Adam’s Curse (1902)

By: Hannah, Ashley, Michelle, Visali, and Judy
Reading The Poem (3 MINUTES)
Take out your poems from the last unit!!!
Reflecting On The Poem (2 MINUTES)
IOC (15 MINUTES)
Activity!

#MADFORMAUD

Just don’t
Thesis

In *Adam’s Curse*, William Butler Yeats uses the motif of beauty to convey the speaker’s pain of his unrequited affection and portray the end of his idealistic perceptions of love to ultimately warn the audience of the effects of unreciprocated devotion.
Fun Fact! (& Background)

- William Butler Yeats’s “Adam’s Curse,” recounts one of the poet’s meetings with Maud Gonne, a free-spirited Irish patriot and sometime actress who was just returning from an extended trip abroad.
- Within its comprehensive span, “Adam’s Curse” explores the motif of beauty and the motif of love, the suffering and labor out of which true beauty is born, and the sorrow inherent in love.
Internal Structure Of The Poem

Part 1:
Discussion about poetry

Part 2:
Appearance/outer beauty

Part 3:
LOVE
Motif of Beauty

- Uses image of women to portray the motif of beauty
  - Conveys the source of his love
- Motif of beauty comments on gender stereotypes through the labor for women to achieve the expectation of beauty
- By using diction “born”, Yeats emphasizes the harsh expectations put upon women from a young age
- Repetition of “beautiful mild woman” conveys his love of the woman as he constantly thinks about her

- “That beautiful mild woman”
- “To be born woman is to know-/ Although they do not talk of it at school-/ That we must labour to be beautiful”

Human achievement requires hard work:

[In order to achieve beauty in poetry, appearance or love]
Similarities between women and poetry

- Women had to do many works to keep her appearance, but the inner beauty is gained from literature and knowledge.
- Poetry works similarly
  - Excellent works comes from hard works
  - The beauty of poetry also is beneath this hard laboring

- “We must labor to be beautiful.”
- “Precedents out of beautiful old books; “
- “Yet now it seems an idle trade enough. “
Motif of Time

- Symbol of the moon to show the effect of time
- Uses motif of time to emphasize the length of his love
- Uses the motif of time with water imagery to convey the idea of a journey within his love
- Conveys the arduous journey in his love life and convey that he did not have an easy path

- “Washed by time’s waters as they rose and fell/ About the stars and broke in days and years”
- “broke in days and years”
  - Washed by time’s water
    - Man’s heart impacted of the passing of time
    - Human curse of aging
    - The heart eventually wear out because of this hard working for love
  - Juxtaposition
    - Happy scene but hearts are as weary as shells worn by the waters of time
Motif of Obsession

- Uses poetry to characterize the speaker through his obsessive tendencies towards one object
- Image of “stitching and unstitching” conveys the constant repetition of actions reflecting the speaker’s obsessive thoughts towards the woman
- Conveys a truth about unrequited love - more of an obsession because there is no reciprocation

- “A line will take us hours maybe”
- “Our stitching and unstitching has been naught”
- “I had a thought for no one’s but your ears”
Sky Imagery

- Sky imagery represents the speaker’s emotions
- Daylight symbolizes hope in love
- Uses personification through the death of daylight to convey his disillusionment in love with Maud’s constant rejection
- Moon symbolizes the speaker’s love and the damage that rejection has done to his spirit
- Diction of “weary-hearted” and “hollow” creates a disillusioned tone as the passionate intensity in his love fades with his idealistic perception of love

- “Last embers of daylight die”
- “trembling blue-green of the sky”
- “A moon, worn as if it had been a shell”
- “As weary-hearted as that hollow moon”
Point of View

- Yeats uses diction “we”, “us”, “you and I” to connect with the audience
- Conveys that his poem uses a common scenario to explain that rejection is universal

“Only for her ears.”

- Talking directly to his lover
- Points out the audience of the poem is the girl as well

- “We sat together at one summer’s end”
- “you and I, and talked of poetry”
- “take us hours maybe”
- “We sat grown quiet at the name of love”
“She kissed him on the lips for the first time in 1899, then immediately confessed the truth about the affair and the children she had told the world were adopted. Their friendship survived her regular refusals to marry him, but he was devastated after she took another nationalist, Major John MacBride, for her husband. When that marriage went bad, Yeats comforted her.”
When Yeats told Gonne he wasn’t happy without her, she replied;

Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry. The world should thank me for not marrying you.
Allusion: Maud Gonne

Motif of Love:

- “That beautiful mild woman” (2).
- “That beautiful mild woman for whose sake / There’s many a one shall find out all heartache” (16-17).
- “We sat grown quiet at the name of love” (29).
  - “We saw the last embers of daylight die” (30).
  - “A moon, worn as if it had been a shell / Washed by time’s waters as they rose and fell... broke in days and years” (32-34).
  - “And in the trembling blue-green of the sky” (31).

- Motif of beauty demonstrates his love for this woman
- Repetition again in line 16 demonstrates his obsession with her
- Shift! Love stopped making a difference/mattering from all the despair he felt
  - He lost hope/it was shattered over time
  - Trembling sky demonstrates his state of being (conflicted)
    - Blue -> truth! Green -> envy!
    - Color archetypes demonstrate he was seeing the truth and was envious of MacBride
- She was right, he ended up creating a beautiful poem about his despair and loss of hope
Allusion: Maud Gonne

Motif of Poetry:

- “And you and I, and talked of poetry. / I said, ‘A line will take us hours maybe’” (3-4).
- “For to articulate sweet sounds together / Is to work harder than all these, and yet / Be thought an idler by the noisy set / Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen” (10-13).

- Demonstrates the passing of time with poetry -> shows his love for it and for her
- He critiques how most do not understand how much work goes into poetry and its beauty (but she did)
Allusion: Adam (Religious)

- “There have been lovers who thought love should be / So much compounded of high courtesy / That they would sigh and quote with learned looks / Precedents out of beautiful old books; / Yet now it seems an idle trade enough” (24-28).
- “I strove / To love you in the old high way of love” (36-37).
  - “That it had all seemed happy, and yet we’d grown / As weary-hearted as that hollow moon” (38-39).
- “It’s certain there is no fine thing / Since Adam’s fall but needs much labouring” (22-23).

- Critique of love and inherent despair from the fact that his love for Maud Gonne was not reciprocated
- Uses the motif of love again to demonstrate how much effort he devoted to her
  - Diction finalizes his disillusionment with love… what seemed happy was hollow
    - Unreciprocated
    - Had no hope
    - THIS IS REALITY
      - Theme of appearance vs. reality
- Allusion to Adam
  - He IS Adam
  - He is portraying this woman as his weakness and his downfall because he loved her
We sat together at one summer’s end. / That beautiful mild woman, your close friend, / And you and I, and talked of poetry. / I said, ‘A line will take us hours maybe’ (1-4).

I had a thought for no one’s but your ears: / That you were beautiful, and that I strove / To love you in the old high way of love; / That it had all seemed happy, and yet we’d grown / As weary-hearted as that hollow moon” (35-39).

P-R R: Nostalgia for the past where he would talk poetry with her

P-R R: Begins with an idealist mentality about striving to love her in the “old high way of love”

Modernist: Disillusionment through a disillusioned mood
  ○ Unreciprocated -> he is left hollow and with no hope
  ○ Note that this is also a characteristic of his early poems which had a “focus on unrequited love”

Modernist: Breaking down formality!
  ○ 4 stanzas. 14 lines in first 2 stanzas. 6 lines in the 3rd stanza. 5 lines in the 4th stanza.
  ○ Rhyme scheme deteriorates throughout progression of the poem -> reflects his deteriorating and conflicted state of mind and his loss of hope
  ○ SECOND BULLET: Demonstrates a more direct style of speech compared to his former elevated language (P-R R language)

AABBCCDDEEFFGH
ABBCCDDEEFFGGH
ABBCCD
ABCDE
Note: D from the 3rd rhymes with A from the 4th
Fun Fact!

“Yeats eventually married Georgina Hyde Lees (he called her George) in 1917, when she was 25 and he was 52. They had two children. At last, his Maud obsession seemed to ebb, nearly 30 years after they first met. His love life remained a tangle. Late in life he had a vasectomy, believed at the time to improve men’s potency. He charged ahead with a dizzying series of affairs, and on his death in January 1939, both his wife and his last lover stood vigil at his bed.”
Discussion (10 MINUTES)
Question #1

Which of the four poems that ("To Ireland in the Coming Times", "September 1913", "Sailing to Byzantium", and "The Second Coming") we read in the last Yeats unit does this poem remind you of and why? Is there a specific literary device that makes you think this?
Thoughts on Question #1...

- “To Ireland in the Coming Times”
  - Post-Romantic Period
  - The motif of love “The love I lived, the dream I knew” (Line 34)
  - Motif of time

- “September 1913”
  - Post-Romantic Yeats
  - Allusions
  - Sin and Salvation

- “Sailing to Byzantium”
  - Modernism
  - Motif of music
  - Motif of Time
  - Motif of Gold

- “The Second Coming”
  - Personification
  - Modernism
Question #2

What are some motifs that Yeats uses that relate to the theme of elegance and peace?
Thoughts on Question #2...

- Motif of Women
- Motif of Beauty
  - “That beautiful mild woman”
  - “We must labor to be beautiful”
- Motif of Love
Question #3

What were some similarities you found in this poem ("Adam’s Curse") and the poem that was discussed yesterday ("The Song of Wandering Aengus")? What were the differences?
Thoughts on Question #3...

Similarities

● About Maud Gonne
● Theme of emptiness
● The beautification of Maud
● The motif of love
● Gender stereotypes

Differences

● Was ‘wandering’ for her in “The Song of Wandering Aengus”; however, he already had her in “Adam’s Curse”
  ○ Affected the POV from “I” to “We”
● Rhyme Scheme
  ○ Not disjointed
    ■ He is not a mess when he is with her
Exit Slip (5 MINUTES)
Please write this on a notecard!

1. List a motif Yeats used in “Adam’s Curse” and briefly explain its importance.

2. What is the significance of the title of this poem: “Adam’s Curse”?

3. If you could describe Yeats (primarily based off this poem) using one word what would it be?
Thank you so so much for listening to my hollow and lonely life!
Works Cited
