



When You Are Old

This poem, which Yeats dedicated to Maud Gonne, is an example of the love poetry he wrote before he was 35 and which is intimately related to his life. The dominant mood is one of serenity, melancholy and memory.

William Butler Yeats
The Rose
(1893)

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;

- 5 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;

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

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the poem and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 giving off bright light because of burning | 4 bending the head quickly |
| 2 escaped | 5 pieces of metal or wood |
| 3 walked quickly | 6 inclining |

2 READ the poem again and do the following activities.

1 Read the poem and answer the following questions.

- Who is the poet addressing?
- In what situation does the poet imagine her?
- What does he ask her to do?
- Who does 'one man' in line 7 refer to?
- What happened to love?

2 Identify the rhyme scheme of the poem.

- A ABAB.
B ABBA.
C ABAC.

3 Focus on metre.

- Divide the first quatrain into syllables. How many syllables are there in each line?
- Say how many feet it consists of.
- Recognise the kind of foot.
A Iambic pentameter.
B Trochaic pentameter.

4 Would you define the poem as conventional or experimental? Can you think of a reason?



- 5 Complete the table with the features of the woman the poet remembers and write down what sides of her personality they suggest.

Features	Side of personality

- 6 What condition is the passing of time associated with?
- A Physical change and loss.
 - B Physical pain.
 - C The joy of memories.
- 7 Analyse the theme of love. How many types of love are presented in the second stanza?
- Lines 5-6:
 - Lines 7-8:
- 8 In the third stanza love is introduced through
- A simile.
 - B lithotes.
 - C personification.
- What does this imply?
- 9 What feelings are connected with love as regards the poet and the woman?
- 10 Evaluate the language of the poem. Choose the correct alternative.
- 1 The words are mainly *monosyllabic* / *polysyllabic*.
 - 2 The terms are mainly *abstract* / *concrete*.
 - 3 Most images are *taken from everyday life* / *conventionally poetic*.
 - 4 The tone is *conversational* / *elevated*.

➤ COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS

- 3 **DISCUSS** the treatment of the theme of love by Yeats with some examples taken from Italian modern poetry. For example, Umberto Saba (1883-1957), who devoted some of the poems in his *Canzoniere* to his wife Lina, or Eugenio Montale (1896-1981), who in his works evoked the women he loved. With the help of your Italian teacher examine a few poems and compare them with the one you have just studied.