you'. How does the speaker justify this in 'When you Are Old'?

“A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers”.