

W.b. yeats poetry analysis

Profession, Poet



Pete Benck Pd. 5 AP Lit 1-18-06 Among School Children In " Among School Children", Yeats speaks to an upcoming generation that is too preoccupied with preparation. The philosophy of this work suggests that life prepares us for what never happens. Consistent with Yeats' message in other works, it follows the dogma: ignorance brings innocence, whereas knowledge brings chaos. With acquired wisdom, consciousness produces a chaotic state within the individual, causing conflict within the soul and mind. Yeats' main focus is ignorant bliss in this poetic reflection of archetypal adolescence.

Consciousness is limited to the realms of experience. Within this experience we may understand individualities of love, death and camaraderie.

Consciousness is the awareness of one's surroundings and identity; the awareness of universal concepts and the relation this plays upon the individual. Yeats believed that throughout an individual's life there were certain icons and memories which remained constant, turning in what he symbolized with a gyre or a downward spiral. This spiral denotes life veering towards a state of anarchy. Yeats uses this gyre not as an ominous message of death, but as a life experience to be handled by the individual. If one neglects this knowledge, one has not been enlightened and so remains much like the school children Yeats views in the poem. If one learns from the spiral, he is a knowledgeable man. It is apparent that among the school children there is an air of beauty which surrounds them. This beauty which Yeats views is derived from their innocence. It would seem that innocence is freedom to follow the divine will. Innocence becomes beauty and consciousness becomes mere confusion. Yeats is constantly using forms of innocence which may be considered the opposing factor to forms of

consciousness. If consciousness is understanding in a universal sense, then innocence would be unable to interpret this wisdom. He displays the children, a mother, a nun and his wife throughout the piece, using them as monuments of innocence. These images of innocence give us intense pictures of purity and are representative of moral order. Yeats begins his piece in the classroom. As he walks through the pairs of puzzled young faces he is told by their teacher that they learn to read, sing and sew. These common classroom activities are what we are taught. They are "neat in everything / in the best modern way" (lines 5-6), and in relation to his final two lines in the piece, this is one of the only ways in which we know how to dance. These teachings have been passed down by generations in hope of increasing our knowledge into an eternal state of bliss and beauty. Another philosophical concept is aroused here. What constitutes eternal bliss? Is it knowledge and reason, or innocence and ignorance? Indeed, within Yeats' prospective standpoint, it is the latter. As he tours the classroom with his eyes he sees beauty in these children who view life simplistically. This cosmology is consistent with "A Prayer for My Daughter", where 'arrogance and hatred' (line 25) become the articles for humanities vending store of consciousness and the two forms of 'ignorance', innocence and beauty are vanquished. The tree which becomes symbolic towards the transgression of innocence at the end of this prayer is indeed another play on the eternal gyres of life. The linnet will never be shaken from the tree if the mind does not turn sour: 'If there's no hatred in a mind' (line 54). Therefore Evil brought about by consciousness becomes the degradation of the enlightened mind, a never ending thirst which 'dries up' (line 51) the mind. Innocence is ignorant

of evil and is a lack of confusion. Therefore, innocence retains a natural order which is the bliss seen in the classroom. In the second stanza, Yeats dreams of the image of his lover who becomes a theme of innocence he may relate to throughout his life. The image he produces is a fresco of beauty above evil. The Ledaean body bent over the inferno of hell, 'a sinking fire' (line 10) is a complex painting of order giving way to disorder, where a 'childish day' turns into 'tragedy' (line 12). Innocence is turned towards consciousness, leading to destruction. Yeats uses an ominous point of view to much of his advantage throughout the poem. In the third stanza, he takes the narration an even loftier level. Yeats continues by alluding to and denying Plato's theory, which states that man is half woman and once unified with his missing half, a unified whole is created. Yeats believed that their bonding came from innocence. Yeats looks upon each child in the classroom and thinks of his wife, comparing her to each child's tender frame of innocence and beauty. He then turns his thoughts towards her present image, which is frail and weak. Although not radiant, she still retains an aura of beauty within her innocence. After analysis of his aging self and the maturity and consciousness of both soul and mind, he brings us the image of a newly born child, where we find the form of a mother cradling her infant. The beauty is the child has been brought into the world by the activity which the 'Honey of generation had betrayed' (line 34). According to Porphyry, a Neoplatonic philosopher, it is the 'souls passage from the blissful state of eternity into the prison of time'. Yeats disagrees and believes that freedom is granted to the individual once he has entered the world. Similar to his denial of Plato's theory, one views conflict between to conscious minds. The image of the

mother and child is the complete picture of both innocence and beauty. The undetermined pain of childbirth, 'the pang of his birth' (line 39), becomes beautiful as the act is unconscious and one of complete innocence. In the seventh verse, the image of the mother becomes prevalent again. Yeats compares the mother to a nun worshipping images. She keeps aspirations in the back of her mind which is her 'spiritual repose' (line 52). In the latter two verses, Yeats captures this divine repose. He determines heavenly glory to be 'passion, piety and affection'. This is the dance he refers to in the final line. It is the dance of the divine which demonstrates all natural order. The symbolism of heaven seen within the individual may be understood as innocent and unconscious, whereas the 'the self-born makers of man's enterprise' (line 56) become the conscious individual. He continues by declaring labor to be part of this divine dance, where pleasure of the soul becomes greater than pleasure of the body. Wisdom becomes bleary, much like peering through 'midnight oil' (line 60), and confusion has been purged through knowledge. With wisdom creating bleary vision, Yeats concludes that we have no way of knowing the 'dancer from the dance' (line 64). We have no capacity for understanding how to fulfill this dance as it cannot even be determined by the conscious individual. If one's consciousness has reached a new parallel in the continual turning gear, one's awareness may be considered one thread closer towards confusion and anarchy. Each step taken into further consciousness may be considered a step in the direction towards confusion as the gyre is turning away from innocence. Conflict will be the