

Sailing to Byzantium

- 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 enameling
 - 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.

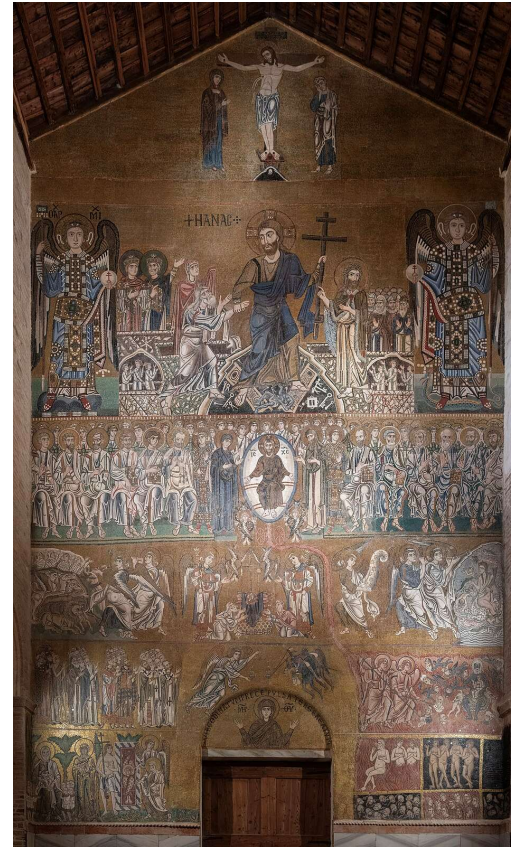
Sailing to Byzantium

- Sage standing in
- God's holy fire:
- Here, prophet
- Elijah



Torcello Cathedral in Venice—Last Judgment Mosaic

Enlargement of one section



The Peacock in Byzantine art represented immortality.



Ben Bulbin



Some Facts about Ben Bulbin

- It's one of the highest peaks in the Dartry Mountains, north of Sligo Town.
- *Ben* is the Irish word for beak or *binn*.
- Bulbin seems to be an anglicization of "Ghulbain."
- Ghulbain was the legendary (and historical) king, Conall Gulban, of what is now Donegal County in Ulster. Conall Gulban was the first nobleman baptized by St. Patrick.
- So, a rough translation would be: Gulban's beak or nose as the mountain seems to have a projecting western nose.

┐

First Stanza of “Under Ben Bulbin”

- **Mareotic Lake** Philo of Alexandria (1st century) describes a Jewish ascetic community of men and women living near Lake Mareotis, near Alexandria. The community studied Hebrew Bible during the week, hoping on the Sabbath to dream visions informed by their studies.
- **“The Witch of Atlas”** is a major work from Percy Bysshe Shelly about a witch living in the Atlas mountains who wants to change man’s fear of death as well as his attitude to war. Basically, mankind should not fear death. The poem is about synthesizing creation and destruction. Shelly believed that love’s energy leads mankind to a higher state of development.
- **The Horsemen** are the riders from Irish folklore known as the **Fianna** (FEE e ne.) Being part of such a group (active in late Iron Age and early Middle Ages—500 BC to 1000 CE) was a rite of passage for free-born young men, not yet coming into their landowning responsibilities. Fenian Brotherhood (late 19th century) and Fianna Eireann (20th century youth organization) are named for these Horsemen.
- **The Pale Women** refer to the supernatural females of Irish folklore, their ghostly, pale beauty and attire indicate their supernatural powers. **The Banshee** are some of the most famous pale women of Irish legends. Their keening or wailing portends death.

Section 4 Under Ben Bulben

- **Quattrocento:** Events in Italy from 1400-1499. Think Leonardo da Vinci
- **Edward Calvert** (1799-1883) English printmaker and painter, greatly influenced by William Blake.
- **Richard Wilson** (1713-1883) early English landscape artist
- **Claud Lorrain** (1600-1682) French landscape artist.
- **Samuel Palmer** (1805-1881) member of The Ancients, a group that came together out of their admiration for William Blake. Palmer was a noted landscape painter. The Ancients idealized rural life; they were a brotherhood of artists, a kind of pre-pre-Raphaelite group.
- **Palmer's phrase:** Palmer praised Blake's illustrations of the *Divine Comedy* as having "...such a misty and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul and gives complete and unreserved delight..."

Under Ben Bulbin

- I
- Swear by what the Sages spoke
- Round the Mareotic Lake
- That the witch of Atlas knew,
- Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.
- Swear by those horsemen by those women
- Complexion and form prove superhuman,
- That pale, long visaged company
- That airs an immortality
- Completeness of their passions won;
- Now they ride the wintry dawn
- Where Ben Bulbin sets the scene
- Here's the gist of what they mean.

- II
- Many times man lives and dies
- Between his two eternities,
- That of race and that of soul,
- And ancient Ireland knew it all.
- Whether man dies in his bed
- Or the rifle knocks him dead,
- A brief parting from those dear
- Is the worst man has to fear.
- Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
- Sharp their spades their muscle strong,
- They but thrust their buried men
- Back in the human mind again.

Under Ben Bulben (part 3, beginning of part 4)

- III

- You that Mitchel's prayer have heard
- 'Send war in our time, O Lord!'
- Know that when all words are said
- And a man is fighting mad,
- Something drops from eyes long blind
- He completes his partial mind,
- For an instant stands at ease,
- Laughs aloud, his heart at peace,
- Even the wisest man grows tense
- With some sort of violence
- Before he can accomplish fate
- Know his work or choose his mate.

- IV

- Poet and sculptor do the work
Nor let the modish painter shirk
- What his great forefathers did,
- Bring the soul of man to God,
- Make him fill the cradles right.

- Measurement began our might:
- Forms a stark Egyptian thought
- Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.

- Michael Angelo left a proof
- On the Sistine Chapel roof,
- Where but half-awakened Adam
- Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
- Till her bowels are in heat,
- Proof that there's a purpose set
- Before the secret working mind:
- Profane perfection of mankind.

Under Ben Bulbin (part 4 continued)

- Quattrocento put in paint,
 - On backgrounds for a God or Saint,
 - Gardens where a soul's at ease;
 - Where everything that meets the eye
 - Flowers and grass and cloudless sky
 - Resemble forms that are, or seem
 - When sleepers wake and yet still dream,
 - And when it's vanished still declare,
 - With only bed and bestead there,
 - That Heavens had opened.
- Gyres run on;
 - When that greater dream had gone
 - Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude
 - Prepared a rest for the people of God,
 - Palmer's phrase, but after that
 - Confusion fell upon our thought.

Under Ben Bulben (part 5, part 6)

- V
- Irish poets learn your trade
- Sing whatever is well made,
- Scorn the sort now growing up
- All out of shape from toe to top
- Their unremembering hearts and heads
- Base-born products of base beds.
- Sing the peasantry, and then
- Hard-riding country gentlemen,
- The holiness of monks, and after
- Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;
- Sing the lords and ladies gay
- That were beaten into the clay
- Through seven heroic centuries;
- Cast your mind on other days
- That we in coming days may be
- Still the indomitable Irishry.

- VI
- Under bare Ben Bulben's head
- In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,
- An ancestor was rector there
- Long years ago; a church stands near,
- By the road an ancient Cross.
- No marble, no conventional phrase,
- On limestone quarried near the spot
- By his command these words are cut:
-
- Cast a cold eye
- On life, on death,
- Horseman, pass by!

Some takeaways about W.B.Yeats

- Throughout his fifty odd career Yeats neither leaves off his preoccupations
- with Irish folklore nor his intense study of the occult.
- He is the national bard giving voice to the deeds of his beloved Ireland and her
- struggle to take her place among the nations.
- Yeats loved his country. The Irish cause dominates his lifetime, but he was a moderate in that struggle.
- He could not work himself up to violence for “England may still keep faith.”
- He was a philosopher/prophet who believed he’d found a systemic answer that would provide meaning to history where the energy of intersecting gyres (opposites) propels the next two-thousand-year cycle.
- Finally, he is an aesthetic philosopher telling us the artist becomes his work of art, thus becoming immortal.

