

# The Resurrection of the Dead Language: Roth's *The Dying Animal* as a Pastiche of W.B. Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*

Ifrah Khan\*, Muhammad Afzal Faheem\*\*, Asrar Hassan\*\*\*

\* MPhil student at Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

\*\* Lecturer at Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

\*\*\* MPhil student at Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Abstract-** Philip Roth's novel *The Dying Animal* revives the dead language, a pastiche of W.B. Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium*; it draws on Yeats' peculiar stylistic imaginary museum. Roth's work operates on the same principle as Yeats' artistic poetry, a quest for a meaningful, artistic, and spiritual identity. This research intends to examine Postmodern Pastiche, a literary concept coined by Fredric Jameson, classified as the random cannibalization of all prior styles, the play of stylistic allusion by emulating the original, and the tendency to breathe new life into ancient and classical works. Jameson asserts that the purpose of Pastiche is to glamorize past writings to give them new life. Roth emulates Yeats' idiosyncratic stylistic technique in depicting his protagonist as a great admirer of art, a true devotee of the female body; cherishing and praising it as a classical embodiment of creative artistry. Through confrontation with nature, examining it as a source of ideas, motifs, and myths, Yeats demystifies his interior state of the 'postmodern self' to create art. Roth's narrative aims to invigorate the old monadic subject of mortality and revive the love for art, stressed by the dead poets, as the only consolation for mortal beings that promises immortality. Roth is resuscitating the oral history, the resurrection of the dead or silenced language, by associating the breast as a symbol of Eros and Thanatos in *The Dying Animal*; he is taking a retrospective dimension to constitute—what Jameson calls multitudinous photographic simulacrum—of Yeats' ideals.

**Index Terms-** Pastiche, Cannibalization, Libidinal historicism, Simulacrum, Asian Stereotypes.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most celebrated writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Roth is particularly interested in sexuality and Jewish identity in America. Roth vigorously attempts to break free from the shackles of religion, culture, and community points to the confusion and anxieties in society. The profound personal nature, the philosophical and formal blending of fact and fiction, sensual, creative language, and thought-provoking explorations of American identity are all characteristic of Philip Roth's literary works, which are frequently situated in his birthplace of Newark, New Jersey. With the 1959 novella

*Goodbye Columbus*, he first came to public attention; the collection of the same name won the American National Book Award for Fiction. He became one of his generation's most honored American authors. He twice won the National Book Award, once from the National Book Critics Circle, and three times the PEN/Faulkner Award for his novels. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his 1997 book *American Pastoral*, one of his most well-known novels. He is immersed in his writing and creates influential art by stepping out of the threshold of traditional values and admires art as a true artist. Intertextual in nature, *The Dying Animal* adheres to multitudinous photographic depictions from Yeats's work.

*The Dying Animal* depicts the narrative of senior cultural studies professor David Kepesh, well-known for his literary radio program. David's vacillation between emotional commitment and physical pleasure eventually destroys him: "He who forms a tie is lost, attachment is my enemy" (Roth 100). Kepesh is enthralled with his young student Consuela Castillo. A romantic connection develops between the two; Kepesh gets obsessed with his lover's breasts, an obsession explored in the preceding novels. Despite his fierce commitment to Consuela, the sexually adventurous professor is having an affair with a previously divorced lover. He is also hesitant to expose himself to the criticism or humiliation that may result from meeting Consuela's family. It is hinted that he is afraid that such a meeting will disclose their relationship's intimacy. Finally, Kepesh restricts their ties to the physical rather than entering into a marital arrangement. Consuela never finds another boyfriend who can show her the same degree of attention to her body as Kepesh. She wants him to take naked photos of her after years of estrangement since she will lose one of her breasts during a lifesaving mastectomy. Consuela sends Kepesh a postcard displaying *Le grand nu* in the novel, and Kepesh determines that the woman in the picture is her dual image.

This research deploys Postmodern Pastiche as a theoretical framework to explore *The Dying Animal's* conflicting themes of Eros and Thanatos. Jameson discusses two features of postmodernism: Pastiche and a crisis of historicity. As an artistic composition juxtaposing several creative creations, Pastiche has superseded parody, which is

just a copy of an original work. According to Jameson, postmodernism sought to unite diverse elements into a cohesive whole. The use of Pastiche provides additional power to postmodern literature's festive experimentation. Pastiche means to blend or paste together several ideas. Thus, Pastiche depicts postmodern society's fragmented, heterogeneous, or detailed features. "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (Jameson 17). Pastiche is a modification of past styles to bring new light to oral history.

Although pastiche usually alludes to blending multiple genres, the work may also contain aspects like metafiction and temporal distortion. In *The Dying Animal*, Roth includes elements from songs, references to popular culture, a combination of obscure, fictional history, and real-world contemporary and historical personalities: Kafka and Byron. Pastiche incorporates numerous genres to create a unique plot or to remark on postmodern settings. It is a creative reproduction of another piece of art, such as literature, music, theatre, architecture, or intertextuality, in which one artist exploits another work's central concept to produce an independent career. Roth incorporates Amedeo Modigliani's sculptor and Pablo Picasso's artistic ideas to intermingle within cross-disciplinary work ethics. Pastiche can also mash up several sources, creating a jumble of distinct works. It celebrates original work from which the creator acquires or employs different components. Pastiche may also generate a variation within a work by taking elements from an existing work of art and developing new or hybrid genres in some circumstances. Furthermore, it may also benefit emerging authors, artists, or filmmakers by offering inspiration for their work's style or point of view. Pastiche is a mixture of diverse components, a hotchpotch or jumble. It is a style that is a light-hearted imitation of another's style that, unlike a parody, is respectful. Star Wars is believed to be a pastiche of conventional science fiction television and radio episodes. Tarantino's films are also frequently seen as pastiche due to their mingling of many genres and generic conventions. According to Fredric Jameson, Pastiche is a reproduction of old styles from the past because of their inspirational qualities.

Philip Roth constructs a linguistic mask of Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium*. *The Dying Animal* is a pastiche of Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*. Roth endows the present reality in *The Dying Animal* to reach the glossy mirage of the stereotypical past. He uncovers the impeccable ability of writers to transform their work into art. He is deeply motivated by artistic notions that are beyond time. Roth has taken Yeats' lead in constructing the characters and the novel's plot. His work operates on the same level as Yeats' spiritual quest for art, immortality, and freedom.

Roth aspires to bring the libidinal historiography to light by portraying David Kepesh's sexual adventures. The idea of art as a stylistic innovation is embodied by both Yeats

and Roth. Art consoles the pain of the dying mortal; it transcends the characteristics of the worldly abode of the soul and promises mortality and everlasting beauty. David Kepesh praises the female body as an epitome of art. He cherishes the lasting euphoria that sex offers him. The fear of death is mitigated by coming closer to art, the female body; "Now, I'm very vulnerable to female beauty, as you know. Everybody's defenseless against something, and that's it for me. I see it, and it blinds me to everything else" (Roth 2). Similarly, Yeats' speaker takes solace in Byzantium mosaic art; he wishes to turn into a golden bird that sings forever. Byzantium symbolically represents the ideal, glorious, and enlightened existence. It refers to a distant foreign culture where religion takes on an exotic appearance and art is practiced for its purpose. The 'I' in the poem intends to be freed from the mortal body; old age is described as "An aged man is but a paltry thing" (Yeats line 9). In the same way, Roth explicates sex as an act of freedom and, thus, an artistic expression. He claims sex to be the revenge for mortality. Death puts a stop to space; however, the ecstasy of sex is beyond time. Consuela's youthful and full-of-life sexual adventures engulf David into spellbinding eternity. The euphoria of her beauty renders her no more than a classical piece of art. She is carved delicately, encapsulating alluring ecstasy "As though she were herself a Picasso" (Roth 37). The prospect of her limitless future welcomes David into her world of possibilities that set him free from the trap of mortality.

Roth has been captivated by Yeats' numerous attempts to withdraw into aesthetic apathy. In his later poems, Roth was significantly influenced by Yeats' incorporation of this conflict between life and art into a poetics of visceral suffering. Yeats serves as a critical touchstone for the wild recklessness and magnificent style of Roth's major work *Sabbath's Theater*, as well as helping to set the emphasis on *The Dying Animal*. *Sailing to Byzantium* presents the same desire of an older man to be set free from the mortal body and take abode in a spiritual land where limits no longer shackle him. It is a poem about Yeats' fascination with seeking ideal spirituality in art and life. He had worn various masks over his career as a romantic, occultist, politician, and dramatist. Still, only through poetry, he tried to transcend the death and decay of the natural world. The symbolic visit to Byzantium, his ideal city, reinforced this desire. The speaker aspires to be out of nature, an immortal being, a sculpted piece of art. This poem is Yeats' creative response to the dilemma of mortality—flesh and blood are merely a cover for the immortal spirit. Byzantium, for Yeats, was the location where the soul might rest and ensure an eternal legacy.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In his book, *Defective Inspectors: Crime-fiction Pastiche in Late Twentieth-century French Literature* (2006), Simon Kemp implements pastiche to pay homage to traditional roman noir. In France, crime literature is a favorite topic for literary pastiche. From the nouveau roman and the Oulipo group to the contemporary avant-garde, writers have used the genre to their advantage, experimenting with its

traditional storylines and characters and exploring its preoccupations with perception, reason, and truth. Simon Kemp's examination in the first full-length study of the phenomena focuses on four significant twentieth-century writers: Alain Robbe Grillet (b. 1922), Michel Butor (b. 1926), Georges Perec (1936-82), and Jean Echenoz (b. 1947). Kemp elucidates the intricate relationship between the pasticheur and his target through their diverse interactions with the genre, from the deconstruction of the traditional detective narrative to tribute to the roman noir, which requires a new appraisal of pastiche as a literary form.

Velichka Ivanova's article: "My Own Foe from the Other Gender: (Mis)representing Women in The Dying Animal" has demonstrated that the depiction of women in Philip Roth's novels must be viewed through the lens of his core obsession with masculinity. *The Dying Animal* (2001), the third novel based on the character-narrator David Kepesh, is regarded as an example of how male gender norms are both constructed and opposed in the essay. Roth's supposedly misogynist depictions of women are entirely the outcome of his fictional approach. By exploring the conflict of the masculine self to maintain its wholeness in the face of a feminine other, Roth exposes the (mis)representation of women.

Peter Mathews claims that reviewers and critics of *The Dying Animal* have seen it as a work of prosaic pornography accusing Roth of making a pale simulacrum of his unsettling explorations of human sexuality: "The Pornography of Destruction: Performing Annihilation in The Dying Animal". In contrast, this article contends that *The Dying Animal* is Roth's study of an existential "pornography of destruction," which both contains and surpasses the sphere of the sexual in its obsession with seeing its own death.

Zoe Roth presents desire as death's revenge for the aging hedonistic David Kepesh in Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal*: "Against Representation: Death, Desire, and Art in Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal*". Due to his artistic desires, he is ready to face death. However, art's mimesis cannot protect us from the unavoidable realities of life and death. Consuela's revelation of mortality in Kepesh is immersed in a formal creative process that questions the truthfulness of portrayal and reconsiders art's mediation of death and desire experience.

### III. REORIENTATION OF ARTISTIC PREHISTORY; YEAT'S STYLISTIC ALLUSION IN *THE DYING ANIMAL*

Roth simulates Yeats' idiosyncratic linguistic style to incorporate the glossy mirage of past styles in his present work as a reorientation of prehistory. Following Yeats' ideals in *Sailing to Byzantium*, Roth presents Consuela Castillo as a wonder of art from Cuba; Cuba is an island nation with a long tradition of artistic creativity. Similarly, the gold mosaics of Byzantium inspire Yeats, "And therefore I have sailed the seas and come /To the holy city of Byzantium" (Yeats lines 15-16).

Yeats' vision of Utopia is Byzantium; likewise, David's appreciation of a Cuban girl points out Roth's inclination towards Cuba. Cuba is depicted as a hub of creative art. Consuela being a part of Cuba encapsulates everlasting artistic beauty. Cuban art of the nineteenth century was reminiscent of European classic painting forms. "There must be a Duchess looking like you on the walls of Prado. Do you know the famous painting by Velazquez, *The Maids of Honor*?" (Roth 14). Consuela is defined as a classical beauty. Yeats dwells on the struggle of keeping one's spirit alive in a frail, dying human body. The speaker, an older man, abandons his homeland for a mystical journey to Byzantium. He aspires to discover how to transcend his mortality and become an everlasting work of art there. The figurative visit to his ideal city of Byzantium solidified this desire. The speaker aspires to transcend nature and take on the form of an everlasting being, an artistic creation. He rejoices in the liberation of the soul from the mortal body and the greatness achieved by it afterward, through reincarnation, but only this time into a changeless embodiment of art. The magnificence of Byzantine artifacts bedazzles him and welcomes him to be among the spiritual beings, allowing their blessings to bestow everlasting beauty; only there may his soul achieve its grandeur. Similarly, David's feverish desire to conquer Consuela's body and soul ends in his submission and subjugation in front of the incredible artistic creation "I had pronounced her a great work of art, with all the magical influence of a great work of art" (Roth 37). Mere consolation of a dying mortal being is indestructible art; the magnificence of artistic creation can beat the terror of death and offers comfort and solace.

In *The dying Animal*, Philip Roth reincarnates the mesmerizing aesthetic mode to reach the glossy mirage of classical writer Yeats. He is amused by Yeats's motivation and enormous appreciation of creativity and art. He has nurtured his idea of breaking free from the existence of flesh and blood and transcending to eternal beauty where he can live forever. Roth's protagonist David Kepesh has encountered all the worldly beauties unless Consuela, an accurate depiction and the epitome of beauty, comes to his life, and he remains spellbound by her magical beauty. David worships her body as the classical piece of art, a divine creation that comes to rescue him from decay and death. "I can't sleep. The experience of her is too strong. I sit up in bed in the middle of the night I cry out, 'Consuela Castillo, leave me alone!'" (Roth 39). It is a journey toward enlightenment where David visions heaven on earth in the form of Consuela. David's metaphorical journey of enlightenment is similar to Yeats' spiritual journey to Byzantium, in which he will live forever and escape the decay of the natural world.

Yeats' exaggerated appreciation of art provides the backbone of Roth's work. Amedeo Modigliani's trademark art wonder "Le Grand Nu" is imprinted as the book's cover, providing artistic glimpses that prevail throughout the novel. Amedeo Modigliani, a controversial artist, refused to adapt his work to modern notions of how to present the human body. His nude art is blamed for being obscene and profane. However, Roth believes that artists can turn obscene material

into a purely aesthetic art form. The striking similitude between Consuela and the nude aspires to pay homage to the artist's capability to defy age and death and thus create spirituality and immutability that aligns with Yeats' approach to living in art. Yeats is awe-inspired by the sublimity of Byzantine monuments of art, "Monuments of its own magnificence" (Yeats line 14) which he desires to turn into. At that time, mosaic artists aimed to produce idealized and perhaps exaggerated representations of what resided inside a person's soul rather than focusing on creating the most accurate pictures possible. It represents the journey from mortal bodies to immortal embodiments of art. Yeats perceives gold as a timeless matter that does not lose its luster. He wishes to come out of the physical abode that could not contain the soul's true potential, whereas art can bestow everlasting permanence.

The vital reorientation of joyous intensities dominates *The Dying Animal*; a photographic enlargement of *Sailing to Byzantium*. The joy of the soul is a momentous feeling of freedom and attainment in Yeats' poem, Roth explicates a similar idea in the form of sexual fulfillment as the joy of the soul. Yeats describes the power of singing of the soul, through which he believes he can create something that will survive physical death. He believes that the soul's singing can be achieved through the art of joy, which makes the soul lively "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" (Yeats lines 17-20). He refers to the golden mechanical birds that sang at the emperor's palace in Byzantium. Once he is "Out of nature," Yeats wishes to be reborn as one of these birds to break the cycle of birth and reincarnation. His singing reflects his job as a poet. He starts his journey and calls the sages of Byzantium to make him aware of the singing of the soul. His spiritual journey is to attain eternal life in some divine and abstract pattern. David is equally indulged in the quest for the art of joy; his search is rewarded when he confronts artistic wonder in the form of Consuela, an accurate illustration of Modigliani's nude art, lying on a grave to comfort David's fear of mortality.

In *Sailing to Byzantium* and *The Dying Animal*, music is the unifying force for the sensual and intellectual world. He takes music as artistic expression and thus wants to learn the singing of the soul. Likewise, David plays piano and is interested in music; he plays music while performing sexual activities. Sex and David relate to menstruating Consuela as Mantegna's Saint Sebastian: "Worship me, she says, worship the mystery of the bleeding goddess, and you do it. You stop at nothing. You lick it. You consume it. You digest it. She penetrates you" (Roth 99). He worships her in the rawest form. He encompasses her wholeness within him, watching her bleed, licking her, savoring the most detestable thing even for Consuela. He embraced Consuela as the figure of his greatest desires. Music and sex are heightened forms of joy for him.

#### IV. THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD LANGUAGE AND CANNIBALIZATION OF YEAT'S IDEALS

Roth resurrects the dead monadic language in *The Dying Animal* to illuminate the themes of decay and death by cannibalizing Yeats' propositions in *Sailing to Byzantium*. The poignancy of old age limits all entitlements of self-command, and the ruthlessness of time is dawned that leaves a person restless and troubled. Roth's depiction of old age in *The Dying Animal* resembles Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*. Escaping from the happy memories of old age symbolizes the cruelty of time; pursuing Yeats' idea, Roth presents a similar vision of the frailty and mortality of the human body as we grow: "But the end? It is, interestingly, the first time in life that you stand entirely outside while you're in it. Observing one's decay all the while (if one is as fortunate as I am), one has, by virtue of one's continuing vitality, a considerable distance from one's decay—even feels oneself jauntily independent of it" (Roth 35). Old age is called death in *Sailing to Byzantium*, a final stage reminiscent of youth's splendors: "An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick, unless" (Yeats lines 9-10). Yeats aspires to start the metaphorical journey to escape the death lurking around in the form of old age. Old age, which is both a force and a peril, robs of the charms of hedonistic physicality and the dignity of the body to find eternal existence.

In *The Dying Animal*, sexual fulfillment—a primordial aspect of youth is a canonical expression of the classical thematics of old age. It is addressed in *Sailing to Byzantium*: "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" (Yeats lines 1- 5). The speaker in the poem misses out on all the joys and excitement of youthful days. On the other hand, David remains worried about his and Consuela's relationship; he does not want her to miss out on life, as time is limited for him. His aging organs do not complement his evergreen passion. The speaker of the poem and David long for the elixir of youth, some magic potion that assures immortality so they would not have to face loss through death until they start the metaphorical journey toward a metaphysical destination. Yeats' interest in Byzantium as a spiritual and aesthetic ideal intensified as he grew older. His aging body caused him some physical and sexual frustration, concomitantly, giving him means of escape and expression.

#### V. LIBIDINAL HISTORICISM IN THE DYING ANIMAL: A SIMULACRUM OF YEATS' IDEALS

Art is the language of simulacra that endows an understanding of the metaphysical realities. Roth stresses artistic notions as tools to transform libidinal desires into a cohesive pattern; a simulacrum to render a link between the metaphysical and material world. The themes of desire and death are explored in Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal* and Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*. The main characters of these

tales are acutely aware that death is imminent. The protagonist, David Kepesh, undoubtedly views sexual activity as a refuge against death on some subconscious level. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, the speaker is troubled by his old age; he conquers his worries related to aging and dying. In spite of immersing himself in creativity and art, he is terrified to be reborn again in any human form; he wishes to be a mechanical bird, an immortal piece of art: "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 enameling" (Yeats lines 25-28).

In *The Dying Animal*, Philip Roth simulates Yeats' peculiar style to create an ideological mirage—a simulacrum of Yeats' ideals. The old man in the *Sailing to Byzantium* still has the sensual desire, which intensifies his predicament: "Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal" (Yeats lines 22-23). Though he is away from the youthful joys of sensuality, he intends to enjoy the soul's liberation. He desires to cherish the taste of freedom that allows him to go beyond time and space. Similarly, David yearns for young Consuela; however, his age does not allow him to confine her; he remains unsatiated. Yeats takes refuge in a metaphorical destination to feel youthful; likewise, David takes refuge in Consuela's youthful beauty to live forever within her to escape the terror of death. David expresses in these words: "Through a Consuela, you can delude yourself into thinking that you have a last shot at your youth" (Roth 34). Consuela is a ray of hope for aging Kepesh. Sexually gratified through carnal encounter(s) with Consuela, David is overwhelmed by the desire to break free from mortal hindrances and be frozen in time, so, he can cherish the everlasting beauty in the form of art. Roth imitates the dead style of Yeats' classical ideals to create stylistic innovation.

In *The Dying Animal* and *Sailing to Byzantium*, the protagonists crave freedom; their sense of belonging is entirely misplaced. David does not want to hold ties anywhere, nor does he want to belong to any place; the obsession with belonging to Consuela is like a disease cured by having sex with Carolyn. "If it weren't for the calming influence of Carolyn and our wonderful nights together, I don't know what would have happened to me" (Roth 92). Sex is the only thing that liberates him from mortal boundaries. His desire for sex turned into artistic longings; he adores the female body like a rare artifact or a piece of art only an artist can praise. He visions himself as Gaston Lachaise, a French sculptor of female nudes. Sex is more than a sensual experience for David; he is engrossed in the moment of sexual pleasure, "Sex isn't just friction and shallow fun. Sex is also the revenge on death" (Roth 69). The everlasting effects of sex are not just limited to physical pleasure; for David, it is an expression of freedom. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, the speaker wishes to liberate himself from his aging old self. He relates his old body to "A tattered coat upon a stick" (Yeats line 10). His freedom lies in immortality: "It knows not what it is; and

gather me / Into the artifice of eternity" (Yeats lines 23-24)—longing for the spiritual transcendence of the soul by overcoming the temptations of physicality.

In *Sailing to Byzantium* and *The Dying Animal*, the protagonist(s) is/are oppressed by the haunting poignancy of their age. Roth refers to the pornography of one's destruction, which refers to the suffering that David Kepesh unavoidably endures. His Obsession with Consuela's breasts, once the source of desire, turns into a symbol of mortality. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, the speaker of the poem chooses art as a pathway to immortality. He makes a confession of his spiritual desolation, physical sickness, and world-weariness: "Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal" (Yeats lines 21-22). In order to overcome the spirit of a dying animal, the speaker wants to move past the limits of his mortal body, by turning into a piece of art: "My bodily form from any natural thing / But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enameling" (Yeats lines 26-28).

## VI. CONCLUSION

*The Dying Animal's* skillfully constructed narrative reveals a vivid embodiment of the postmodernist principle of pastiche by resurrecting the dead language: cannibalizing Yeats' idiosyncratic artistic style. Roth takes a retrospective dimension of pastiche as an approach to artistic musings—in accordance with the strict delineation of Jameson's principles. David's obsession with the female body in *The Dying Animal* creates a parallel to the speaker's passion for Byzantine gold mosaics in *Sailing to Byzantium*. There are photographic similarities between both works of art. In addition, each work embodies a true inspiration for the art—the language of the simulacrum. As a pastiche of the stereotypical past, Roth foregrounds the object of David's longing—the female body—as a piece of art that reaffirms his carnal desires against the overwhelming fear of death. While David surrenders himself to the inevitability of his fate as a dying animal, the speaker of *Sailing to Byzantium* aspires to transcend senescence by embracing the permanence of art over the impermanence of libidinal passion

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## Authors

**First Author** – Ifrah Khan, MPhil (student) in English Literature, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Second Author** – Muhammad Afzal Faheem, Lecturer at Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Third Author** – Asrar Hassan, MPhil (student) in English Literature, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Correspondence Author** – Muhammad Afzal Faheem, Lecturer at Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.