

# Sailing to Byzantium

William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939)

*That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
– Those dying generations – at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.*

*An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.*

*O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.*

*Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.*



*Sailing to Byzantium* was first published in the 1928 collection, *The Tower*. In the poem, Yeats narrates Byzantium (Istanbul of nowadays) as a mental refuge against the negative physical effects of aging. The basic idea is that one can reach spiritual immortality even with a deteriorating physical condition, as long as he/she depends on Byzantium, which signifies the wisdom and enlightenment of the Greek-Roman intellect.