

Sailing to Byzantium

classmate

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- W. B. Yeats

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Summary.

"Sailing to Byzantium", a narrative poem, has been written by William Butler Yeats. Yeats is one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Even as he was an Irish man, he ranks with the greatest British poets of the Modern age. "Sailing to Byzantium" is a nature poem. This poem is composed of four stanzas. Each stanza contains eight lines each. Its verse form is called ottava rima.

In the opening line of the stanza the poet, referring to the country that he has left, says that it is, no country for old men. It is full of youth and life, with the young lying in one another's arms, birds singing in the trees and fish swimming in the waters. There, "all summer long" the world rings with the "sensual music" that makes the young neglect the old, whom the speaker describes as "Monuments of waning intellect. An old man, the speaker says, is "a paltry thing", merely a tattered coat upon a stick, unless his soul can help its hands and sing; and the only way for the soul to learn how to sing is to study "Monuments of its

own magnificence.

Thus, we see that the first stanza describes the natural world of living, loving and reproduction; although these "generations" are 'dying' they seem to be oblivious to their fate and thus are involved in their world. In the second stanza the theme of old is discussed. The movement of the soul and the uselessness of the flesh are also central themes, and the speaker first mentions his desire to go to Byzantium, once the ancient capital of the Roman Empire and the centre of Mediterranean culture. In stanza 3 the spirits of Byzantium are addressed and the theme of immortality is discussed. Stanza 4 further explores the theme of immortality and perfection in an artistic creation. So each soul must be purified before his rebirth.

This poem also describes before his rebirth the situation of transmigration; those dead human body are purified for the last time before he is led to the central life.