

HOW TO ANALYSE A POEM?

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**BA English Part II, Paper 1
(British Poetry)**

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THE EXTRACT

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,

... ..

To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
what is past, or passing, or to come.

Of

THE QUESTION

- In your question paper you will be asked to explain a given extract in the reference to the context section.
 - As the poem will be only from within your syllabus, you will know the name of the poet and the title of the poem. That's a definite advantage.
 - Once you know the name of the poet, you also know the age of the poem.
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THE CONTEXT

Take the extract given above as an example extract. It's from William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium".

Let's not begin with "These lines have been taken from... by the poet..." as it's the most hackneyed and boring beginning possible.

I recommend that you give different beginnings to different RtoC's of yours, e.g.

"'Sailing to Byzantium' is a milestone poem of the Nobel Laureate W. B. Yeats. The present extract is the last stanza of that poem..."

THE CONTEXT CONTINUED

- You may write a sentence or two about the age of the poem, e.g.
“This poem is the result of the happy marriage between Yeats’s symbolism and the Modernist world weariness.”
- You may mention when the poem was first published etc.
- Link the extract with the other parts of the poem, e.g. “This is the last of four stanzas of the poem.”

THE EXPLANATION

- Remember that explanation is not paraphrase.
- Try not to use words directly from the poem, but also try not to convert the verse into prose line after line.
- You may begin explaining this extract thus:
“The soul, that is the speaker here, expresses its wish in these lines.”

EXPLANATION CONTINUED

- Yeats has taken the image of his “Emperor” from *Kathopanishad* . He had translated ten principal *upanishads* earlier in collaboration with Purohit Swami.
- He brings the medieval Byzantium from the West and melds the myth of the East with it. He does that in his other poems too.
- Mention all that in the explanation.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

- The final paragraph or two, of course, should comment critically upon various aspects of the poem/extract.
- Write about the following:
- the form of the poem (*ottava rima stanzas* in this example),
- its rhyme scheme (*abababcc*),
- the meter (*iambic feet* in majority)

CRITICAL COMMENTS

- Write about the rhetorical tropes used in the extract (alliteration, symbolism etc.)
- Comment upon the musical quality and the pattern of use of specific sounds, e.g. **repetition of plosive consonants here** (so many /g/ sounds in the first few lines and /p/ in the last line).
- Don't forget to mention another poet/poem the extract invokes, e.g. **Blake's "Hear the voice of the bard" here.**