

*Robert Nelson*

“STARLIT DOME”: THE BYZANTINE POEMS OF W. B. YEATS

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A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains  
All that man is.

William Butler Yeats (1930)

Sometime during the late summer or early fall of 1926, a procession of sorts made its way, not to Istanbul or to Constantinople, but to Byzantium. Both its destination and the voyage itself were imaginary, but strangely powerful, nevertheless, for they drew upon and reinforced attitudes formed over the past half century. And all this was enacted in only thirty-two lines, the telling clue, of course, that the pilgrimage in question is the one staged by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) in his famous poem, “Sailing to Byzantium.” In this poem and its sequel, “Byzantium” of 1930, Hagia Sophia, especially its dome, and Byzantine mosaics and enamel work become pure art, divorced from nature, and eternal monuments, removed from time and space. More widely read than any scholarly tome or religious tract, Yeats’s potent and compelling visions of Byzantine art raise many questions. Why did a distinguished Irish poet want to write about Byzantium and its art, what were his sources of information, how and why did he create his image of Byzantium, what was its significance for him, and why was his vision so successful and influential that it transformed perceptions of the actual mosaics that would soon be rediscovered at Hagia Sophia? Such questions are worth pondering, because Yeats’s vision, his act of making Byzantium symbolic, lies close to the heart of the dominant general response to Byzantine art in the twentieth century.

As if already in the midst of dialogue, “Sailing to Byzantium” begins arrestingly with the word “that,” for the poet is looking at what he has left behind:

I  
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.<sup>1</sup>

This is an Ireland, so engrossed in what is youthful, sexual, and natural that it ignores the eternal, here given physical form as “monuments of unageing intellect.” This land also cannot accommodate the old; Yeats was sixty-one when he wrote the poem. When Augustus John painted him four years later in 1930 (fig. 74), he described the poet as “a silver-haired old man, much mellowed and humanised.”<sup>2</sup> These qualities are less evident in the poem. Yet, this is not merely the complaint of an older, disaffected intellectual—Yeats, after all, was an Irish senator at the time. Something else is at issue, as the next stanza makes clear:

II  
 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,



**Figure 74—Augustus John, portrait of W. B. Yeats, 1930.** Glasgow. Glasgow City Art Gallery. © Courtesy of the estate of Augustus John/The Bridgeman Art Library.

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.

Requiring more than a vacation in the sun, the poet, a “paltry thing,” a scarecrow, has made a pilgrimage to a holy city. His is an internal quest, or as Harold Bloom put it, a simulated “fragment in a mythological romance, as though the poet himself as quest-hero undertook continually an odyssey of the spirit.” And contrary to its title, the poem is essentially static, its motion internal, its voyage illusory.<sup>3</sup> Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* or Lethaby and Swainson’s *Sancta Sophia* were also quest narratives of sorts, but their authors did actually make the trip. Yeats never traveled to Istanbul, but other journeys that he did take contributed to the creation of the poem, as will be discussed below.

The distancing of the first stanza contrasts with the intimacy and direct address of the third stanza:

III  
 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.

Sages are evoked, addressed, using all that English possesses of a vocative case, and are associated with mosaic figures on gold grounds, an unmistakable reference to Byzantine mosaics. The poet asks that his soul, tethered to a decaying body, be liberated and taken into “the artifice of eternity,” so that

IV  
 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.<sup>4</sup>

In that world of eternal artifice, the poet, no longer resembling a “tattered coat upon a stick,” will never again take on a natural body, no matter how beautiful. Instead, he writes himself into what Byzantine goldsmiths made, something gilded, dazzling, and made of enamels, precisely the aesthetics that were appreciated during the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> The specific vision refers to one of the automata of the Byzantine emperors. They, like their Muslim counterparts, kept such devices in the imperial audience hall and used them to dazzle ambassadors, especially those from lesser-developed regions, such as Western Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Yeats remarked in his *Collected Poems* of 1933 that he had “read somewhere that in the Emperor’s palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang.”<sup>7</sup> It has been suggested that he may have been thinking of a section in Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* or another in Charles Diehl’s chapter in the *Cambridge Medieval History*. Yeats bought these and other books with the proceeds from the Nobel Prize for literature, awarded at the end of 1923.<sup>8</sup> Yet another source might have been the actual text of Liudprand of Cremona, which was shown to him in 1910 by his friend Eric Maclagan, a fellow poet, scholar of medieval art, and later director of the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>9</sup> Even more distant in time would have been Yeats’s memory of having been read a tale of Hans Christian Andersen as a child.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, Brenda Maddox has suggested that the golden bird was inspired by a toy duck that Yeats bought for his son at Harrods.<sup>11</sup>

Yet surely this is not Sailing to Harrods. Medieval crafts are more relevant. Yeats’s notions of Byzantine metalwork probably were based on the only general handbook in English at the time, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1911) by the aforementioned Dalton, who was born one year after the poet. Yeats owned the book.<sup>12</sup> After a chapter on enamel, it discusses the work of goldsmiths,<sup>13</sup> a key term in the poem; the same word was also used in the passage on the automata in the *Cambridge Medieval History*.<sup>14</sup> Yeats would have appreciated Dalton’s conclusion that Byzantine art evoked “a life elect and spiritual, and not the tumultuous flow of human existence.”<sup>15</sup>

One clue to the types of imagery that Yeats was looking at in the period is provided by his preparation of a new deluxe edition of his *Stories of Red Hanrahan and The Secret Rose* (London, 1927). He took up the new project evidently at the same time he was continuing to work on “Sailing,” a period of composition that extended from the first dated draft of September 26, 1926, to the completed version

to which Yeats attached the date of 1927. For the new edition of his stories, Yeats collaborated with a young artist Norah McGuinness, who was later to become an important figure in the Irish art world.<sup>16</sup> On December 14, 1926, Yeats wrote to his publisher that he and McGuinness “spent the evening looking through photographs of Sicilian mosaics and the like, and she went away full of the idea.”<sup>17</sup>

The cover of the previous edition of *Stories of Red Hanrahan*, designed by Althea Gyles and published in 1897, was an art nouveau version of Hiberno-Saxon ornament.<sup>18</sup> Thirty years later McGuinness produced something rather different. Her cover has a simple, elegant gold design on a deep blue ground (pl. 7). A knight with drawn sword holds a small rose and stands above a small man with outstretched arms. They are the principal figures in the stories, “Out of the Rose” and “The Crucifixion of the Outcast,” respectively. “Sailing to Byzantium” appeared at the beginning of the new edition, the same position Yeats accorded it in his collection of poetry, *The Tower*, also published in 1927. The poem’s presence in the story collection redefines the older work, bringing Byzantium to Ireland. Yeats dedicated “Sailing” in *Red Hanrahan*, but not in *The Tower*, to McGuinness, and afterward he wrote her to express his “great pleasure” in her work and its “powerful simplicity.”<sup>19</sup>

The basic process of collaboration between the poet and painter is clear from the research of literary scholars, but what has not been noted is how closely McGuinness drew upon Byzantine sources, precisely as Yeats had suggested. Factoring in the artist’s stylistic transformations, the central group of her colored frontispiece appears to have been borrowed from figures in the central panel of a sixth-century ivory book-cover that is illustrated in Dalton just before one of the bookmarked pages of Yeats’s copy.<sup>20</sup> McGuinness copied more faithfully a hunting scene in the pseudo-Oppian manuscript in Venice and placed it at the top of the same frontispiece. As for the book’s cover, the knight, his armor, pose, and stance are copied directly from what Dalton thought was a Byzantine “enameled book-cover,” the stunning enamel icon of Archangel Michael in the Treasury of San Marco, Venice. The quality of Dalton’s black and white illustrations would not be acceptable today, and his picture of the Archangel Michael enamel is especially murky and hardly does justice to the object (fig. 75).<sup>21</sup> Still, for its day Dalton’s book was lavishly illustrated, and enough survives of the metallic sheen of the original object to suggest the “hammered gold and gold enameling” of the poem. Using what Yeats and McGuinness understood was a Byzantine book-cover to frame the new poem and the old stories, they created a modern version of a deluxe Byzantine manuscript.



**Figure 75—Enameled book cover of Saint Michael.** After O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archeology* (Oxford, 1911), fig. 306. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

For a nonspecialist and someone who never attended a university, Yeats was well read about Byzantine history and art. These were years during which Byzantium captured his imagination—and vice versa. The first mention of Byzantine luxury objects in Yeats’s poems comes in “The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid” from 1923. At the beginning, Yeats describes the caliph’s treasury and its “books of learning from Byzantium written in gold upon a purple stain.” What he had in mind were those sumptuous purple codices of early Byzantine date, another subject discussed by Dalton.<sup>22</sup> The poem opens book 2 of Yeats’s grand theoretical/historical/mystical treatise, *A Vision*, which was completed in February 1925 and published in January 1926 and thus some months before the September drafts of “Sailing,”<sup>23</sup> and both poems appear in Yeats’s collection of verse, *The Tower* of 1927.

In regard to this interest in Byzantium, no literary critic has failed to quote the relevant passages of *A Vision* or to emphasize that for Yeats Justinian’s reign was “that great age of building in which one must conclude Byzantine art was perfected.”<sup>24</sup> In his grand historical system, ordered by units of five hundred years, there were three periods of perfection and unity, the Athens of Phidias or c. 500 B.C., Byzantium about A.D. 500, and the Italian Renaissance in A.D. 1500.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the poet’s interest in Constantinople was so great that this was the place he would want to visit, if granted a month in “Antiquity.” For Yeats, then, Byzantium was ancient, not medieval, much less “Byzantine” in the popular sense of the word today. In Yeats’s time, few classicists were interested in Byzantium or the Neoplatonic philosophy that he also treasured. Neither was a proper subject of study for a classicist, and the concept of late antiquity would not be well established for decades, at least in the Anglo-American world.<sup>26</sup> Yeats imagines himself “in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato.” Strictly speaking, that moment would be logically impossible,

as Justinian closed the pagan schools in 529, when the Nika Riot and the need to rebuild Hagia Sophia could hardly have been foreseen.<sup>27</sup>

But then Yeats was a poet, not a historian, as the continuation of his dream shows:

[At that time] I think I could find in some little wine shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to Princes and Clerics and a murderous madness in the mob, show as a lovely flexible presence like that of a perfect human body.

I think that in early Byzantium, and maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, and that architect and artificers—though not, it may be, poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract—spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter and the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern, metal work of rail and lamp, seem but a single image . . .<sup>28</sup>

This world was preferred to ancient Rome, for what Yeats sought was that “moment when Byzantium became Byzantine and substituted for formal Roman magnificence, with its glorification of physical power, an architecture that suggest the Sacred City in the Apocalypse of St. John.”<sup>29</sup>

Here Byzantium is more than the “holy city” of “Sailing to Byzantium”; it has become the heavenly Jerusalem of the Bible, a Platonic ideal in which work and worker, word and image, theory and practice, religion and society fuse in and through art. And it fulfilled the dreams of William Morris, as discussed in the preceding chapter, and the Arts and Crafts movement generally.<sup>30</sup> Yeats could easily invest so much in Byzantium since for him it was both real and imaginary. Because he never traveled east of Italy, he depended upon others for his information. In addition to the books previously noted, he had in his library W. G. Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905–07), Mrs. Arthur Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life* (1915), Elie Faure, *History of Art* (1921–24), and Josef Strzygowski, *Origin of Christian Church Art* (1923),<sup>31</sup> one of whose translators

was the aforementioned Dalton. To judge from that evening spent with Miss McGuinness, Yeats also had a personal collection of photographs of Byzantine mosaics, these having become more readily available than in Morris's day.

At least as important as the textual sources, I would like to suggest, were his direct experiences with Byzantine murals, beginning with a trip to Ravenna in 1907. More relevant, because more recent, was his extended stay in Italy from the fall of 1924 until the following spring. Diagnosed with high blood pressure and suffering from shortness of breath, Yeats needed respite from his public life in Dublin, and at his wife's urging, he left for Sicily in November. They spent some time in Palermo, meeting Ezra Pound there and seeing Byzantine mosaics at the Cappella Palatina and nearby sites. According to Mrs. Yeats, the church of Cefalù to the east was dark the day of their visit. Monreale, in the hills overlooking Palermo, made a stronger impression,<sup>32</sup> as well it might, given its vast decorative program. From Sicily, the couple went to Capri, where *A Vision* was finished in February, and then settled in Rome. There Yeats studied Renaissance frescoes in the Vatican and brought back many photographs.<sup>33</sup> Little of these experiences were immediately evident in Yeats's writing, although the first edition of *A Vision* does refer to mosaics in Rome and Sicily, which was emended to Ravenna or Sicily in the next edition.<sup>34</sup>

Returning to Dublin, Yeats resumed his old life, but by the spring of 1926, he again was not feeling well, now suffering from measles and a hernia. His family moved to their tower in the countryside at Ballylee at the beginning of the summer. By June he had composed an important poem, "Among School Children,"<sup>35</sup> and in September he produced a preliminary draft of "Sailing to Byzantium." All these experiences bear, I suggest, on creation of the latter and its influential conception of Byzantine art. That process may be followed in detailed with the aid of Yeats's manuscripts and their interpretation by Jon Stallworthy.<sup>36</sup>

Yeats had what the best of recent biographers, R. F. Foster, calls an "alchemical capacity"<sup>37</sup> to transform details of his personal life into art and to do so in such a way as to reach a wide audiences. These artistic powers are fully displayed in "Sailing." Yet the first sketch of the poem could hardly have been less promising, although Harold Bloom argued differently in his book on Yeats:<sup>38</sup>

Now the day has come I will speak on of those  
Loves have I had in play. . . .  
For many loves have I taken off my clothes  
for some I threw them off in haste, for some slowly and indifferently  
& laid on my bed that I might be  
but now I will take off my body . . .<sup>39</sup>

Thankfully, he soon begins drafting descriptions of the Ireland that he will leave behind, rather than his old lovers. Then he turns to describing the journey to Byzantium:

Now I have shipped among these mariners  
 And sail south eastward toward Byzantium . . .  
 then  
 I therefore travel towards Byzantium  
 Among these sun-browned pleasant mariners  
 Another dozen days & we shall come  
 Under the jetty & the marble stairs . . .

The dome of Hagia Sophia makes its appearance:

Flying from nature towards Byzantium  
 Among these dark skinned pleasant mariners  
 I long for St. Sophia's sacred dome . . .

Clusters of images that will become important come helter-skelter with bits crossed out:

But now these pleasant dark skinner mariners  
 Carry me toward that great Byzantium  
 And ageless beauty where age is living . . .  
 That I may look on St. Sophia's Dome . . .

Part of the last line is crossed out, yielding the more generalized, "That I may look on the great shining Dome."

What did Yeats know of Hagia Sophia? Not too much, it seems. Several books in his library describe the church (Holmes, Dalton, Diehl's chapter in the *Cambridge Medieval History*), but only two actually illustrate it. One is the second volume of the recently translated *History of Art* (1922) by Elie Faure, a medical doctor with a passionate interest in art. A follower of Hippolyte Taine, Faure does not write with the extreme prejudice that Taine displayed toward Byzantine art, but neither is he especially sympathetic. Nonetheless, Faure's *History* may have been more important stimulus for Yeats than heretofore realized. His poem "Leda and the Swan," published in the same volume as "Sailing," corresponds closely to the captionless frontispiece of Faure's first chapter.<sup>40</sup> Faure conceived his prose history to be a poem about the history of art in language that is highly imagistic and personal, although not always historically accurate.<sup>41</sup> His chapter, titled

“Byzantium” opens with a handsome Byzantine enamel on the verso, part of a set that had prompted an essay by Roger Fry in 1912.<sup>42</sup> On the recto is a photograph of “Constantinople.”<sup>43</sup> The image is small and the view distant, having been taken from across the Golden Horn, but Hagia Sophia is there at the left (fig. 76).



**Figure 76—Photograph of Constantinople skyline.**  
After Elie Faure, *History of Art*, vol. 2 (London and New York, 1922), 206-7. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

A second photograph of Hagia Sophia in Faure’s book and thus available to Yeats was taken from the obligatory point to the southwest (fig. 77) by the leading commercial studio in Istanbul of the day, the aforementioned Sébah & Joaillier.<sup>44</sup> As if to illustrate that firm’s control of the visual representation of Hagia Sophia in the early twentieth century, the same photograph was added to J. B. Bury’s addition of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*.<sup>45</sup> This is the edition that Yeats bought with the funds provided by his Nobel Prize and book marked.<sup>46</sup> The exterior view in the fourth volume accompanies Gibbon’s not wholly favorable assessment of the church that he never saw. The frontispiece to volume 4 is Sébah’s composite image of the interior of Hagia Sophia (fig. 65), the one that appears in various publications of the day.<sup>47</sup> As Yeats revised his poem, he likely looked at these pictures of the church and imagined himself in its spaces. In a similar fashion, he may have personalized Gibbon’s distancing prose: “. . . the spectator was dazzled by the glittering aspect of the cupola.”<sup>48</sup> By the application

of Romantic empathy and poetic transposition, that thought turned into the line that Yeats momentarily considered, “That I may look on the great shining Dome.”



**Figure 77—Hagia Sophia.** Photograph by Sébah & Joaillier. After Elie Faure, *History of Art*, vol. 2 (London and New York, 1922), 235. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

The description of what he longs to see continues, if not entirely coherently at this stage:

On gold limbed saints & emperors  
 After the mirroring waters & the foam  
 Where the dark drowsy fins a moment rise  
 of fish, that carry souls to Paradise.<sup>49</sup>

The first line is a confused reference to Byzantine mosaics, because in that pictorial tradition, garments, but not limbs or flesh, were rendered in gold. Might “limbed” have either been a poetic substitution or a prosaic slip for “nimbed”? Another attempt to suggest wall mosaics, “Angel, vestal or emperors lost in gold,” led Stallworthy to conclude that Yeats was thinking of the nave mosaics of the sixth-century Basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the city that Yeats had visited in 1907. What Stallworthy and other commentators<sup>50</sup> had in mind was the procession of male and female saints on the sidewalls of this basilica (fig. 22), which, however, has no mosaics of emperors.

With such a vague allusion, it is, of course, impossible to determine an exact source, but I suggest that Yeats was thinking more of Sicily than Ravenna during these years.<sup>51</sup> The Sicilian trip was more immediate, and Sicilian mosaics were what he and Ms. McGuinness discussed as sources of her illustrations. In Yeats’s library, his copy of Dalton’s *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* had two bookmarks,

one to the section mentioned before and the other to pages 404–5. The latter has an illustration, murky as usual, of the Byzantine mosaics of La Martorana, a twelfth-century church in Palermo (fig. 78). What are pictured are several registers of figures. These correspond better to Yeats’s next vision of wall mosaics:

Procession on procession, tier on tier  
 Saints & apostles in the gold of a wall.



**Figure 78—Mosaics of Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio, known as La Martorana, Palermo.**

After O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archeology* (Oxford, 1911), fig. 237.  
 Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

After several crossed-out lines, the poet’s personal plea to the depicted saints follows:

As in God’s love will refuse my prayer  
 When prostrate on the marble step I fall  
 And cry aloud—‘I sicken with desire  
 And fastened to a dying animal  
 Cannot endure my life—O gather me  
 Into the artifice of eternity.<sup>52</sup>

Here elements of the completed stanza 3 are emerging, and gold mosaics have become the object of the poet’s prayer. In its final form, the vocative “O” will be transformed to the beginning of the stanza and saints and apostles reduced to sages:

“O sages standing in God’s holy fire . . .” But the ending and the general thought of the stanza remains: “gather me into the artifice of eternity.”

Now the poet’s longing turns to wall mosaics; Hagia Sophia and its dome will soon drop away, not to return, at least in this poem. The result concentrates both gaze and prayer on figural mosaics and locates all within a setting more intimate than Sophia’s vast dome and one that Yeats may have known personally. At a subsequent stage of composition, he composes a new beginning:

Here all is young; the chapel walls display  
An infant sleeping on [asleep] His Mother’s knees . . .<sup>53</sup>

A chapel and its mural thus briefly introduce the poem. That Yeats continued to think about a chapel space is indicated by a speech he gave to the Irish Senate in 1928. In it he mentioned Byzantine wall mosaics and “that little Byzantium chapel at Palermo.”<sup>54</sup>

The latter may have been a reference to the Martorana, but it is not the only church with Byzantine mosaics in Palermo. As beautiful as it is, Baedeker’s guide to *Southern Italy and Sicily* (16th rev. ed., 1912), which Yeats owned, gives it one star (there evidently having been star inflation, together with everything else, in the twentieth century). Better was the two-star Cappella Palatina (fig. 79), which was accorded this accolade: “The whole, with its exquisite mosaic decorations, is a gem of mediaeval art, perhaps the most beautiful palace-chapel in the world,”<sup>55</sup> quite a claim, but the building had been dazzling visitors since at least the time of King Ludwig I, as noted in chapter 2. Strictly speaking, the Martorana is a church and the Cappella Palatina, obviously a chapel, as Baedeker and Dalton note.<sup>56</sup> Thus, if Yeats is being terminologically precise, his references to a chapel ought to refer to the Cappella Palatina.



**Figure 79—Cappella Palatina, Palazzo Reale, Palermo.**  
View to the apse. Copyright Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

Additional support for this suggestion comes from an overlooked line in an intermediate draft: “When prostrate on the marble step I fall.” Both the Martorana and the Cappella Palatina have finely decorated medieval floors, but the former has no steps,<sup>57</sup> nor do Byzantine churches in the East as a rule. A raised altar area is a feature of Western medieval architecture from the early Middle Ages, and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, although decorated with Byzantine wall mosaics and a painted wood ceiling in Islamic style, is architecturally Western. It has two sets of steps, one to the east before the choir (fig. 79) and another in front of the ruler’s throne at the west end. Yeats might have remembered these stairs or noticed them in a photograph, because they are made more prominent by their risers, which are decorated with the same type of mosaic ornament as the rest of the floor.<sup>58</sup>

Thus the nave of the Cappella Palatina is more likely to be the imagined theater for the poet’s petition to the “saints and apostles in the gold of a wall.” Falling down on the chapel’s steps and gazing at the mosaics all around, the poet asks to be embraced by them. In this particular spatial setting, the petition may also imply that he wishes to be taken into the holy spaces around of the chapel’s altar, the choir, apse, and dome, which contain the chapel’s most magnificent mosaics.

His prayer is that of a particular kind of mystic, who desires not union necessarily with God but with the aesthetic, with “the artifice of eternity.” In sum, this version of stanza 3 focuses on Palermo, specifically its Cappella Palatina, and in so doing, it recapitulates Yeats’s journey two years before—presumably by sea. At this moment he is writing “Sailing to Sicily.”

The poem’s fourth and final stanza emerges more quickly than the others. From the first or second drafts it contains the crucial phrases, such as “Of hammered gold and gold enamelling” and “Of what is past, or passing, or to come.”<sup>59</sup> A bit of tinkering here and there, and it is done. The concluding verses take the poem out of the architectural and spatial literalness of the intermediate versions of the third stanza and instead tie the whole into the literary and historical past of an imagined holy, eternal city. All is united by the last line, which recalls the concluding language of prayers and liturgies: “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.” Yeats’s utopia is secular and aesthetic, however, and a transformation of the prior literalness. Instead of being gathered into a choir and apse or merging with the mosaics of a wall and dome, the poet turns into another “bodily form” beyond nature, one of the courtly automata that sings to the lords and ladies of the court. Now the previously desired absorption has been realized.

At this point, as Stallworthy explains,<sup>60</sup> Yeats produced a typewritten draft with the title “Towards Byzantium,” thankfully dropped. In stanza 2, he continued to work on the journey to Byzantium:

Another dozen days and we shall come  
Under the jetty and the marble stair

In the typescript “we” is changed to “I,” as Yeats continues to write himself into the poem and into actual buildings. A similar effect is conveyed by the mention of a harbor with a jetty and marble stair. Both probably refer to Constantinople itself and may have been suggested by Holmes’s discussion of the Boukoleon Palace and its “small but very ornate harbour” with long curved piers that are “approached from the city by flights of white marble steps . . . This is the exclusive port of the Imperial Palace.”<sup>61</sup> Reversing the approach, Yeats imagines sailing into the imperial harbor and walking up these stairs. Yeats’s evident preoccupation with stairs befits a man, whose country house was a tall stone tower, the inspiration for the title of this book of poems, *The Tower*, and his next, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.<sup>62</sup>

That he continued to think spatially is shown by a subtle revision in this stanza. The former,

Flying from nature towards Byzantium  
 Among these dark skinned pleasant mariners  
 I long for St. Sophia's sacred dome

is rewritten as

But now I travel to Byzantium  
 With many a dark skinner pleasant mariner . . .  
 That I may look in the great churches dome  
 On gold-embedded saints and emperors . . .<sup>63</sup>

Before he longed for and thus looked *at* the dome. Now he desires to look *in* the great church's dome and its mosaics of saints and emperors. By "churches," Yeats presumably meant church's. The phrase indicates that he was aware that Hagia Sophia was known as the Great Church, something that he would have learned from Holmes. The relevant page is found in a well-marked section of his copy.<sup>64</sup>

How might Yeats have known about the mosaics of Hagia Sophia? Even if he had gone to Constantinople in 1926, he, of course, would not have been able to see what the Byzantine Institute of America would not uncover until the next decade. Given Yeats's powerful imagination, he could have simply attributed to Hagia Sophia what he had seen in Italy. On the other hand, he may have consulted his library, especially Dalton's handbook or the *Cambridge Medieval History* and a chapter by the French Byzantinist Charles Diehl. Dalton notes that Fossati uncovered mosaics at Hagia Sophia and describes what could be known of the program, mentioning, of course, saints and at least one emperor.<sup>65</sup> Diehl's discussion of Hagia Sophia is less detailed, but more imaginative, and for that reason, his scholarship had an impact outside academia in France.<sup>66</sup> Diehl puts the reader inside the great dome: "Under the golden domes of Justinian's church, every Byzantine experienced emotions of the same kind [i.e., "transcending . . . human intelligence"], as deep and as powerful and his mystic and pious soul became marvellously exalted."<sup>67</sup> He could have been writing the brief for "Sailing" at this stage of creation.

After reaching the end of the poem, Yeats must have looked at the whole rather critically, for he next strikes out most of its first two stanzas. Instead of beginning with details about Byzantium, he starts with Ireland, but seen from abroad. For the poem's first word, he rejects "Here" and "This," before finding the critical "That" ("That is no country for old men . . .").<sup>68</sup> The second stanza is also radically rewritten. Now Yeats presents the poet as "an aged man," "a paltry thing," "a tattered coat upon a stick," images that he had recently used. In "Among School Children," composed in the summer of 1926, Yeats described himself as an

“old scarecrow,” and he had “World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras” intone “Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.”<sup>69</sup> To accommodate the new thought, Yeats eliminates the details of the voyage, the tanned mariners, the jetty and its marble stairs and truncates all to a powerful conclusion:

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

In the final version, Byzantium is no longer denoted by specific details of the dome of Hagia Sophia or by images of saints and apostles on the walls of the Cappella Palatina. Yeats, the poetic alchemist, has transformed his experiences and his reading into a generalized and more universal holy city, a place for “monuments of unageing intellect” and “the artifice of eternity.” Now we finally have “Sailing to Byzantium,” a place “out of nature” and the opposite of Ireland’s surfeit of nature. What began with Yeats’s sexual memories and shifted to an evocation of a therapeutic journey to Sicily and southern Italy culminates in a paean about young and old, nature and art, and Ireland and Byzantium, and life, death, and afterlife. It is no wonder that references to the mundane, to actual buildings in crowded, teeming Palermo, had to be eliminated.

In 1931, Yeats read and commented on his poem:

Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called “Sailing to Byzantium.” When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city.<sup>70</sup>

These two sentences express the poem’s personal meaning for Yeats and justify his appropriation of Byzantium. For him, Byzantium is a symbol, and as the foregoing has labored to explain, that symbol is mainly visual. Yeats once remarked, “I have remembered nothing that I read, but only those things that I heard or saw.”<sup>71</sup> He exaggerated, of course, but it is not surprising that the son and sibling of artists would have a good visual memory. That Yeats wrote from the visual is indicated by a comment he made on a later poem, “The Mother of God,” based on his remembering “Byzantine mosaic pictures of the Annunciation.”<sup>72</sup> For him and a long line of Romantic poets, as Frank Kermode put it, the image is “radiant truth out of space and time.”<sup>73</sup>

How visual symbols worked for Yeats personally is suggested by the end of an essay about Shelley that Yeats wrote in 1900. It seems to portend “Sailing”:

. . . for every man [there is] some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images, and that this one image, if he would but brood over it his life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from the unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household, where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp.<sup>74</sup>

Thanks to Yeats’s reading and traveling, “undying gods” awaiting souls as “simple as flame” became the poem’s “sages standing in God’s holy fire as in the mosaic of a wall” and a quiet agate lamp metamorphosed into a gold and enameled bird that sang to the “lords and ladies of Byzantium, of what is past, or passing, or to come.” The relationship of the two texts, of course, is neither direct nor causal, but it does suggest how Yeats continues to employ visual objects to trigger emotional and psychic responses in himself and in his readers. The continuity in Yeats’s work confirms Ellmann’s conclusion that “Sailing” has echoes throughout Yeats’s oeuvre; “in a sense he had been writing it all his life.”<sup>75</sup> And he was to continue writing it, as its sequel shows.

On April 16, 1930, the Irish poet and artist T. Sturge Moore wrote Yeats, commenting on literature and philosophy, as the two did throughout their lives. At the end of the letter, Moore criticizes “Sailing to Byzantium.” Although its first three verses are “magnificent,” the fourth he finds to be disappointing. The problem is that “a goldsmith’s bird is as much nature as a man’s body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies.”<sup>76</sup> While the criticism may be unjust,<sup>77</sup> it did stimulate Yeats to produce a sketch for a new poem within the same month and the completed version by the summer. The result—“Byzantium”—was for Helen Vendler “Yeats’s greatest single triumph” and what one reviewer termed the “magnificent centre-piece” of his next book of poetry, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.<sup>78</sup>

The unpurged images of day recede;  
 The Emperor’s drunken soldiery are abed;  
 Night resonance recedes, night-walkers’ song  
 After great cathedral gong;  
 A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains

All that man is,  
All mere complexities,  
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,  
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;  
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth  
May unwind the winding path;  
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath  
Breathless mouths may summon;  
I hail the superhuman;  
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,  
More miracle than bird or handiwork,  
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,  
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,  
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud  
In glory of changeless metal  
Common bird or petal  
And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit  
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,  
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,  
Where blood-begotten spirits come  
And all complexities of fury leave,  
Dying into a dance,  
An agony of trance,  
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,  
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood.  
The golden smithies of the Emperor!  
Marbles of the dancing floor  
Break bitter furies of complexity,  
Those images that yet  
Fresh images beget,  
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

Like “Sailing,” Yeats’s second Byzantine poem began in a few scattered thoughts: “Subject for a poem. Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millenium [*sic*].” Then follows a crossed-out line, “The worn ascetics on the walls contrasted with their (?) splendour,” referring presumably to mosaics of emaciated saints on gold grounds. The revised lines continue:

A walking mummy; flames at the street corners where the soul is purified.  
Birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees. In the harbour  
(dolphins) offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them  
to paradise. These subjects have been in my head for some time, especially  
the last.<sup>79</sup>

This being a section of his diary, Yeats addresses the final sentence to himself and continues a dialogue that he had indeed been having with himself and his disparate reading for some time. The dolphins recall the fish that carry souls to paradise in drafts of “Sailing,” a notion that commentators agree he took from Strong’s *Apotheosis and After Life*.<sup>80</sup> The golden birds repeat even the phrasing of the earlier poem. The mummy, according to Arkins, was inspired by the scene of the resurrection of Lazarus, as discussed in Dalton’s handbook,<sup>81</sup> and the flames, so powerfully evoked in the final version of the poem, have been thought to be inspired by Japanese Noh plays.<sup>82</sup>

Taking this raw material for a poem, these visual images, Yeats drops them into an immediate and vivid setting, the night streets of Byzantium with their dying sounds of harlots and a cathedral gong. By the latter, he refers to the *semantron*, a wooden board struck with a mallet used to call worshippers to service, and a device he had encountered in Holmes’s book on Justinian.<sup>83</sup> The poem’s next image, the dome, might seem to be yet another scenographic detail, but it is hardly background. This is Hagia Sophia’s dome that was purged from the drafts of “Sailing.” Disdaining mere human complexities, it now comes to represent what Ireland had neglected, a monument of “unageing intellect” and “the artifice of eternity.” This is Holy Wisdom, as Yeats referred to the church,<sup>84</sup> but it is also a secular wisdom or Intellect. Not by coincidence does the dome appear at night and lighted by the stars or the moon. In the aforementioned essay about Shelley, Yeats writes about the light of the sun, moon, and stars in Blake, Keats, and Shelley, respectively, and concludes that Shelley, a constant inspiration of his, understood starlight to symbolize love, liberty, wisdom, or beauty and thus “Intellectual Beauty, which was to Shelley’s mind the central power of the world.”<sup>85</sup> In the dome of “Byzantium,” Yeats created a similarly powerful symbol but transferred it to a culture for which Shelley had little sympathy, as noted above.

At the start of the second stanza, the person of the poet is introduced as witness to a dramatic vision of a floating mummy, another being out of this world and “death-in-life and life-in-death.” Next appears the gold bird that troubled Moore in “Sailing” and that Yeats agreed “needed exposition.”<sup>86</sup> Like the dome, the bird is starlit and stands aloof from human “mire or blood,” “more miracle than bird or golden handiwork.” This automaton is more powerful than the earlier model, or at least the poet makes a better case for its powers. It is not merely an exquisite form “of hammered gold and gold enamelling,” a perfect facsimile of a bird, able to call out “like the cocks of Hades.” This miracle is a permanent artifact, made of “changeless metal” and perched on a golden bough of the same substance.

Moore surely got the point this time, and at Yeats’s suggestion, he made this poem the basis for the cover and dust jacket for *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, the volume that Yeats had once thought of naming *Byzantium* (fig. 80). Yeats was pleased with the results.<sup>87</sup> In the upper left corner, Moore set a bird on the golden bough and put what appear to be flames in the right corner. At the bottom of spiral stairs in the center, a man rides a dolphin. These last two images refer to the concluding sections of “Byzantium.” From the Olympian peak of the first three verses and the artifices of eternity, the dome and the bird, the poem descends in the last two stanzas to the “Emperor’s pavement” with its “flames begotten of flame” and to “that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.” The final verses complicate the previous abstractions and oppose the human and the ideal.

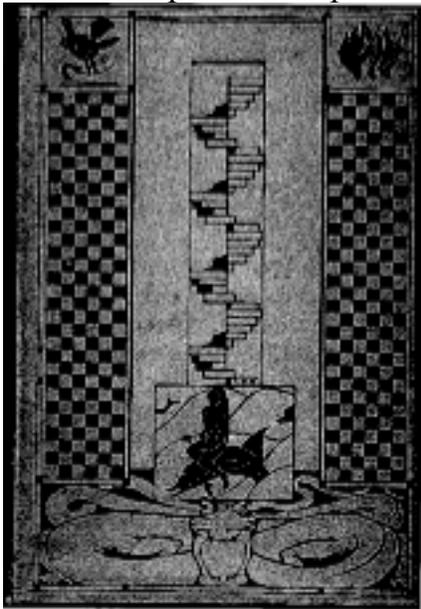


Figure 80—T. Sturge Moore, dust jacket for W. B. Yeats, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1933).

This conflict or strife between what Yeats calls antinomies is fundamental to both his Byzantine poems and to life, as he writes in “Vacillation,” a poem that was also included in *The Winding Stair*:<sup>88</sup>

Between extremities  
 Man runs his course;  
 A brand, or flaming breath,  
 Comes to destroy  
 All those antinomies  
 Of day and night;  
 The body calls it death,  
 The heart remorse.  
 But if these be right  
 What is joy?

Byzantium, its great dome and golden bird, represent one extreme, and it is to this world and/or its Sicilian version that Yeats sailed in the first poem. Once there, “once out of nature,” the poet is destined to be a bird on a branch, albeit a very beautiful, gilded bird with prophetic powers. This was “trivial ambition” according to Theodore Spencer, who reviewed *The Tower* for the *New Republic* two years before Moore’s response.<sup>89</sup> More recently, Frank Lentricchia wrote that keeping a sleepy emperor awake was “a pretty menial task—at best the artist is an entertainer, at worst an alarm clock.”<sup>90</sup>

“Byzantium” answers these objections. It reestablishes the antinomies of “Sailing,” but in its last two stanzas, it goes further and joins the opposites or at least puts them in the same arena. In the process, Yeats creates arresting, if also difficult images, such as the flames on “the Emperor’s pavement,” probably a reference to something else Byzantine.<sup>91</sup> The goldsmiths are still powerful; “the golden smithies of the Emperor” “break the flood.” But they have to confront a torrent of images, “images that yet / Fresh images beget,” and “That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.”

In the last line, Yeats twice writes “that,” “the crucial word with which he began his first Byzantine poem. Its presence here creates distance between the observer and the observed and contradicts the sense established from the beginning that the poet is inside Byzantium in as many ways as possible.<sup>92</sup> At the conclusion, the poet withdraws, looks back to the imaginary world he has created, and reverses the direction of “Sailing.” Here the journey concludes, and the two-part series ends.

From the first to the second of the Byzantine poems, the holy city changes. Although still the repository of beauty and intellect, the second Byzantium is more

theater than symbol. It is simultaneously more distant, because the poet/reader looks on from afar, but also more intimate and real, because it is filled with mire and blood, therefore life. Yeats treats the city as if it were a model, a space in which to put his visual images, to stage his play of antinomies. The spatial movement within the poem is complex and not easily diagrammed. In contrast, “Sailing” has a more linear structure. The poet journeys to a city imagined from his reading and travels. In various drafts, he lands at a jetty and walks up stairs to the Boukoleon Palace, stands before the apse of the Cappella Palatina and prays to its mosaics, and contemplates mural sages from beneath the dome of Hagia Sophia. The first Byzantium is more historical and art historical, the second more textual and poetic, but both, it should be emphasized, are written from his visualizations of Constantinople and its Great Church and thus more generally are the products of prior traditions of representing cities.<sup>93</sup>

For Yeats, writing about Byzantium in the 1930s served the same function as his long vacation in Sicily and southern Italy in 1924–25 or the composition of “Sailing” in 1926–27—it was rehabilitating. In the introduction to *The Winding Stair*, Yeats wrote that he had been “ill again” and “warmed myself back into life with ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Veronica’s Napkin,’ looking for a theme that might befit my years.”<sup>94</sup> Byzantium and its art thus continued to have potent personal significances for a poet, who identified strongly with it and had made himself, after all, into a gilded enamel bird. And Byzantium continues to be the refuge for the elderly.

As literature, “Byzantium” may or may not be the greater of the two poems, but it is surely the more difficult. As one critic wrote, it is “powerful before it is intelligible.”<sup>95</sup> Its delicate balancing of the ideal and the human within the city limits of Constantinople is not as readily understood, and its images are more surreal. Perhaps for these reasons, it has been less influential than the simpler pilgrimage to the holy city in “Sailing.” Nevertheless, both poems turn into art Yeats’s curious ruminations and enthusiasms in *A Vision*. In the process, Hagia Sophia and Byzantine mosaics became one of Yeats’s antinomies, as well as ideal beauty and intellect or pure art, and thus unageing monuments and artifices of eternity. The illusion persuades partly because Yeats writes so well and partly because he manages to ground his symbols in personal experience, thus allowing the reader to move from the human to the eternal. He connects Byzantium to the heart and art to personal identity, each part of the equation supporting the other. This was Yeats’s great contribution to Anglophone audiences for whom Byzantium and its art were becoming fashionable in the 1930s.<sup>96</sup>

“In Memory of W. B. Yeats” (1939), W. H. Auden wrote that while “poetry makes nothing happen . . . it survives, a way of happening, a mouth.” For the poems under discussion this assessment is overly pessimistic, but earlier in the same eulogy are lines that are more prophetic:

The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living.<sup>97</sup>

Yeats’s Byzantine poems have served as scholarly epigraph, stimulus for paintings, poetry, and a musical libretto, and inspiration for young and old. What began as personal—a synthesis of the travel and reading of a certain Irish poet—became general, if not universal. The verses live on with the consequences that Auden predicted. In quoting and adapting the poems, diverse individuals reveal something about themselves and provide evidence of the fate of Yeats’s notions of Byzantine art and Hagia Sophia.

Of the two poems, the more popular “Sailing” has been simpler to appropriate. Parts of the poem afford different roles or metaphorical transformations to an author, reader, or their objects of contemplation. For example, Yeats’s “monuments of unageing intellect” has twice been evoked by a recent scholar of Byzantine architecture.<sup>98</sup> When students today “surf the net,” to adopt a metaphor from another realm, they eventually reach a useful site, “Byzantium, Byzantine Studies on the Internet.” Its epigraph, appropriately enough, is the concluding couplet of the second stanza: “And therefore I have sailed the seas . . .”<sup>99</sup> Mouse clicking thereby becomes a romantic quest, something that surely neither Auden nor Yeats anticipated.

On the other hand, instead of becoming a cybernetic sailor, a Byzantine historian can cite the fourth stanza of “Sailing” (Once of nature I shall never take . . . Of what is past, or passing, or to come) and make himself or herself into the prophetic golden bird.<sup>100</sup> Subtler is the adaptation that appears at the beginning of *L’idéologie politique de l’empire byzantin* (1975). The author is Héléne Ahrweiler, historian and prominent university administrator in Paris. She excerpts key lines from the second and fourth stanzas:

I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.  
. . . Set upon a golden bough to sing  
To Lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.<sup>101</sup>

She deletes “And therefore,” from the beginning of the crucial last couplet of the second stanza, and by eliminating traces of the old man, she thereby alters the referent of the personal pronoun. In the last stanza, she similarly excises the golden bird. As a result, it is Ahrweiler who has sailed the seas and come to address the lords and ladies of Byzantium and her readers, presumably about political ideology.<sup>102</sup>

The same poem permits the political philosopher Ernest Barker to assume another role in his *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (1957). In the preface, the then octogenarian (1874–1960) writes that he has come to Byzantine studies after a long career studying other topics and concludes with an apology to his readers. It seems that he had declared that his previous book would be his last and had said “Farewell” to his readers. But “another bud appeared on the tree which I had thought was barren, and the bud has grown into a book.”<sup>103</sup> For him, “Sailing” provided the ideal epigraph for such a project. Barker quotes the entire second stanza of “Sailing,” with the result that he is metaphorically transformed into not the prophetic bird, but the old man who found new life in Byzantium.

This connection of the Byzantine poems with old age has proven popular and accounts for their quotation in contemporary fiction.<sup>104</sup> It also helps to explain their employment in two recent works, one a series of paintings and the other a symphonic composition. The former consists of thirty-six paintings, sized 38” x 45” and executed in the early 1980s by the American painter and photographer David Finn. Their relationship to the poems is close and direct, and Finn inscribed the appropriate verses on each painting. He writes that the paintings “represent my private journey through the ideas and experiences of these two remarkable poems.”<sup>105</sup> Unlike Yeats, Finn actually traveled to Istanbul, as well as other Byzantine sites.

One painting puts back into “Sailing” what Yeats had written out, the great church/mosque (fig. 81). Finn depicts Hagia Sophia from a photograph that he took evidently from the Sea of Marmara east of the building. With its gleaming white walls and golden dome, the building floats above the dark blue of the ground and the lighter blue of the sea in front. Behind are bands of green and red that make this the apocalyptic accompaniment to the conclusion of the second stanza: “And therefore I have sailed the seas and come/To the holy city of Byzantium.” For Finn, the paintings that respond to the beginning of that stanza are “especially dear, since I was approaching 60 when I painted them and the lines to which they refer reveal the prospect of wisdom which can give meaning to one’s later years.”<sup>106</sup>



**Figure 81—David Finn, *And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium*, 38” x 45”**, c. 1980, one of a series of thirty-six paintings.

More recently, Sir Michael Tippett set “Byzantium” to music. Scored for solo soprano and orchestra, his symphonic rhapsody with this name has five parts corresponding to the five stanzas of the poem. It was given its world premiere by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in April 1991. Tippett, then the “eight-six year old dean of British composers,”<sup>107</sup> described his inspiration and motivation in the program notes:

[F]irstly, the crystalline intensity of the poem itself offered a challenge in setting its verbal imagery to music; secondly, I identified completely with its emphasis on the notion of artifact, enshrining values that can be set against the impermanence of the everyday world and the complexities of the human beating heart.<sup>108</sup>

In a public discussion before the premiere performance, Tippett recounted that he had long read Yeats and had visited him in his Norman tower. Mentioning that his father had been born within a few years of Yeats, the composer seemed to suggest that the poet was a father figure for him, as Yeats had been for Auden.<sup>109</sup> Certainly Tippett viewed Byzantium through Yeats’s eyes. For Tippett, the poem was about precious artifacts, the most prominent of which was the dome of Hagia Sophia. Musically, the last lines were crucial for him:

Those images that yet  
Fresh images beget,

That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

As typical of Tippett's work, his symphonic setting is filled with percussion instruments, especially gongs. Like Professor Barker thirty years before, Tippett in his last years identified with Byzantium, and he too produced important work at an advanced age.

For the American poet James Merrill (1926–95), the Byzantine poems have still other significances. Merrill's "The Thousand and Second Night," published in 1966, recounts the trauma of his waking one March morning in Istanbul and finding his face half-paralyzed. But not to worry, he seems to reassure himself; there is much that he has not yet seen—for example, Hagia Sophia, ever a cure, at least in poetry. But it disappoints, or at least it is not what Yeats had described. The actual church/mosque is a monument/museum without life:

The house of Heavenly Wisdom first became  
A mosque, is now a flame-  
less void . . .

No flames begetting flames here. The dome also fails to satisfy:

Above you, the great dome,  
Bald of mosaic, senile, floated  
In a gilt wash. Its old profusion's  
Hypnotic shimmer, back and forth between  
That of the abacus, that of the nebula,  
Had been picked up from the floor,  
The last of numberless handfals  
By the last 18th century visitor.<sup>110</sup>

That dome, which once was powerful enough to stand above "the fury and the mire of human veins" has become bald and senile. Its gold mosaics, to which an imaginative poet once prayed and by which he was relieved of his tired body, have long since fallen off, retrieved (anachronistically) as souvenirs by Lady Montagu and her contemporaries. But still Merrill cannot escape the power of Yeats's Byzantine poems, which are directly evoked in another stanza of this multipartite and multinational poem. Later, but still within the poem, Merrill explains that the preceding excursus about Hagia Sophia had been the first of three interpolations that refer to the mind, body, and soul.<sup>111</sup> While the present condition of the Great Church disappointed, for Merrill it still could stand for the mind and

was to be counted among the “monuments of unageing intellect.” Yeats’s vision holds firm; the ideal overwhelms the real.

Merrill’s first exploration of Hagia Sophia took place in 1952, according to his memoirs. Like Evelyn Waugh, his expectations were predetermined by photographs, in Merrill’s case, “the available postcards.” “Not knowing what more to expect, we weren’t at first thrilled on entering. Where were the mosaics promised by Yeats, by Gibbon for that matter, who described the dome as a ‘glittering spectacle’?”<sup>112</sup> Neither, of course, had actually been inside the building, and while by 1952 the mosaics had been uncovered, they are not immediately apparent upon entering the great nave. Merrill’s preconceptions were founded upon nineteenth-century visual representations, as refined into a gilded essence by Yeats. No building could match gold of that purity.

An article in the *Nation* of June 23, 1956, suggests that Yeats’s impact on Merrill may have been part of a more general phenomenon and, further, that Yeats was as generally influential for the educated youth of the day, as he had been for the elderly Professor Barker. Much to the disapproval of the essay’s author Dan Wakefield, a reporter and novelist, the “younger intelligentsia” of America no longer sail as they once did to creative exile in Paris or to war in Spain. Instead they are content with “that cold, metallic world of abstraction” of Yeats’s Byzantine poems and sadly lack political convictions. “Recently graduated English majors” prefer the cold abstractions of Byzantium, because this was a “land of images instead of humans, a land of artificial experience . . .” “Unless the youngest generation of thinkers and writers in America changes its course,” they will only be left with that fire on the emperor’s pavement in “Byzantium,” and “it is a fire that holds little danger of burning anyone—even less promise of warming them.”<sup>113</sup> One of those graduates, English, not American, was the often cited Jon Stallworthy, who took up the study of Yeats at this time, and four decades later, he too returned to “Sailing” and used it for the epigraph and title of his memoirs.<sup>114</sup>

More recently Yeats’s poetic vision of Byzantium has found new life in the book, *A Gilded Lapse of Time* (1992) by the American Gjertrud Schnackenberg. Able to manipulate the once thought dying arts of rime and rhythm, this “new formalist” poet attends to historical pasts, distant literatures, and especially visual art. From her first book published in 1982, Schnackenberg, the daughter of a history professor, has been interested, as one critic put it, in “the idea of history and its role in our lives. . . . [making] us aware of the *idea* of the past, and of the way a past, a history, resounds within and intrudes upon the present.”<sup>115</sup> One of its series of poems is a moving elegy for her father with an epigraph taken from Yeats. In later books, a Yeatsian quality has become more evident, if not often observed, even when another critic concluded that Schnackenberg “reads herself out of nature.”<sup>116</sup>

With impassioned verse and empathetic, neo-Romantic visual responses, Schnackenberg recounts a visit to Ravenna in the more recent book. Woven together are the Byzantine monuments and Dante, who is buried in the city, and his great epic, all of which lead her to ponder “the source of poetry” and God, the two being more or less equivalent. The contrast with the by now distant pejorative comments of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could not be greater. At the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, she is overwhelmed, not repulsed like Shelley. The vault of this inner sanctum is a “whirl of gold,” an “inflooding realm,” like the honeycombs of Assyrian bees that the Immanuel summoned. The reference here is to Isaiah 7:18–19, which follows the well-known prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 to which Christianity would give a special interpretation: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” At the mausoleum, “gold glass glowed/As if embers from the imperial furnaces,” and the vaults seemed like those messianic honeycombs “still dripping on the ground.” Referring in one instance to the “hammered gold in the rooms,” she makes explicit the debt to Yeats, but her Byzantium is not his distant holy city, but instead the gritty industrial town of Ravenna. This she inspects, like all tourists, with guidebook in hand, as she pours over historical tomes at night in her hotel room.<sup>117</sup>

Schnackenberg’s poem on the sixth-century Church of San Vitale focuses not on the famous mosaic of Justinian (fig. 5) but rather on the theological heart of the program, the figure of Christ, enthroned on a globe in the apse:

Now in a gilded apse the celestial globe  
Has rolled to the end of an invisible rope  
And come to rest on a cliff in a blue-green garden.<sup>118</sup>

At the end comes the book’s title, now revealed to be a pun on this golden apse: “Downward, through the gilded lapse of time.”<sup>119</sup> In the lines of the poem, what flows instantly across space and time—from apse to lapse—is the immediacy and power of the gleaming mosaics and their ability to transform the lives of readers and viewers at the end of the twentieth century, as they had done for Yeats decades earlier. The poetry of James Merrill and Gjertrud Schnackenberg thus confirm, as one scholar has recently put it, “that Byzantium in English poetry is in a significant sense a Yeatsian monopoly.”<sup>120</sup>

Such diverse evidence demonstrates that Yeats’s poems were widely read, especially in the first couple of decades after World War II, the period also of important literary criticism about the poet.<sup>121</sup> And this larger context helps to explain certain reactions to Byzantine art, Hagia Sophia, and its mosaics in the

period. Echoes of Yeats, for example, can be heard at the end of a celebratory article in the Christmas issue of *Life* magazine for 1950. There the mosaics of Hagia Sophia are proudly presented “for the first time in their full color.” Byzantium and its greatest church are given a perfunctory introduction that concludes with the Deesis mosaic (figs. 20–21).

As the director of the work, Thomas Whittemore is prominently featured, and the article closes with the news that he had died some months before. The published photograph of him shows an intense, haggard old man with a piercing gaze and gnarled hands (fig. 82). This portrayal has none of the elegance and sophistication of an earlier drawing by Matisse (see fig. 83 below) or the publicity shot that Whittemore liked to use.<sup>122</sup> It is as if this paltry figure, surrounded by Byzantine mosaics, personifies the narrator of “Sailing” and is about to be gathered into eternity. The article concludes that Whittemore’s “associates are carrying on the laborious, rewarding task of rediscovering what the world has come to recognize as some of its purest and most enduring works of art,” exactly what Yeats had wrought.



**Figure 82—Thomas Whittemore, photography.**  
From *Life*, December 25, 1950. Photo © Dimitri Kessel / Timepix.

A few years before the *Life* article, this aesthetic position, descended from Romanticism and symbolism, had been fully endorsed by the art historian Otto von Simson. The preface to his *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (1948) does more than quote a few lines of poetry as epigraph. According to von Simson, Yeats’s poems expressed “the yearnings of our age” and epitomized “the spirit of Byzantine culture.” The Byzantine state was “motivated

by dreams,” a prominent motif in the poem “Byzantium,” and was “molded by the power of the imagination,” like the poet/bird of “Sailing.” While recognizing the modernity of Yeats’s vision, this German medievalist, then teaching at the University of Chicago, thought that the poet’s metaphors captured the nature of Byzantine art. Art or artifice was “an object of pure contemplation, serene in itself and setting the mind free as does a play . . . at once sacred symbol and precious toy.” To understand this art, we, like Yeats, must leave behind our world and “transport ourselves” into that past civilization.<sup>123</sup> Von Simson thus internalized Yeats’s visionary quest and accepted his symbolist image; for both, Byzantium is a place divorced from life and nature, a timeless world of the intellect and the aesthetic.

That Yeats had been thoroughly absorbed in a general discourse about art and Byzantium during the 1950s is suggested by the title and the venue of a brief article on the first major display of Byzantine art after World War II. Held in Edinburgh and London in 1958, this survey of the art of Constantinople from the fourth to the fifteenth century was organized by David Talbot Rice, who by that time had long been recognized as an authority in the field. Rice wrote a general introduction to the show for the American journal, *Art News*, and titled his essay “Sailing from Byzantium.” The framing and context of Byzantine art in a journal generally devoted to contemporary art says much about how Byzantine culture was then being regarded. For example, from Rice’s lead article, the reader sails or turns to the next by Allan Kaprow on “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock.”<sup>124</sup> By implication, Byzantine art is relevant to modern art and to the contemporary interest in abstraction.

Clement Greenberg made the association explicit in his essay, “Byzantine Parallels,” also published in 1958. According to Greenberg, modernist painting reversed the conventions of “sculptural naturalism” and created “pictorial space that would invoke no sense other than that of sight.” Once before at the end of antiquity, art had undergone a similar transformation. Both Byzantine and cubist art disrupted tradition and affected a shift from the tactile to the optical. Greenberg sees further parallels between Byzantine art and the painting of the abstract expressionists, such as Jackson Pollock. Each produces an “anti-illusionist, or rather counter-illusionist, art.”<sup>125</sup>

At this point, we are nearing a notion of Byzantine art that was evoked in 1963 by Cyril Mango in a major article, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder.” Written by a relatively young, although even then, highly accomplished scholar, the article studied how the Byzantines responded to ancient art and to their own art, including the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia. Like Yeats, who liked to put major poems in the middle of his books, Mango hid an intriguing paradox in the center of his study:

Our own appreciation of Byzantine art stems largely from the fact that this art is not naturalistic; yet the Byzantines themselves, judging by their extant statements, regarded it as being highly naturalistic and as being directly in the tradition of Phidias, Apelles, and Zeuxis.<sup>126</sup>

Mango's contrast of the past and the present was productive and has influenced subsequent scholarship. The latter part of this chapter has suggested a poetic/textual context in the 1950s and 1960s for what he terms "our own appreciation of Byzantine art," its lack of naturalism. For Yeats, von Simson, and others, this abstraction of Byzantine art was wholly positive. Although the old binary oppositions still held—Byzantium versus the West, abstract versus natural—the valences have reversed. Young, old, male, female, professor, poet, painter, composer—all joined the quest for, the voyage to Byzantium. And for them, Hagia Sophia's dome, that "artifice of eternity," still "disdains all that man is, all mere complexities."

To make that claim takes a great poet. To successfully implant it in the imaginations of many, when the building was enmeshed in religious and political conflict and subjected to archaeological surgery, requires language and imagery that would transcend the mundane and appeal to the many. It was Yeats's enduring accomplishment that he made Byzantium personal as well as symbolic and thereby powerful. A few years after Yeats wrote his poems, others would make Hagia Sophia available to new publics, especially non-Muslims, and the poetic would become real. The building would become an official monument and museum, its gilded mosaics would be uncovered, and once again there would be "sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall" (pl. 1). To these developments we now turn.

## CHAPTER SIX NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 1: 197–98.

<sup>2</sup> D. J. Gordon, *W. B. Yeats: Images of a Poet* (Manchester, 1961), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York, 1970), 7, 347; Edward Engelberg, *The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats's Aesthetic*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C., 1988), 68–92.

<sup>4</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 197–98.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer Schapiro, “On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art,” in his *Romanesque Art* (New York, 1977), 1–27.

<sup>6</sup> See the learned article of Gerard Brett, “The Automata in the Byzantine ‘Throne of Solomon,’” *Speculum* 29 (1954): 477–87. A more recent consideration of the role of mechanical devices in Byzantium is James Trilling, “Daedalus and the Nightingale: Art and Technology in the Myth of the Byzantine Court,” in Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, D.C., 1997), 217–30. The best general investigation of Yeats’s Byzantine sources is the chapter by D. J. Gordon and Ian Fletcher, “Byzantium,” in Gordon, *W. B. Yeats: Images of a Poet*, 81–90.

<sup>7</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 604.

<sup>8</sup> Allan Wade, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1954), 701–2.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Finneran et al., *Letters to W. B. Yeats* (New York, 1977), 1: 126. In 1901, Maclagan had published a book of poems, *Leaves in the Road* (London, 1901) and in 1904 edited William Blake’s *Jerusalem*.

<sup>10</sup> References in A. Norman Jeffares, *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford, 1984), 215–16.

<sup>11</sup> *Yeats’s Ghosts: The Secret Life of W. B. Yeats* (New York, 1999), 218.

<sup>12</sup> Edward O’Shea, *A Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats’s Library* (New York, 1985), (New York, 1985), 71.

<sup>13</sup> O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1911), 494–576.

<sup>14</sup> As noted by Joost Daalder, “Some Possible Sources for Yeats’s ‘Sailing to Byzantium’: A Reconsideration,” *Yeats Eliot Review* 9 (1987), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon and Fletcher, in Gordon, *W. B. Yeats: Images of a Poet*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*, s.v. “McGuinness, Norah”; S. B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism, 1880–1950* (Belfast, 1991), 53–55. On her early designs, see Marianne Hartigan, “The Commercial Design Career of Norah McGuinness,” *Irish Arts Review* 3, no. 3 (1985): 23–25, but there is little said about the Yeats project.

<sup>17</sup> Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus, and Michael J. Sidnell, *The Secret Rose: Stories by W.B. Yeats. A Variorum Edition* (London, 1981), 279. My account of the production of this edition depends upon theirs, pp. 278–86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 272–78, fig. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 10; Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 210, fig. 125. According to O’Shea (*Descriptive Catalog*, 71–71), Yeats’s copy of the latter has paper slips at pages 212–13 and 404–5.

<sup>21</sup> An excellent color reproduction is in David Buckton, ed., *The Treasury of San Marco Venice* (Milan, 1984), 172–73.

<sup>22</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 451; Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 444–64. As Giorgio Melchiori noted, Yeats referred to Byzantine art once in an early story: *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1960), 214, 221. On his general reading about early Islam, see S. B. Bushrui, “Yeats’s Arabic Interests,” in A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross, *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats, 1865–1939* (New York, 1965), 280–314.

<sup>23</sup> George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood, eds., *A Critical Edition of Yeats’s A Vision (1925)* (London, 1978), vii, xli.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>25</sup> As Helen Hennessy Vendler puts it, Byzantium is the “magic place; A.D. 500, the magic date of intersection” between the classical and Christian eras: *Yeats’s Vision and the Later Plays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 62.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the discussion of the career of the classicist E. R. Dodds in this period by Robert B. Todd, “A Note on Wayne J. Hankey’s Review of Blank, Sextus Empiricus, Against the Grammarians. (BMCR 99.10.33),” in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (BMCR 99.11.19) at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr>.

<sup>27</sup> Did Yeats mean to write that he wished to be in Constantinople “a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and [a little after he had] closed the Academy of Plato”?

<sup>28</sup> Harper and Hood, *A Vision (1925)*, 190–91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>30</sup> Herbert J. Levine, “Yeats’s Ruskinian Byzantium,” *Yeats Annual* 2 (1983): 25–34; Peter Faulkner, *William Morris and W. B. Yeats* (Dublin, 1962).

<sup>31</sup> See O’Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 95, 266, 267.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats’s Poetry in the Making* (Oxford, 1963), 97.

<sup>33</sup> The details of the Italian trip are reported in Joseph Hone, who met Yeats then in Rome: *W. B. Yeats, 1865–1939*, 2d ed. (Toronto, 1967), 367–68.

<sup>34</sup> Harper and Hood, *A Vision (1925)*, 192, “Notes,” 54.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffares, *New Commentary*, 250; Keith Alldritt, *W. B. Yeats: The Man and the Milieu* (New York, 1997), 297–99.

<sup>36</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 87–136. The manuscript versions of the poems are also discussed in Curtis Bradford, “Yeats’s Byzantium Poems: A Study of Their Development,” in John Unterecker, ed., *Yeats: A Collection of Critical*

*Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 93–130. Stallworthy's first encounter as a young man with Yeats's manuscripts and his widow is described in the delightful memoir, *Singing School: The Making of a Poet* (London, 1998), 214–29.

<sup>37</sup> R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, *The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914* (New York, 1998), xxvi.

<sup>38</sup> Bloom, *Yeats*, 347–48.

<sup>39</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 218. Elie Faure, *History of Art*, vol. 1, *Ancient Art*, trans. Walter Pach (New York, 1921), 2. The relief of Leda and the swan is in the National Museum of Athens, according to a recent edition of Faure's book: *Historie de l'art*, vol. 1, *L'art antique* (Paris, 1985), 40. The latter has a useful preface about Faure (9–21). On the poem, see Ian Fletcher, "'Leda and the Swan' as Iconic Poem," *Yeats Annual* 1 (1982): 82–113.

<sup>41</sup> Faure, *History of Art*, 1: xxxviii–xxxix.

<sup>42</sup> Roger Fry, "An Appreciation of the Swenigorodskoi Enamels," *Burlington Magazine* 21 (1912): 290–94. The enamels and Fry's response are discussed in Green, *Art Made Modern*, 142–43. By the time of Faure's book, the enamels had passed from the collection of J. Pierpont Morgan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their accessibility there and ease of reproduction probably explains their appearance in the general book that Yeats owned. There is no evidence that he consulted an old issue of the *Burlington Magazine*, although later he did acquire Fry's *Vision and Design* (London, 1928): O'Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Faure, *History of Art*, 2: 206–7.

<sup>44</sup> This print with the picturesque staffage group of pigeons in the foreground bears negative number 901 on copies in the collections of the Getty Research Institute, De Gigord Collections, boxes 56 and 85, and the Middle Eastern Library, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>45</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 4: 264–65.

<sup>46</sup> O'Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 105.

<sup>47</sup> See page 102 above.

<sup>48</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 4: 264.

<sup>49</sup> These and the above lines are found in Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 96.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–98; Jeffares, *New Commentary*, 213; Gwendolen Murphy, *The Modern Poet* (London, 1938), 153.

<sup>51</sup> D. J. Gordon and Ian Fletcher argue that when Yeats went to Ravenna he was more interested in Renaissance art. The guide book that he brought along had little

to say about Byzantine art. See their essay, “Byzantium,” in Gordon, *W. B. Yeats: Images of a Poet*, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 98.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (New Brunswick, 1986), 153.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Baedeker, *Southern Italy and Sicily*, 16th rev. ed. (Leipzig, 1912), 309; O’Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 9–10. It is tempting to think that Yeats and his wife used the Baedeker to plan their entire trip. Concerning the climate, the guide advises (xi) that “the rainy winter months had better be devoted to Rome,” where they went in February.

<sup>56</sup> Baedeker, *Southern Italy and Sicily*, 309, 314; Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 406, 410.

<sup>57</sup> Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (London, 1949), pl. 45.

<sup>58</sup> William Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Princeton, 1997), 29–37, figs. 6, 9, 23, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 99.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>61</sup> William Gordon Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*, vol. 1 (London, 1905), 37.

<sup>62</sup> Yeats mentions this tower and its stairs in the notes at the end of *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (London, 1933): Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 607.

<sup>63</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 94–95, 103.

<sup>64</sup> Holmes, *Age of Justinian*, 1: 55. As O’Shea notes (*Descriptive Catalog*, 128–29), the discussion of “Constantinople in the Sixth Century” in Yeats’s copy has numerous marginal notations.

<sup>65</sup> Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 391–92.

<sup>66</sup> Mario Praz (*The Romantic Agony*, 2d ed. [New York, 1970], 397) discusses how Diehl supplied the “necessary historical erudition” for the literary movement known as Decadence during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. An example of Diehl’s association with that movement is the work of Paul Adam, an author of eroticized historical fiction. He dedicated to Diehl his *Irène et les eunuques* (Paris, 1907).

<sup>67</sup> Charles Diehl in J. B. Bury, ed., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, rev. and corr. ed., vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1927), 752–53.

<sup>68</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 105.

- <sup>69</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 220–21.
- <sup>70</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 96–97.
- <sup>71</sup> William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald, *W. B. Yeats Autobiographies* (New York, 1999), 69, cited in Ernest Schanzer, "Sailing to Byzantium, Keats, and Andersen," in Richard J. Finneran, ed., *The Byzantine Poems* (Columbus, Ohio, 1970), 62.
- <sup>72</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 607.
- <sup>73</sup> Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London, 1961), 2. I thank Stephen Marcus for directing me to this book.
- <sup>74</sup> W. B. Yeats, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," in his *Essays* (London, 1924), 116. The continual importance of Shelley to Yeats's work throughout his career is the theme of Bloom, *Yeats*, and George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley* (Chicago, 1970).
- <sup>75</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York, 1979), 258.
- <sup>76</sup> Ursula Bridge, ed., *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901–1937* (London, 1953), 162.
- <sup>77</sup> Daniel Albright, *The Myth against Myth: A Study of Yeats's Imagination in Old Age* (London, 1972), 57.
- <sup>78</sup> Vendler, *Yeats's Vision and Later Plays*, 114; A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1977), 330.
- <sup>79</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 115.
- <sup>80</sup> First noted in A. Norman Jeffares, "The Byzantine Poems of W. B. Yeats," *Review of English Studies* 22 (1946): 52.
- <sup>81</sup> Brian Arkins, "A New Source for Yeats' Poem 'Byzantium,'" *Byzantion* 57 (1987): 172–73.
- <sup>82</sup> Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 123.
- <sup>83</sup> Holmes, *Age of Justinian*, 1: 110; Jeffares, *A New Commentary*, 295. In early Byzantium, semantra were more likely to be heard than bells. See *ODB*, s.v. "bell."
- <sup>84</sup> Harper and Hood, *A Vision* (1925), 192; and their commentary, 54. Yeats also titles a poem "Wisdom" in which the word has the standard religious referent of Christ: Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 223.
- <sup>85</sup> Shelley, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," in his *Essays*, 108–9, 111–13.
- <sup>86</sup> Yeats's letter to Moore on October 4, 1930: Bridge, *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore*, 164.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 164, 177. Moore also designed the cover for *The Tower* and other books by Yeats, as illustrated in *ibid.*, pp. 23, 27, 29, 37, 125.
- <sup>88</sup> Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 254.

<sup>89</sup> Reprinted in Jeffares, *Yeats: The Critical Heritage*, 289.

<sup>90</sup> Frank Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley, 1968), 106.

<sup>91</sup> The pavement is usually associated with the Forum of Constantine, the first great public space in Constantinople, when processing up the city's main street from Hagia Sophia. It is discussed briefly in Holmes (1: 69), a page that Yeats annotated: O'Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 129. See Jeffares, *New Commentary*, 298. Comparing source with end result shows how much Yeats invented. He surely would have been impressed by the diverse images of the Great Palace mosaics, which were discovered by a British team a few years after Yeats composed this poem: *The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors* (Oxford, 1947).

<sup>92</sup> George Bornstein put it nicely: "Historically, [the speaker] stands in his ideal city; aesthetically, within an art work; eschatologically, in eternity; and psychologically, inside a perceiving mind." See his *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (Chicago, 1976), 82.

<sup>93</sup> On the latter, see the important book of M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

<sup>94</sup> From a letter to Edmund Dulac put at the beginning of "*Winding Stair*" and *Other Poems*. Finneran, *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 1: 607.

<sup>95</sup> A. G. Stock in Finneran, *The Byzantine Poems*, 138.

<sup>96</sup> One important figure here is the well-traveled and well-connected Robert Byron, the author of *The Station, Athos: Treasures and Men* (New York, 1928), idem, *The Byzantine Achievement: An Historical Perspective, A.D. 330–1453* (New York, 1929); and with David Talbot Rice, *The Birth of Western Painting* (New York, 1931). Recently on Byron, see David Roessel, *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination* (New York, 2002), 238–41. As the latter notes, Sacherverell Sitwell remarked that "all serious minded undergraduates from Oxford and Cambridge" go to Mount Athos the way their grandfathers visited Rome and Florence: *Roumanian Journey* (1938; reprint, New York, 1992), 93.

<sup>97</sup> Edward Mendelson, ed., *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems* (New York, 1976), 197.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Ousterhout and Nezih Bağelen, *Monuments of Unaging Intellect: Historic Postcards of Byzantine Istanbul* (Istanbul, 1995); Robert Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium* (Princeton, 1999), 5.

<sup>99</sup> Available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/>.

<sup>100</sup> For example, Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, 1982), v;

John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* (New York, 1989), 29. The historian of Byzantine art Kurt Weitzmann quotes the entire poem at the beginning of his memoirs and makes the poem the basis for the book's cover and a metaphor for his life: *Sailing with Byzantium from Europe to America*. Osbert Lancaster titled a guidebook *Sailing to Byzantium: An Architectural Companion* (London, 1969).

<sup>101</sup> Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), 4.

<sup>102</sup> In a similar fashion, the scholar of ancient through modern Greek poetry C. A. Trypanis used a bit of "Byzantium" for the epigraph and title to a book of his own poetry, *The Cocks of Hades* (London, 1958).

<sup>103</sup> Ernest Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford, 1957) vii–ix. On Barker, see the *Dictionary of National Biography, 1951–1960* (New York, 1971), 62–64.

<sup>104</sup> For example, John Cheever, *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* (New York, 1982), 5; Saul Bellow, "Ravelstein," *New Yorker* 75, no. 32 (Nov. 1, 1999), 99. I owe these references to Margaret Olin and Steven Marcus. "Sailing" is discussed in Wayne Booth, *The Art of Growing Older: Writers on Living and Aging* (New York, 1992), 30, 153–55.

<sup>105</sup> *W. B. Yeats Byzantium: Paintings by David Finn* (Redding Ridge, Connecticut, 1983), 8.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> From the review by John Rockwell in the *New York Times*, April 17, 1991.

<sup>108</sup> Similar comments are to be found in Tippet's autobiography, *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London, 1991), 274.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London, 1995), 75.

<sup>110</sup> James Merrill, *Selected Poems 1946–1985* (New York, 1995), 92–93.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 101.

<sup>112</sup> James Merrill, *A Different Person: A Memoir* (New York, 1993), 234–35. I owe this reference to the kindness of Mr. Hugh Stevens.

<sup>113</sup> Dan Wakefield, "Sailing to Byzantium: Yeats and the Young Mind," *Nation* (June 23, 1956), 531–32.

<sup>114</sup> Stallworthy, *Singing School*, v.

<sup>115</sup> David Saint John, *Where the Angels Come Toward Us: Selected Essays, Reviews and Interviews* (Fredonia, New York, 1995), 83. Schnackenberg's poems are collected and republished in *Supernatural Love: Poems, 1976–1992* (New York, 2000).

<sup>116</sup> William Logan, *Reputation of the Tongue: On Poets and Poetry* (Gainesville, 1999), 84.

<sup>117</sup> *Supernatural Love*, 138–39, 142–43, 266. There is excellent and largely positive review of *Gilded Lapse* by Rosanna Warren in the *New Republic*, September 13, 1993, 37–41. Dorothy Barresi sees the potential of the work but has little sympathy for the style of language or the historical references: “Seeing Divine,” *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 18–19 (1993–94): 297–306.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>120</sup> David Ricks, “Simpering Byzantines, Grecian Goldsmiths *et al.*: Some Appearances of Byzantium in English Poetry,” in Cormack and Jeffreys, *Looking Glass*, 225.

<sup>121</sup> For example, Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London, 1948); A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet* (London, 1949); Thomas Rice Henn, *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1950); Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (New York, 1954); Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1960); Helen Hennessy Vendler, *Yeats’s “Vision” and the Later Plays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963); and Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York, 1970).

<sup>122</sup> Teteriatnikov, *Mosaics*, fig. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Otto von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Chicago, 1948), vii–ix. Von Simson’s reading of the art of Ravenna through Yeats’s poems has been popularized and presented to general readers in Sara Cornell, *Art: A History of Changing Style* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1983), 54.

<sup>124</sup> D. Talbot Rice, “Sailing from Byzantium,” and Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *ArtNews* 57, no. 6 (October 1958): 20–26, 53–57.

<sup>125</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Byzantine Parallels,” in his *Art and Culture* (Boston, 1961), 167–70.

<sup>126</sup> Cyril Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 65. I have discussed the both sides of this paradox in “To Say and to See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium,” in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (New York, 2000), 143–68.