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## The Journey of Life and Immortality: A Comparative Study of Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"

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### Abstract

This paper studies two famous poems: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842) and W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928). Though written in different times, both poems deal with old age, the desire for meaning, and the human search for immortality. Tennyson presents Ulysses as a symbol of courage and adventure, while Yeats uses Byzantium as a symbol of art and eternal spirit. This comparative study shows how literature expresses universal human feelings across time and culture. Both poems explore aging, death, and immortality from different perspectives. Ulysses represents the individual's resilience and traditional heroic spirit, while Yeats imagines timeless art through symbolism. Together, they reveal how poetry gives meaning to human struggles and the search for purpose in life's final stage.

**Keywords:** Ulysses, Sailing to Byzantium, immortality, individual, perspective, symbolism

### Introduction:

Poetry helps us think about life, death, deep emotions, human experiences. It reveals truth that often go unspoken, unrealed. Old age is something all human face, and poets often asked: How should we grow old? Can we leave something behind the lasts forever? Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" and W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" are two poems with these questions. Tennyson's "Ulysses" tells the story of the Greek hero after his long journey to home. He is old but he does not want to live quietly or stay idle. He wants adventure, excitement, and purpose until the end of his life. Yeat's "Sailing to Byzantium" speaks from the non who feels separated perspective of old man who feels separated from the world of young people. He seeks immortality, not through action, but throughs art, spirit a and eternal Beauty. From both of poems were written almost hundred years apart, they share similar concerns. Both exploring ageing, death and the human desire to find meaning beyond simple, easy & ordinary life.

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However, they approach these ideas, differently, Ulysses looks outward for actions while Yeats looks inward towards the eternal and artistic. In this article, I will explain these poems in simple words, show how they are similar, their differences and why both remain meaningful for readers from that day to today. I will also include some lines from each poem to make the connection clear.

## Background of the poets and the poems:

### J. Alfred Lord Tennyson and Ulysses-

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was a famous poet of the Victorian age. He wrote many things like grief, courage, duty and human struggles. When his close friend Arthur Hallam died, Tennyson felt very sad. Out of this grief, he wrote many poems, including he says:

“How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!”

This shows that Ulysses does not want to stop, living or sitting idle. Even in old age he wants to keep exploring, learning and doing new things. At the end, he calls his sailors to join him on a final journey and says: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

These lines show that life is meaningful when we continue to act and explore even when death is near.

### W.B. Yeats and Sailing to Byzantium:

J. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was a famous Irish poet and Nobel prize winner. In his later years, he often wrote about old age, age, art and spirituality. Sailing to Byzantium was written when he was in his sixties.

#### The Poem begins with:

“That is no country for old men.”

Here Yeats says that the world is for young. People, Love & pleasure is not for the old. The old man feels left out and weak. He compares himself to:

“A Tattered coat upon a stick.”

But Yeats does not stop at despair. Instead, he imagines sailing to Byzantium, a city of eternal art and wisdom. These lines symbolizing the frailty, decay and insignificance of the physical body in old age comparable to a neglected scarecrow. There he wishes to leave his body behind and become part of something eternal, like a golden bird. The bird will sing forever and symbol of immortality art and spirit.

Through this, Yeats shows that even though the body grows weak, the soul and art can last forever. His poem teaches that meaning can be found not in action also in imagination, spirit and beauty.

#### Theme in Both Poems

##### Aging and Human spirit:

Both poems focus on old age. Ulysses is old but still strong in spirit. He does not want to stop living or leading. Yeats speaks also feels old and weak, but he does not try to fight time physically. Instead, he turns toward art and the eternal.

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In both poems, aging is not a reason to stop. It becomes a reason to search for meaning. Both poets show that the human spirit does not die even when the body grows weak.

## **Death and Immortality:**

Death is a key idea in both poems. Ulysses knows death will come, but he wants to live meaningfully until the end. Yeats also know that the body will die, but he hopes to gain Immortality through art.

Beth seeks to rise above ordinary life. Ulysses through action and adventures. Yeats through art and spiritual transformation. Both show the human wish to leave a mark that lasts beyond life.

## **The journey as a symbol:**

In Ulysses, The Sea voyage represents adventure, courage and the search for new challenges. In Sailing to Byzantium, the journeys more symbolic- It represent moving from timeless, temporary, mortal world to a timeless, eternal one.

In both poems the journey shows the desire to go beyond limits, whether they are like physical seas or spiritual like the world of art.

## **Inclusion of Poems lines for Similarity:**

Both poems include lines that shows their similar Ideas about old age and striving for something beyond life:

Ulysses Says “How dull It is to pause, to make an end  
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!”

Yeats says “An aged man is but a paltry thing, A tatted coat upon a stick.”

Both lines shows that old age is a challenge, not the end of life. Each poet refuses to accept weakness as a reason to stop striving for meaning.

## **Form and Style**

Tennyson wrote “Ulysses as a dramatic monologue. This means the poem is Ulysses speaking directly to others (and to himself also). It is full of energy and Strong verbs that show action.

Yeats wrote “Sailing to Byzantium as a lyrical poem. The speaker reflects on life and imagines the spiritual journey. The style is calm, reflective and filled with symbols.

The difference in style shows the difference in approach. Ulysses moves outward towards action. Yeats moves inward towards thought and imagination.

## **Complexion and Analysis**

### **Similarities**

Each poem deals with ageing, death and search for meaning.

Both use a journey as a symbol for moving beyond ordinary life.

Both rejects positivity and encourage striving in their own ways.

### **Differences**

Ulysses looks outwards towards action and adventure.

Yeats looks inwards towards art and immortality.

Ulysses finds immortality in heroic deeds and memory.

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Yeats find immortality in art and spiritual transformations.

Both poems are meaningful and show human resilience in facing old age.

### Personal Reflection:

Reading both poems together shows two ways of responding to old age. Sometime we feel like Ulysses- we want to keep exploring and living fully. We want to learn, all experiences, adventures and face all challenges. Other time, we feel like Yeats- we want to find peace and lasting meaning through art or ideas. We want to be mortal with the help of art not by physically action. Both choices of human are valuable. They show that life does not end with old age. Both poets encourage us to think about how we can live fully either through action or with the help spirit.

### Conclusion

Tennyson's Ulysses and Yeats Sailing to Byzantium age, both deal with old age, death and this search for meaning. Ulysses shows courage, action and adventure. "To strive to seek, to find, and not to yield!" Yeats shows art, spirit and Immortality: A tattered coat upon a stick.... or to come." Both poems remind us that life continues to have value in old age. We may choose action like Ulysses or seek art and spirit like Yeats. Either way, both poems teach us that human being always look for purpose and meaning, no matter how old they grow.

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