

Q. Critically Analyse W.B Yeat's Poem Byzantium.

W. B. Yeats' "Byzantium" is a sequel to his poem "Sailing to Byzantium." Four years later, in 1930, this poem was composed, and in 1932 it was included in the collection "Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems." Between these two poems, the poet has experienced both intellectual and physical changes as a result of Malta fever. The poet describes the voyage to Byzantium in "Sailing to Byzantium," but he describes his experience there in "Byzantium." Thus, "Byzantium" appears to be a rewritten version of "Sailing to Byzantium." These two poems are commonly addressed as 'Byzantium poems'.

The poem "Byzantium" uses the first-person viewpoint to deliberate what occurs in the city of Byzantium at night. The activities of the day fade away as night falls in Byzantium. The Emperor's inebriated warriors have fallen asleep, and the huge cathedral gong is followed by the fading of the night-walkers' singing and other nighttime noises. All things human are denigrated by the "starlit" or "moonlit" dome, since human existence is nothing more than a tangled web of rage and blood. An image appears in front of the speaker as he surveys the surroundings. According to the speaker, the spirit is "superhuman" since it embodies the ultimate reality of "death-in-life and life-in-death." To locate a golden bird, the poet pursues the floating image.

The pictures are floating across the Emperor's pavement at midnight amid the flames. Since the fire was not fuelled by steel or wood, it appears to have started on its own. It is not even affected by the storm. Here, "blood-begotten spirits" arrive, "dance" in a "trance," and are purified of all impurities from this world. At last, spirit after spirit reaches the shore to be carried by dolphins across the ocean. While the flames guarantee the cleaning of the spirits on land, the Emperor's golden smithies guarantee the final process' perfection.

Theme and Settings

The two main themes of "Byzantium" are "Terrestrial life vs. Spiritual or afterlife" and "Human imperfection vs. perfectness of art." The contrast between existence before and after death is metaphorically represented by the image of day and night. Overall, the poet uses metaphor to show that human life is meaningless and insignificant, yet the arts created by humans endure forever.

"A night in the city of Byzantium" serves as the poem's setting. The church of St. Sophia, located in the eastern region of Rome or the centre region of Byzantium, is referred to as the "great cathedral" in the poem.

Form and Structure

Byzantium is a formal poetry that rhymes. The poet employed the stanza form that he had previously employed in "A Prayer For My Daughter" and "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory." The poem's rhyme scheme is "AABBCDDC," with eight lines in each stanza. The rhyme pattern of the following four lines resembles sandwiched couplets with the rhyme scheme (CDDC), whereas the first four lines are composed of two rhyming couplets (AABB).

The location at night is shown in the first verse of "Byzantium." The unpurged images of the human activity fade away as darkness falls. The emperor's inebriated warriors had also fallen asleep. Even the sounds of the night and the melodies of the nightwalkers (prostitutes) diminish by the time the gong of the great Cathedral (the church of St. Sophia, the Byzantine center) is heard. It is clear from all of these scenarios that he is depicting the late hours of the night. The poet's dissatisfaction with the deteriorating cultural and societal norms that Yeats addresses in the majority of his poems is expressed through the "drunken soldiers" and "night-walkers." Additionally, the stanza's second section remarks on the unimportant life of the "mire of human veins".

The poet describes the vision or sight that materialized in front of him in the second stanza of "Byzantium." He questions whether it's a shade or a guy. As he looks closer, he sees that it is more of an image than a shade; it is more of a shade than a man. The verb "float" confirms that the image is a ghost or spirit because it makes it obvious that it is not moving but is instead being carried away by the wind. Because the dead folks wrapped in "mummy-cloth," Hade's bobbin, travels a convoluted route to get to him. Additionally, the next sentences characterize them as "dry-mouthed" and lacking in "moisture" or "breath."

The "mummy-cloth" has been employed by Yeats as a metaphor for human experiences, aging, and death. The complexity of life that a soul carries with it after death to be unwounded before entering the afterlife are symbolized by the cloth that is coiled around. In his other poem, "All Soul's Night," which was published in 1920, the author presents a similar theme. Because the deceased are no longer bound by earthly constraints, the poet refers to them as "superhuman." Additionally, the poet revealed the opposing viewpoint on death by using the rhetorical method known as "chiasmus." From a spiritual standpoint, it is the beginning of new life, even though those who are still here may believe it to be the end of life. This stanza's use of "me" lends further subjective personality to the poem.

The poet of "Byzantium" notices what appears to be a miracle in the third stanza. On the starlit golden ribbon, he spots a golden bird or bird sculpture.

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Here, the poet alludes to Byzantine art and architecture, which are renowned for their magnificence. Because it was more than a bird or a piece of art, he refers to it as a miracle. Like the cocks of Hades, the city of ghosts and the dead, it appears to be crowing. It mocks the "birds of petals," the mortal ones, in its splendor of "changeless metal," the state of immortality. The image of the bird presents a paradox regarding the immortality that human creations can achieve. It turns into something impervious to the aging process and impurities of human experience. The artwork, which is manmade, becomes something that gives reason to human existence.

The poem's fourth stanza describes the poet's observations of the city at midnight. A fire breaks out on the Emperor's pavement around midnight. It cannot be started by hitting a piece of iron on a flintstone or fuelled by fuel sticks. They resemble self-created flames, with one emerging from another. Since even storms cannot put them out, nature is marvelous. The blood-born spirits—spirits are said to be begotten of blood in medieval belief—are eventually cleansed of all impurities and earthly desires. The ghosts of people who perished in the World War and the Irish Civil War can also be considered "blood-begotten" spirits. In this ethereal, excruciating fire, the spirits go through a "dance" of "trance," but yet can burn even the sleeve. It allegorically refers to the fire of Judgment mentioned in the bible to those impure souls.

In the poem "Byzantium," the fifth and last stanzas discuss the spirits' ultimate journey. In symbolic reference to the Roman concept that the dead are taken to the Isles of the Blessed, Spirit after Spirit arrives to ride on the dolphins. The emperor entrusts the task of maintaining order to his golden blacksmiths. The dance floor's pebbles simultaneously quell even the slightest rages of intricacy for those pictures that spark new, burning images. Nevertheless, even though the dolphins were tearing up the sea and the gongs were breaking the night's calm, the spirits' journey continued.