

W. B. Yeats - Among the School Children

Sub. English (Hons)

B. A. Part III Paper VIth

'Sailing to Byzantium' is a meditation on timeless existence or eternity. 'Among School Children' is a meditation on existence in time, the world of becoming. As Sailing to Byzantium can be related to 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', 'Among the School Children' can be related to early poem on Ma and Gaune Gonne such as when you are old. In that poem Yeats following Ronsard, has imagined his mistress in old age sitting by the fire and remembering his love, and had then allowed his mood of vague desire to lead him to the sentimental image of love on the mountains.

hiding his face 'amid
a crowd of stars'. In
~~among~~ 'Among Schoolchildren'
he starts with a vivid
picture of himself as an
elderly senator of the
Irish free state inspecting
a convent school. Against
there is a ironic humour
both in the glimpse of
the education of the
children and in the
self-portrait.

I walk through the long
schoolroom questioning,
A kind old nun in a
white hood replies;
The children learn to
cipher and to sing,
To study reading-books
and histories,
To cut and sew, be neat
in everything,
In the best modern way
the children's eyes

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In momentary wonder
stare upon
A sixty year old smiting
public man.

The sight of girls recalls
Maud Gonne, not imagined
in a vague romantic age,
'but as he actually was when,
bent above a sinking fire'

To be continued.

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