

# For Anne Gregory

*This poem is a conversation between a young man and a young woman. What are they arguing about?*

The “honey-coloured ramparts at your ear” refer to Anne’s beautiful, golden hair, which is likened to “ramparts” or strong wall. This suggests that her hair acts as a barrier that distracts or even prevents people from seeing her inner self, as they are too captivated by her beauty.

Metaphor: Anne’s hair is called “honey-coloured ramparts,” comparing it to protective walls that hide her true self.

Imagery: Descriptions like “yellow hair” and colors “brown,” “black,” and “carrot” create visual images.

Irony: Anne thinks dyeing her hair will make people love her inner self, but appearances still matter.

The message here is that human love is often affected by appearances, so it’s hard for people to love someone purely for their inner qualities. Only God’s love is completely pure and focused on the inner self, without being influenced by outward beauty.

“Never shall a young man,  
Thrown into despair  
By those great honey-coloured  
Ramparts at your ear,  
Love you for yourself alone  
And not your yellow hair.”

“But I can get a hair-dye  
And set such colour there,  
Brown, or black, or carrot,  
That young men in despair  
May love me for myself alone  
And not my yellow hair.”

“I heard an old religious man  
But yesternight declare  
That he had found a text to prove  
That only God, my dear,  
Could love you for yourself alone  
And not your yellow hair.”

young men to lose their sense of reason or to feel a kind of intense longing or sadness

Most young men are overwhelmed or “thrown into despair” by physical beauty and are more likely to fall in love with someone because of their looks (symbolized by Anne’s yellow hair) than for their true personality or character.

so that her appearance would be less captivating or noticeable.

for her inner qualities, personality, and true self

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was an Irish nationalist. He was educated in London and Dublin, and was interested in folklore and mythology. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

Dialogue: The poem is written as a dialogue between two voices—the poet and Anne. This conversational style allows readers to see both perspectives on love and beauty, making the poem more engaging and reflective.

Theme: The poem explores the difference between loving someone for their physical beauty versus loving them for their true inner self. It suggests true love should go beyond superficial attraction to outward appearances.

## Glossary

**ramparts:** the high, wide walls around a castle or fort, for example, *the ramparts of the Red Fort*

## Thinking about the Poem

1. What does the young man mean by “great honey-coloured /Ramparts at your ear?” Why does he say that young men are “thrown into despair” by them?
2. What colour is the young woman’s hair? What does she say she can change it to? Why would she want to do so?
3. Objects have qualities which make them desirable to others. Can you think of some objects (a car, a phone, a dress...) and say what qualities make one object more desirable than another? Imagine you were trying to sell an object: what qualities would you emphasise?
4. What about people? Do we love others because we like their qualities, whether physical or mental? Or is it possible to love someone “for themselves alone”? Are some people ‘more lovable’ than others? Discuss this question in pairs or in groups, considering points like the following.
  - (i) a parent or caregiver’s love for a newborn baby, for a mentally or physically challenged child, for a clever child or a prodigy
  - (ii) the public’s love for a film star, a sportsperson, a politician, or a social worker
  - (iii) your love for a friend, or brother or sister
  - (iv) your love for a pet, and the pet’s love for you.
5. You have perhaps concluded that people are not objects to be valued for their qualities or riches rather than for themselves. But elsewhere Yeats asks the question: How can we separate the dancer from the dance? Is it possible to separate ‘the person himself or herself from how the person looks, sounds, walks, and so on? Think of how you or a friend or member of your family has changed over the years. Has your relationship also changed? In what way?