

Core 311 : History of English Literature 1890-1939

UNIT 02 :Poetry

***01. * 'Meru' _ ***

by W. B. Yeats

****01. About the Poet:****

Δ *Born: 13 June 1865,* Sandymount, Ireland.

Δ *Died: 28 January 1939,* Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France.

Δ W.B. Yeats made his debut as a poet in 1887, but in his earlier period his dramatic production outweighed his poetry.

Δ Along with playwright Lady Gregory, he founded the Irish Theatre, which later became the Abbey Theatre.

Δ His plays are often based on Irish legends and are full of mysticism and spiritualism.

Δ William Butler Yeats is widely considered to be one of the greatest poets of the 20th century.

Δ He belonged to the Protestant, Anglo-Irish minority that had controlled the economic, political, social, and cultural life of Ireland since at least the end of the 17th century.

Δ Yeats' poetic style provided very rhythmic and structured order and sounding.

Δ The use of language in Yeats' poems is very confident and passionate at the same time.

- He published over 30 poetry collections.
- He founded the Irish National Theatre Society.

****Δ His Best Poems:****

- Leda and the Swan'.

- 'Death'.
- 'The Second Coming'.
- 'He Wishes for the Clothes of Heaven'.
- 'Long-Legged Fly'.
- 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death'.
- 'Sailing to Byzantium'.
- 'Easter 1916', etc.

Δ His Awards:

- ***William Butler Yeats Wins Nobel Peace Prize On 14 November 1923*** Irish poet and senator, William Butler Yeats created history when ***he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Irish citizen to achieve such an accolade.***

- ***In 1922*** , on the foundation of the Irish Free State, ****Yeats accepted an invitation to become a member of the new Irish Senate.****

02. About the Poem:*

Δ 'Meru' by William Butler Yeats is a two stanza poem that can be separated into one set of eight lines and another set of six lines.

Δ Due to the nature of the rhyme scheme, and the fact that this poem contains a total of fourteen lines, it is considered to be a Shakespearean sonnet.

Δ Yeats's interest in the Upanishads is reflected in "Meru" (1934).

Δ Thematically, "Meru" is distinctly Hindu, and its formal structure parallels the process of man's ascent to Truth according to the teachings of the Upanishads, a structure which augments the meaning of the poem.

Δ The poem 'Meru' by William Butler Yeats appeared last in his work 'Parnell's Funeral & Other Poems (1935)'.

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03. Theme:

'Meru' by William Butler Yeats describes ****the illusion of civilization and the importance of embarking on a spiritual journey.****

04. Rhyme Scheme:

Poems that are considered to be traditionally Shakespearean follow the rhyming pattern of

****abab cd cdef fg g****

05. Setting:

The ****first lines bring up two different mountains, "Meru" and "Everest."**** Mount Meru is a mystical and imagined mountain which is referenced in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts.

06. Critical Appreciation:

In the first stanza of this piece, the speaker begins by describing the state of “Civilisation,” or civilization. He states that all of the humankind throughout time has been connected throughout the ages. It has been “hooped together” and unified “Under a rule.”

This “rule” is not the reign of a king, institution, or spiritual belief system, it is instead “illusion.” The speaker believes that humans are connected through “manifold illusion,” that of the illusion of civilization itself.

Throughout time there has only been a “semblance of peace,” no real embodied state which exists in reality.

The speaker states that this fact is not commonly known. Men and women are living their lives as they always have, with no full consideration for the truth of their existence. He speaks on “man’s life is thought.” A man living through the days of his life spends time analyzing each moment and worrying over all the details.

He continues on to describe how even though this is the case, the man cannot stop, “Ravens through century after century.” Humankind has an unquenchable thirst for more. It is animalistic, almost desperate.

This generalized depiction of humankind is continued. People have lived in this manner through all the ages of the earth. No matter the situation, there is always “Ravens, raging, and uprooting” in an effort to “come / Into the desolation of reality.”

The speaker is stating that even though humankind continues to search for meaning, they are unable to see the illusion of their lives that connects them all. In the last lines of this section the speaker bids farewell to the great ancient civilization. He speaks of “Egypt, Greece” and “Rome.” The speaker brings these up to prove the point that nothing lasts, there is no permanence. Eventually, all tangible structures made by humankind disappear.

In the second half of the poem, which is made up of six lines, the speaker discusses the importance of a spiritual journey versus a physical one.

The first lines bring up two different mountains, “Meru” and “Everest.” Mount Meru is a mystical and imagined mountain which is referenced in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts. It is thought to be the center of all spiritual universes.

The speaker describes “Hermits” who are squatting on either Meru or Everest. These two peaks are quite different, but similar in the fact that it takes a great effort to surmount them. The hermits are “Caverned...under the drifted snow.” Both of these beings are existing in an ever-changing world. It is here that “snow and winter’s dreadful blast” pours down on them.

Their bodies are described as being “naked.” This choice was made by the poet in an effort to show the strain and depth of one’s spiritual or physical journey. They have been stripped down to nothing as they attempt to climb, or even exist upon these mountains.

Both hermits know that the day, which brings with it more hospitable conditions, will eventually give way to night. Nothing, no civilization, nor even the warmth of the sun, will last. They both know that “before dawn / His glory and...monuments are gone.” The speaker is now referring directly to God, adding in “His” own creations into the process of continual transformation.

07. Conclusion:

The poem ***concludes with the speaker restating the fact that the world is always changing.*** Dawn will bring on the night for the rest of time until God’s creation is destroyed. These are facts the hermits have come to know throughout their spiritual and physical struggles.

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