

Sailing to Byzantium Literary Devices

Writer: William Butler Yeats | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Figures of Speech

- **Metaphor:** The old man is compared to a torn coat on a stick. It shows that he is weak and useless. This is not a real coat—it's a metaphor for an old body.
- **Personification:** The soul is given human actions like clapping and singing. But souls don't really do this. So, this is personification.
- **Imagery:** The poet uses visual imagery to show a golden bird made by art. We can picture the bright, shining bird in our minds.
- **Symbols:**
 - **Byzantium:** Byzantium is an old, holy city. It is a symbol of the spiritual world, art, and eternity. The poet wants to go there to escape death and become eternal.
 - **The Sailing (Journey):** The journey to Byzantium means a journey of the soul. It is not real sailing. It is a symbol of leaving the body and going to a world of art and spirit.
 - **The Golden Bird:** The golden bird is made by art. It is a symbol of immortality and perfect beauty. It does not die or grow old. It sings forever in the holy city.
 - **The Aged Man:** The old man is weak and useless. He is a symbol of mortal life and decay. His body is like a torn coat on a stick.
 - **The Holy Fire:** The holy fire in Byzantium means spiritual wisdom. It burns away the body and gives pure life to the soul.