

Lapis Lazuli Summary

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Summary

Stanza 1 - Fear of Destruction and the Immortality of Art: In the opening stanza, Yeats portrays the panic of the modern world, where “hysterical women” complain that poets and artists speak only of joy while the world stands on the brink of destruction. They warn that “Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,” symbolizing the threat of war and devastation. Yet, Yeats contrasts this fear with his faith in the immortality of art. He believes that no matter how many wars or calamities occur, poetry, music, and art will never perish — for art is the eternal expression of the human soul.

Stanza 2 - Joy Within Tragedy: In the second stanza, Yeats uses the example of tragic drama to express his vision of joy transcending sorrow. On stage, characters like Hamlet or King Lear suffer deeply, yet within their pain lies “gaiety transfiguring all that dread.” Even when “the great stage curtain” is about to fall, true artists or noble souls do not weep — they accept tragedy with dignity and grace. Yeats suggests that the essence of art transforms human suffering into beauty, and tragedy becomes a symbol of inner joy and enlightenment.

Stanza 3 - Fall and Rebirth of Civilisations: Here, Yeats reflects on history and the endless cycle of destruction and renewal. He observes that “Old civilisations [were] put to the sword,” and that masterpieces like those of Callimachus vanished with time. Yet, humanity always rises again. As Yeats writes, “All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay.” This captures the indomitable creative spirit of mankind — the joy and courage to rebuild even after total ruin.

Stanza 4 - The Symbol of the Lapis Lazuli and the Chinese Figures: In the fourth stanza, Yeats describes a carved Lapis Lazuli stone depicting three Chinese men climbing a mountain, one carrying a musical instrument. This image represents the calm, eternal spirit of art. “Every discolouration of the stone” seems like the marks of nature — snow, streams, and flowering branches — symbolizing the balance of life and beauty. The serene figures, carved in stone, reflect an unshaken joy that transcends all worldly sorrow and change.

Stanza 5 - Wisdom, Serenity, and the Eternal Smile of Art: In the final stanza, Yeats envisions the Chinese sages sitting atop the mountain, gazing peacefully upon the tragic world

below. One plays music while the others listen — their eyes full of wisdom and calm. The poet ends with the memorable line, “Their ancient, glittering eyes are gay.” This symbolizes the serene joy of true artists and thinkers who, even in the face of destruction, remain undisturbed. They understand that suffering is a part of the eternal cycle of life — and through that awareness, they discover beauty, harmony, and everlasting joy.

LxNotes