## For Anne Gregory

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

> "Never shall a young man, Thrown into despair By those great honey-colouredor "thrown into despair" by physical Ramparts at your ear, Love you for yourself alone And not your yellow hair."

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

Most young men are overwhelmed 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.

"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."

so that her appearance would be less captivating or noticeable.

for her inner qualities, personality, and true self

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.

"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."

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.

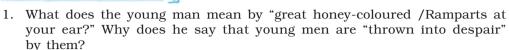
Theme: The poem explores the difference between loving someone for their physical beauty versus loving them for their true inner self. It suggests true love should go beyond superficial attraction to outward appearances.

119

## Glossary

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

## Thinking about the Poem



- 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?