

Literary Analysis

SYMBOL

A **symbol** is a person, place, object, or activity that represents something beyond itself. Symbols in Yeats’s poetry often connect to central ideas about life, death, and rebirth. For example, in line 4 of “Sailing to Byzantium,” the speaker refers to “salmon-falls” and “mackerel-crowded seas.” In these images, water is a symbol of abundance and fertility.

Directions: Complete this chart to identify and explain key symbols in each poem. One symbol for each poem is provided for your analysis. After explaining what each symbol represents, find and analyze two more symbols in each poem.

Title of Poem	Symbol	Explanation
“Sailing to Byzantium”	“fish, flesh, or fowl” (line 5)	
“The Second Coming”	falcon and falconer (line 2)	
“When You Are Old”	grey hair (line 1)	