**Analysis of Sailing to Byzantium by W.B. Yeats**

In the opening stanza, Yeats introduces a world of youth and sensuality. The conflict of the poem is addressed when the speaker distances himself from this world by stating “That is no country for olf men.” The speaker feels alien in this natural and youthful landscape. The image of the birds, often a symbol for the soul, are described as “dying generations.” Their songs are not immortal and thus they are aligned with the natural world.

In lines 4-6, the speaker continues his description of the natural world with images of fertility “Salmon falls” and “mackerel-crowded sea”, are both images of abundance and fertility. Yeats’ Salmon image is particularly interesting because it suggests both life and in abundance and, or the natural world, as well as the journey towards death, or the spiritual world. Each year, Salmon swim arduously upstream in order to reach a place to reproduce. In doing so they both work with and aginst nature. Reproduction is, of course, natural, but swimming upstream is an act that goes against nature. The motion itself is much like flying, and one is brought back to the idea of the body travelling toward the soul.

The rhyming couplet at the end of stanza 7-8 emphasises the conflict of the poem. Yout, caught in the “sensual music” of the natural world overlooks the imposing, immortal aspects of art and intellect.

The second stanza (9-10) introduces the world of the speaker as very different from the “country” of the previous stanza. An elderly man is described as a scarecrow. This “bird” image is interesting because it both describes the man physically, and also contributes to the description of the spiritual in the natural world. While youth is represented by singing birds, age is shown by a pathetic scarecrow.

In lines 11-12, the scarecrow image is transformed into the soul with another motion similar to flight. The clapping of hands and singling evokes more bird imagery, but this time is associated with the spiritual world.

In lines 13-16, the speaker concludes that only in an ideal environment, like Byzantuim, can he learn the song of the soul. Remarkably, the speaker elevates the Byzantium to “a Holy City”. Thus deeming it appropriate in the poem to be the center of the spiritual world.

In Byzantium, as shown in lines 17-18, the speaker addresses the “sages” of Byzantium whose images are enclosed. Inside a holy fire, represented in a gold mosaic. This also is a misguided bird image. The sages may remind the reader of the Phoenix, an ancient mythical bird whose body is consumed by fire, only to be reborn from its own ashes.

In lines 19-20, the speaker asks the sages to make him immortal like the glorious works of art in Byzantium. For this to occur, his body, or natural element, must be destroyed.

In lines 21-24, the speaker’s heart, the home of his once youthful passion, is consumed by a cleansing fire along with his body which is described as a “dying animal.” Without the body, his soul, like the sages, is held in the “artifice of eternity.”

In lines 25-29, the speaker renounces the natural world and chooses to recreate himself in the form of an immortal golden bird. Why does he choose this form? Perhaps because the bird symbolizes the soul, and it sings much like the natural birds in the first stanza. But unlike those birds, the golden bird which exemplifies the art and beauty of Byzantium culture is immortal.

In lines 30-32, the speaker placed himself in a natural tree. He has now completely transformed himself into a work of art, unable to decay. In the first stanza, the birds of the natural world sing of “whatever is begotten, born, and dies,” and also die themselves at the hands of nature. In the ideal world, the speaker sings of what is past, or passing, or to come,” thereby indicating his immortality.