

'among earth. he  
says maude gonne,  
his



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

' Among School Children' is a poem written by William Butler Yeats; it is among the highly rated poems globally. It has eight stanzas. The poem discusses various themes; the major theme being aging. Some of the other themes that are discussed in the poem are hopelessness and education. Throughout the poem, William Butler acknowledges the aging process but does not appreciate it. When he looks at some situations in life, he points out that all the joys in life would be unnecessary, if the fact that all persons would eventually die and decay is put into consideration.

The thought of aging and eventually dying makes the little joys of life redundant. According to the poem, aging is unavoidable to all men but the process is appalling and it makes life meaningless (Yeats, " Selected Poetry" 76). The first stanza of the poem is set in a classroom where William, a member of the Senate, has gone to evaluate the new school curriculum (Yeats, " Autobiography" 45).

He takes this chance when he is among the children, to evaluate his life. He clearly sees himself for who he is, " sixty-year-old smiling public man" (Yeats and Richard 54). He evaluates his life's accomplishments and feels that at sixty, he has not done enough.

He feels like life has passed him by. He reviews his own education and wonders whether the knowledge was helpful; he wonders whether what the children are being taught will be useful to the children in their later years. At this point, he realizes that the knowledge required to guide one through life is not obtained from school. The fact that school knowledge will not be useful in life and one will eventually grow old and face death, the aim of going to

school loses meaning. William turns to Greek mythology to emphasize the eventual aging and loss of youth. In Greek mythology, Leda was raped by the god, Zeus. From this single incident, all the youthful glory that Leda held vanished.

Leda seemed to increase in knowledge after her innocence was taken by Zeus; the same will happen to the children. As they grow older, they will realize the truths of life and learn various life lessons; they will become wiser but at the same time, older and closer to death. At one point, William gets saddened by the aging of the girl he loved when he was still a child. He describes her as very beautiful; likening her to Hellen of Troy, who is considered to be the most attractive woman on earth.

He says Maude Gonne, his love, had swan like beauty when she was young, she was perfect. He however gets sad when he realizes that that beauty faded as Gonne aged. He compares her beautiful cheek to the wind. He uses the wind to portray just how life and beauty are short lived (Jones 78).

He also realizes at this time that if Gonne has aged, so has he. Trying to recover from his thoughts, he smiles "...show there is a comfortable kind of old scare crow" (Yeats and Richard 54). This is just a cover up since he is not comfortable in his aging (Yeats, " Selected Poetry" 76). William Yeats further looks into the issue of aging in the fifth stanza. He considers the anxiety a woman goes through while in the process of giving birth to a son. He wonders whether all that anxiety is worth it if the mother looked into the future and saw how her son would degenerate into old age just like

everybody else. During this time, he wonders what the meaning of life really is, if everything eventually ends at death and everything loses meaning.

He likens his sixty years in life with sixty winters. He uses winter at this point to show that all through life, everything is a struggle, life is hard yet we work so hard but eventually age and die (Jones 78). To further show how worthless life is, William Yeats looks into the works of great men of the world. First, he looks at Plato, the great philosopher. He demeans Plato's theory by presenting it as a shadow of the real life.

Aristotle's theories were also degraded; he says that Aristotle "played the fiddle upon the bottom of a King of Kings" (Yeats and Richard 54). Pythagoras theorem did not make sense to Yeats; it was like he "fingered upon a fiddlestick or strings" (Yeats and Richard 54). Looking at all the works of these great men of the world, while considering that despite their great works they aged and died, their works seem meaningless to Yeats. Yeats at this point loses all meaning of all his worldly achievements since he had proven that what a man produces lasts longer than the man himself. Due to the eventual demise of all men, Yeats finds it unnecessary to have high hopes in regards to anything. He uses the figure of a mother and her great hopes and dreams for her son. All the time, when a mother has hope in her son, she gets disappointed for lack of the fulfillment of her hopes. Similarly, a nun's worship becomes meaningless when one day, she gets disappointed in her unfulfilled expectations from God.

Yeats points out that we should live a life of little or no expectations since all expectations lead to the same thing, disappointment. There is

disappointment in a man's own expectations of himself; as seen earlier in the poem, Yeats feels discontented with his achievements. From a lay man's point of view, Yeats had achieved a lot, him being a member of the senate was a great accomplishment in itself but he was disappointed with his life (Yeats, " Autobiography" 45).

Everyone expects a lot but no one gets what they expect, no matter how much effort is put into the realization of the expectations.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the poem, Yeats realizes that life as we know it is meaningless. A mothers' anxiety for her coming son is meaningless when you consider that the son ages and dies eventually. The mother's expectations of her son even when he is alive never come true. Beauty, no matter how much, fades; education does not teach you the important lessons you need to go through life.

Yeats' poem clearly shows the reader that life, and all that you do in it, is meaningless.

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