

B. A. Part III  
 Paper Vth VIII  
 Sub-English (H)

Q. Sailing to Byzantium -  
 Critical appreciation.

Ans. "Sailing to Byzantium" should be read in conjunction to its sequel, "Byzantium" written four years later. The first poem is the picture of voyage from the material world to the holy city of eternity. The second is the vision of city from the inside where the soul is imaged first as a walking mummy and then as the emperor's golden bird, whose glory of changeless metal is contrasted with the complexities of wire and

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blood! Here 'Byzantium'  
is a purgatory as well as a  
Paradise, a place of cleans-  
ing flame.

Flames that no faggot feels,  
nor steel has let,  
nor storm disturbs,  
flames begotten of flames.

In stanza 2 two Yeats describes  
the predicament of the old  
man more closely. An  
'aged man' is no more  
than a scarecrow, with  
a tattered coat upon a  
stick' unless he rejects  
the flesh - which has in  
any case has become  
inadequate - and concentrate  
on improving his soul,  
sending it to school to  
learn to sing. For if in the  
first stanza, we learned  
about the 'sensual music'  
of nature, now that we

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will discover that there is a corresponding spiritual music which the soul can study - the music of art, of poetry, for instance, for are not poems "monuments of own magnificence?" And therefore Yeats tells us he has sailed the seas to the holy city of Byzantium, a kind of capital of art.

In Stanza 3, the poem passionate climax, Yeats addresses the spirit of Byzantium, the sages standing in God's holy fire as in the gold mosaic of wall" - He begs them to "come from the holy fire and spiral spiral down ('perne in a gyre') to where he is sick with desire / And fastened to

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dying animal". He wants them to "consume away" his least, with its fleshy mortal dreams and teach him how to be immortal - teach him the secret of the soul and of the art, of the artifice of eternity".

In stanza 4 Yeats imagined what this immortality would be like. It is of course far from the traditional concept of ~~mortality~~ immortality - angels, choiring, etc. This is the heaven of art where the artist himself becomes the artifact. He is out out nature now, he becomes a golden bird, supernaturally wise, who sings the soul of music - the knowledge of ages - to the mythical ~~ladies~~ ladies of Byzantium".

To be continued  
K. D. Singh