

## B. A. III (Hons.) English

### Paper VI

A Critical Appreciation of The Tower: —

(Selected poems of W. B. Yeats)

The Tower is one of the largest narrative poems composed by W. B. Yeats in 1926. It is a modern mythic and symbolic poem of repute. The Tower belonged to Thoor Ballylee in County Galway. It is a very peculiar Irish square castle tower, built about 1500 and Yeats purchased it in 1916. It was his first property in life. He composed this very poem when he was sixty. He was acquainted with the fact that he was becoming older and his physique was beginning to deteriorate day by day.

The tower has its past long history and relationship with past legends. It symbolizes the passing time and expresses his ideas about how people dealt with the coming of the old age in the past.

In the first section of the poem The Tower, consisting of seventeen lines, Yeats thinks seriously the absurdity that is 'decrepit age'. He feels that his mind is as active as ever. His present old body is not as active as when he was a boy climbing the local mountain to spend his five long summer days. He wants to desert poetry for ever seeing his old age, following the consolation of philosophy as represented by Plato and Plotinus.





The second section of the poem is much longer, it consists of thirteen eight line stanzas. Its rhyme scheme is aabbcd, dc. When he walks on the battlement at the top of his tower, Yeats uses imagination to search for the past. He asks some people living in the neighbouring area of the Tower. He narrates some stories to them before asking them his question. There is the story of Mrs. French, who sent her faithful and ~~the~~ obedient servant to cut off the ears of the farmer and bring them to her in a little covered dish, because he was very insolent and arrogant to her, there is also the ~~a~~ description of another story of some men, who went to test their fancy for a local farmer girl when they were attending the drinking session and singing after a night. She jumped into the local bog where one of them was drowned.

Yeats deals with the second story which had come from a song composed by Anthony Raftery, a blind poet and equivalent



of Homer, who was also a blind poet. Herein the poet compares the farmer girl with Helen of Troy in her efficiency to drive men with a strong desire and lead them to their damnation. Yeats obviously thinks about the unrequited love of his own life for Maud Gonne, whom he had pursued for several years unsuccessfully. She was a revolutionary lady whom ~~the~~ the poet always compares with Helen of Troy.

Yeats next recalls a character that he had invented himself. This character is Red Hanrahan, a County poet who performed feats of music. ~~He~~ the poet also cites an illustration of the farmer owner of Thoor Ballylee who became a victim of insolvency. He remembers Hanrahan all the time because he exists in the imagination of Yeats. He has obviously in mind the picture of Maud Gonne as a woman lost.

The concluding third section of the tower is probably one of the finest extracts that Yeats wrote in his later poems. He makes it crystal explicit that he always places poetry above philosophy. Hanrahan demonstrates dignity, however in the transfiguration of cards into a pack of hounds. These are quickly





converted into a hare. In the Tower, ghost of warlike men haunt the house and it is these ghosts as well as other people who were old during the poet's childhood. Yeats has a tradition of tolerance and generosity which he inherited from Edmund Burke and Henry Grattan.

The poet affirms his deep belief in life and imagination. He dismisses platonic ideas and challenges the threat of death.