

Among school children by w.b. yeats. poetry analysis

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Among School Children explores the reflection of life and mortality, as famous Irish author Yeats confronts the mistakes of his past. In Among School Children, Yeats explores the motivations and values of humanity through the speaker's confrontation of his own mortality supported by allusion, structure and diction.

The work begins with the speaker being forced to confront his own age and mortality when among school children. He stands as a " sixty year old smiling public man" (8). Forced to confront his own age, he reflects on and assesses his life as he is no longer one of the school children.

In the second stanza he alludes to the tale of Leda, a beautiful woman and mother of Helen. The poet interprets the Greek myth as Zeus raping or seducing Leda in the form of a swan, and Leda later giving birth to Helen of Troy. An unnamed woman, and her ledaean beauty, stands in as one of his regrets, he alludes to Plato's parable, the concept of two halves of a whole being separated at birth, growing apart but wanting to find each other. This is likely a reference to his love, Maud Gonne, who he attempted a relationship with and proposed to many times over the course of their friendship. This allusion to the unnamed woman continues into the third stanza when he muses about the beauty of youth, comparing her to the daughter of the swan, Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman on earth. The diction surrounding the unnamed woman shifts upon the confrontation of age once again. His words once describing her as daughter of the swan, and using phrases like " and had that color upon cheek or hair, and thereupon my heart is driven wild she stands before me as living child" he is forced to

confront the deterioration of beauty with age as he recalls her current appearance. His own ageing is addressed and dismissed with the phrase “had pretty plumage once-enough of that”(30). This dismissal illustrates the speaker’s struggles with ageing and loss of his own youth and his difficulty accepting that. This is a major theme of Yeats later poetry as he struggles deeply with his age and regrets during his time in the Black Tower.

In the fifth stanza the speaker refers to his age once again. The confrontation of age continues as he muses about what a mother would think of her son “with sixty or more winters on his head”. The use of winters rather than years creates a tone of age and weariness rather than youth and vigor. In the sixth stanza it alludes to multiple well known figures, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras. Rather than celebrating their achievements his word choice underrates them with phrases such as “a ghostly paradigm of things and bottom of the king of kings” (42-44). He instead chooses to emphasize that these are all men too with the line “old clothes upon old sticks” (48), men who are mortal as well and age. The diction and allusions throughout the poem illustrate the speaker’s struggle with his own age and mortality as he reflects on his life and attempts to evaluate the worth of a life. The dismissal of accomplishments and focus on the aging process reveals that with age comes the loss of accomplishments and the focus on failures and mortality.

The poem’s structure also supports the speaker’s difficulty with impermanence. The poem is structured in eight octets, each octet is able to explore the frailty and loss of a different element from beauty, love, faith, youth and innocence and conclude with a reflection on the worth of life. The

allusions to outside figures, diction surrounding them and the structure of the poem enhances the speaker's confrontation with age and mortality. It is through this confrontation the ideas of love, art, success and youth are explored and reflected upon as well as the value of a human life.