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Website: www.akshiraa.com
www.akshiraa.blogspot.com
Email: akshiraa@gmail.com

Contact: 9487976999
# Unit V: Modern and Contemporary Periods

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1. W.B.Yeats’s Sailing to Byzantium

W.B.Yeats

Life:
- William Butler Yeats was born on 13th June, **1865 in Dublin, Ireland.**
- He was the son of a well-known Irish painter, John Butler Yeats.
- He went to Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin.
- **He fell in love with Maud Gonne who was the Irish revolutionary;** but she married Mac Bride.
- He was married to another woman, Georgie Hyde Lees.
- He died on 28th January, 1939 in France.

Career:
- Yeats was Irish poet, dramatist, and prose writer, one of the greatest English-language poets of the 20th century.
- He was called as ……
  - National poet of Ireland
  - Symbolist poet
  - Pre-Raphaelite poet
- He was influenced by ……..
  - Indian philosophy and religion
  - French symbolist movement
  - Aestheticism
  - Imagism
- He became involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period.
- He was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and others.
- He founded the Rhymers' Club poetry group with Ernest Rhys in 1890.
- He founded “London Irish Society” at Berdfordpark.
He helped found the **Irish National Theatre Society**, serving as its president and co-director, with Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge.

He founded the Irish Theatre, which was to become the **Abbey Theatre** in Dublin.

He joined the **Order of the Golden Dawn**, an organization that explored topics related to the occult and mysticism.

**He was strongly influenced by Ezra Pound**, becoming more modern in its concision and imagery.

He was appointed a **senator of the Irish Free State** in 1922.

He received the **Nobel Prize for Literature** in 1923.

He helped Shri Purohit Swami to translate the **Upanishads and Patanjali Yogustra**.

**He wrote introduction for Tagore’s Gitanjali.**

He drew upon Buddhism as well as upon Jewish and Christian mystic books to try and capture what he thought was a harmony of the opposite elements of life.

**Works:**

- Poems (1895),
- *The Secret Rose* (1897),
- *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899),
- Diarmuid and Grania (1901),
- The Pot of Broth (1902),
- In The Seven Woods (1903),
- Where There Is Nothing (1904),
- Collected Works in Prose and Verse (1906),
- The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910),
- Responsibilities: Poems and A Play (1914),
- At the Hawks Well (1917),
- Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1920),
- Four Plays for Dancers (1921),
- The Tower and Other Poems (1928),
- Words for Music, Perhaps (1932),
- The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933),
A Full Moon in March (1935),
Dramatis Personae (1935).

His early accomplishments include The Wanderings of Orisin and Other Poems (1889) and such plays as The Countess Kathleen (1892) and Deirdre (1907).

He went on to pen more influential works, including The Tower (1928) and Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems (1932).

He dedicated his 1892 drama The Countess Kathleen to Maud Gonne.

Some of his important later works include The Wild Swans at Coole (1917), A Vision (1925), The Tower (1928) and Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems (1932).

His plays usually treat Irish legend and they reflect his fascination with mysticism and spiritualism.

The Countess Cathleen (1892), The Land of Heart's Desire (1894), Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902), The King's Threshold (1904), and Deirdre (1907) are among the best known.

His poetry, especially the volumes The Wild Swans at Coole (1919), Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921), The Tower (1928), The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933), and Last Poems and Plays (1940), made him one of the outstanding and most influential twentieth-century poets writing in English.

His recurrent themes are the contrast of art and life, masks, cyclical theories of life (the symbol of the winding stairs), and the ideal of beauty and ceremony contrasting with the hubbub of modern life.

Yeats’s interest was evident in his collection of Irish folklore, Fairy and Folk Tales (1888).

His long verse drama, The Countess Cathleen (1892), was a combination of modern dramatic forms with ancient beliefs and modern Irish history.

He followed this with his collection of romantic tales and mood sketches, The Celtic Twilight (1893).

Yeats’s Secret Rose (1897) includes poems that he called personal, occult, and Irish. More figures from ancient Irish history and legend appeared in this volume.
The Wind among the Reeds (1899) won the Royal Academy Prize as the best book of poems published that year.

In the Seven Woods (1907) is a new style, less elaborate, less romantic, and more straightforward in language and imagery.

The tower became a prominent symbol in his best poems, notably in those that make up The Tower (1928).

Chinua Achebe derived title for his novel ‘Things Fall Apart’ from Yeats’s ‘The Second Coming’.

Quotes:

Yeats had the lines of one of his poems engraved on his tombstone in Ireland: "Cast a cold eye; On life, on death; Horseman, pass by!".

“Yeats is the last of the Great Romantics” – Hough.
Sailing to Byzantium

Text

1) 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.

2) 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.

3) 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.

4) 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" is a poem by William Butler Yeats, first published in the 1928 collection *The Tower*.
❖ It comprises four stanzas in **Ottava Rima**, each made up of eight ten-syllable lines.
❖ **It uses a journey to Constantinople (Byzantium) as a metaphor for a spiritual journey.**
❖ It explores his thoughts and musings on how immortality, art, and the human spirit may converge.
❖ It describes the metaphorical journey of a man pursuing his own vision of eternal life as well as his conception of paradise.

Summary:

**Stanza 1:**
❖ Ireland is not a suitable place for old man.
❖ The young men and women are in other arms.
❖ The love birds sing song on the tree; they are subject to death.
❖ **The salmons jump into water-falls; the mackerel are crowded in seas.**
❖ Fish, flesh, fowl praise summer which is mating season.
❖ All creatures are born, give birth and die finally; they are interested in the sensual pleasures.
❖ They neglect the intellectual activities of the old man which have a permanent value.

**Stanza 2:**
❖ The aged man is insignificant like a tattered coat upon a stick.(scarecrow)
❖ His soul claps its hands and sings loudly because the body, the outer garment is subject to decay.
❖ **Byzantium is a city of art and culture where one can learn the immortal products of the human soul.**
❖ Byzantium was the capital of the capital of the Roman Empire from 330 A.D.
Byzantium is a symbol of artistic magnificence and permanence or Artistic endeavour.

Therefore the poet has sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium.

Stanza 3:

- The sages are standing near God’s holy fire as in the gold mosaic of a wall; holy fire purifies our sins.
- They are in the movement of circular motion.
- They are the spiritual mentors of the poet’s soul.
- The poet asks …
  - To come from holy fire
  - To purify his heart which is stick with desire and fastened to the aging body
- The poet says that his heart doesn’t know spirituality.
- He asks sages to create a taste for eternal values.

Stanza 4:

- After the death, the poet’s soul will not choose any natural thing.
- His soul will choose a golden bird made of Grecian goldsmith by hammering the gold continuously and covering it with gold.
- This golden bird will awake the drowsy emperors.
- It sits upon a golden bough and sings of lords and ladies of Byzantium.
- It sings of the past, the present and the future.
- The poet is standing in the Church of St. Sophia.
- This poem describes …
  - the conditions of Ireland.
  - A voyage from Ireland to Byzantium
  - Prayer for wisdom
  - An old man solves the problem of age, death and regeneration.
1. W.B. Yeats’s Sailing to Byzantium

1) Who is often hailed as being one of the driving forces behind the Irish literary revival?
   A) T.S. Eliot
   B) W.B. Yeats
   C) Ezra Pound
   D) W. H. Auden

2) Whom did Yeats dedicate his verse play, *The Countess Cathleen*?
   A) His friends Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markievicz
   B) His wife, Georgie Hyde-Lees
   C) His mother
   D) Maud Gonne

3) Who borrowed ‘golden apples of the sun’ the from last line of *The Song of the Wandering Aengus* by Yeats for a book title?
   A) Ray Bradbury
   B) John Irving
   C) Frank Herbert
   D) HE Bates

4) Who sang ‘so I meet you at the cemetery gates / Keats and Yeats are on your side / while Wilde is on mine’?
   A) Rufus Wainwright
   B) Anthony Hegarty
   C) Kate Tempest
   D) Morrissey

5) Which poem of Yeats provided the title for a book by Chinua Achebe?
   A) Easter 1916
   B) Sailing to Byzantium
   C) Leda and the Swan
   D) The Second Coming
6) Which European city was William Butler Yeats born in?
   A) Glasgow
   B) London
   C) Dublin
   D) Edinburgh

7) What year did Yeats win the Nobel Prize for literature?
   A) 1918
   B) 1921
   C) 1923
   D) 1925

8) Which of the following club was founded by W.B. Yeats?
   A) Theosophist's Club
   B) Rhymer's Club
   C) Literary Club
   D) Theatre Club

9) Who was Irish nationalist captured Yeats's heart, but she persistently refused to marry him?
   A) Mary Shelley
   B) Lady Gregory
   C) Maud Gonne
   D) Fay Reznick

10) Which theatre was founded by Y. B. Yeats in 1904?
    A) Globe Theatre
    B) Abbey Theatre
    C) Swan Theatre
    D) Lane Theatre
11) Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" describes the metaphorical journey of a man pursuing his own vision of ________ as well as his conception of paradise.
   A) Love
   B) Prophecy
   C) Time
   D) Immortality

12) ________'s novel The Dying Animal also takes its title from the poem.
    A) Philip Roth
    B) D.H. Lawrence
    C) James Joyce
    D) Joseph Conrad

13) "Sailing to Byzantium" is a poem by ________, first published in the 1928 collection The Tower.
    A) Thomas Westropp Bennett
    B) James Campbell
    C) Andrew Jameson
    D) William Butler Yeats

14) ________'s novella, Sailing To Byzantium, uses Yeats's title and builds upon its themes.
    A) Frederik Pohl
    B) Robert Silverberg
    C) Isaac Asimov
    D) James Joyce

15) Byzantium is ________
    A) a mythical king
    B) a mythical city
    C) a modern city
    D) the capital of Greece
16) At the end of "Sailing to Byzantium," the speaker imagines transformation into ______
A) a mechanical bird
B) an auto
C) a god
D) a woman

17) In "Sailing to Byzantium," the element that death is most associated with is ______
A) water
B) fire
C) air
D) earth

18) “Caught in that sensual music all neglect; Monuments of unageing intellect”. This line occurs in Yeats’s poem ________
A) Leda and Swan
B) The Winding Stair
C) Sailing to Byzantium
D) Byzantium

19) W.B. Yeats wants to be reborn as ________
A) Diamond bird
B) Silver bird
C) Golden bird
D) Ancient bird

20) Complete the following line: “And therefore I have sailed the seas and come; To the holy city of ________
A) Byzantium
B) Italy
C) Spain
D) Greece
21) Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" was written in ________
   A) Ottava Rima  
   B) Heroic Stanza  
   C) Free Verse  
   D) Blank Verse a

22) An old man compared his soul to a/an ________
       A) eagle  
       B) dove  
       C) scare-crow  
       D) Pigeon

23) The poet asks the sages to purify his heart which is stick with ________ and fastened to the aging body.
       A) love  
       B) desire  
       C) anger  
       D) jealousy

24) Complete the following line: “But such a form as ______ goldsmiths make, Of hammered gold and gold enamelling”
       A) Grecian  
       B) Italian  
       C) Portuguese  
       D) Irish

25) The direction that the spirits would move around the speaker in "Sailing to Byzantium" is in a ________
       A) gyre  
       B) straight line  
       C) circle  
       D) zig-zag

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1. W.B. Yeats's Sailing to Byzantium

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