



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;

10 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.

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.

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

2 Identify the rhyme scheme of the poem.

A ABAB.
B ABBA.
C ABAC.

3 Focus on metre.

- 1 Divide the first quatrain into syllables. How many syllables are there in each line?
- 2 Say how many feet it consists of.
- 3 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.



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;

10 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.

READING COMPETENCE

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

1 giving off bright light because of burning	glowing	4 bending the head quickly	nodding
2 escaped	fled	5 pieces of metal or wood	bars
3 walked quickly	paced	6 inclining	bending

2 READ the poem again and do the following activities.

1 Read the poem and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who is the poet addressing? **A former love.**
- 2 In what situation does the poet imagine her? **As an older woman reading his book.**
- 3 What does he ask her to do? **Read his book and dream of how she used to be.**
- 4 Who does 'one man' in line 7 refer to? **The author.**
- 5 What happened to love? **It left and was lost in life.**

2 Identify the rhyme scheme of the poem.

A ABAB.
B ABBA.
C ABAC.

3 Focus on metre.

- 1 Divide the first quatrain into syllables. How many syllables are there in each line? **10 syllables**
- 2 Say how many feet it consists of. **5 iambic feet**
- 3 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?

It is conventional. It has standard 4 line quatrains and a conventional rhyming scheme.



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
soft eyes	kind-hearted, gentle
shadows in eyes	mysterious
face	sad, sorrowful
grey hair	old, elderly
body/soul	beautiful, alive, fresh

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: romantic
- Lines 7-8: filial

8 In the third stanza love is introduced through

- A simile.
- B litotes.
- C personification.

What does this imply? It implies love has its own reasons, self-will and control.

9 What feelings are connected with love as regards the poet and the woman? romantic, unrequited love
tenderness.

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.

Please visit us!

The largest and most complete lesson library on the web.



Everything in English language teaching



[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Follow
-US-



Follow Us On

[Teachers Pay Teachers](#)