

Analysis of “When you are Old by W.B Yeats”

This poem, which is written by Yeats, is addressed to his beloved Maud Gonne who was a famous actress and political activist. Yeats was deeply in love with her, but whenever he proposed to her, she always rejected him.

“When You Are Old” is mainly based on imagination. It starts with a lovely and warm picture of Maud Gonne who becomes an old lady. Her hair have becomes grey, and she is nodding by the fire and full of sleep. He told her that, at this old age, if she takes his book that includes this poem and reads it slowly and carefully, she will remember her soft and mild eyes she had when you was young. The sorrow and depth of her eyes will appear in her dream once again. The speaker imagines one day, when his beloved young lady is old, she will be reading this poem and feel the youth of herself again.

The second stanza makes a comparison between the speaker and the lady’s admirers when she was young. Her suitors or admirers loved her only because she was beautiful, young, elegant, and graceful. Nevertheless, there is only one man who loved her noble soul and her aging face. The speaker, here, refers to himself when he says: “one man”.

In the last stanza, the speaker imagines the old lady bending down beside the stove and murmur sadly about the love that fled away. Love goes up a mountain overhead and hides his face among a crowd of stars. It means that his love for the woman has been left unrequited. Realising the fact that love has fled away is likely, according to the speaker, to make the lady sad.

The speaker wants this woman to regret losing him when she is old, and her beauty has faded. He believes that when she is old, she will truly regret having lost the only person who loved her soul. Thus, he is trying to get her to picture herself as an old woman before she gets there. If she does, perhaps there is a chance that she may change her mind and decide to return the love of the man who loves her soul and whose love will not fade as her beauty fades with age. The tone of the poem changes in the last stanza. While the first two stanzas could be seen as romantic, the loss of the speaker’s love in the third stanza drastically changes the tone, which has become full of regret.

One might say that the main theme of this poem is the brevity of life, the passing time, and the unrequited love.