

## THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

W.B.YEATS( last romantic and the first modernist)

1. W.B.Yeats :( 13<sup>th</sup> June 1865-28<sup>th</sup> January 1939) : Irish poet, dramatist and prose writer, helped to found the Abbey Theatre. Was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival. He was a protestant. Was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

Together with Lady Gregory, Martyn, J.M.Synge, Sean O' Casey, Yeats was also responsible for the establishment of IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL.

Was in love with Maud Gonne. She was an ardent Irish nationalist. Yeats Proposed her thrice, but was rejected partly due to his reluctance to participate in her nationalist activism. To his utter dismay in 1903 she married the Irish nationalist Major John McBride. In 1908 in Paris Yeats and Maud Gonne consummated their relationship.

Yeats' only other love affair was with Olivia Shakespeare.

The poem was written around 1916 and 1917. It was published in 1917.

2. Setting of the poem: The poem is set near a lake in the woods in Coole Park in County Galway from Ireland.

3. Rhyme scheme: ABCBDD

4.The poet sees 59 swans in the water of Coole Lake. The poet saw the swans in his real life when he went for a walk to the lake at Augusta Gregory's Coole Park residence.

5. How does Yeats portray the beauty of autumn?

Ans: In the poem 'The Wild Swans at Coole' Yeats presents a somber beauty of the autumnal landscape where the trees are bare, the woodland paths are dry and the lake full of water to the brim reflects the still sky above and is graced by the elegant presence of nine and fifty swans.

6. "The trees are in their autumn beauty"- The somber beauty of nature aptly relates the poet's own condition- the kind of stasis he has reached in the twilight phase of his life.

7. "The woodlands paths are dry."- The dry paths suggests the dryness of emotion the poet is experiencing because of being burdened by age and experience.

8. "Under the October twilight... mirrors a still sky."- The sky is still because it is not agitated by winds. The water of the lake reflects the still sky. In fact, the stillness of the sky suggests the kind of stasis the poet has reached in the twilight phase of his life.

9. There are 59 swans altogether. The odd one swan other than the rest 58 paired swans is no other than Yeats himself. In his own personal life Yeats was jilted by Maud Gonne and in the twilight phase of his life when he is burdened by both age and experience, he feels all the more forlorn.

10. "The nineteenth autumn has come upon me."- The time span speaks of the intervening years between Yeats' first(1897) and second visit(1916) to Coole park in County Galway. These years, he feels, are almost an assault to his body and spirit. (The poet paid his first visit when he was 32 years old.)

11. "All suddenly mount...clamorous wings."- during his first visit to the lake, the poet tried to make a count of the swans there but in vain because they all suddenly mounted in the air in circular shape

resembling the shape of a ring. And as they started flying, the beating of their wings against the wind produced a loud clamorous sound. Notice they can fly all on a sudden and this suggests that they are characterized by free will and unbounded freedom in sharp contrast to mankind as represented by the poet himself.

12. "I have looked upon those brilliant creatures..."

Here the swans in lake are called brilliant creatures. They are called brilliant apparently because of their white gleaming feathers. Metaphorically they have been called so because 'age cannot wither them, nor can custom stale their infinite variety of beauty.' They symbolize the eternal passions of life.

13. "...and now my heart is sore"

The poet W.B. Yeats feels a soring sensation in his heart of hearts because of his-

- i) loss of his joyous buoyant spirit during the intervening 19 years. Age and experience have withered him in body and spirit and the swans remind him so.
- ii) Love-lorn heart for Maud Gonne.
- iii) Bitter experiences of World War-I and the Irish War of Independence as well.
- iv) Decaying relationship with Rabindranath Tagore between this time.

14. "all is changed"-

The changes in the context of the poem refer to the loss of his joyous buoyant spirit. Both age and experience have withered him in body and spirit and the swans remind him so. Metaphorically it may also denote the changes in his attitude due to – i) the betrayal of his lady love ii) the bitter experiences of the Irish freedom , iii) the violence of Easter Rising, and finally iv) the change of his belief in art for art's sake.

15. "...the bell beat of their above my head/ trod with lighter tread."

The sight of the swans during the poet's second visit to the lake at Coole 19 years after reminds the poet the bygone days of his youth when he was literally lighter. As he was not burdened by age and experience, he had the joyous buoyant spirit then and, as such, could trod with lighter tread.

16. "Unwearied still lover by lover...companionable streams."- Yeats here speaks of the swans. They are unwearied because they are untamable by time. They are lovely, lively and passionate. Theirs is an evergreen joyous buoyant spirit. So why they enjoy bliss of love irrespective of time and clime.

17. "Their hearts have not grown old."- Speaks of the swans. Their hearts do not grow old because they are untamable by time. They are lovely, lively and passionate. Theirs is an evergreen joyous buoyant spirit because they are being and becoming.

18. Passion or conquest...attend upon them still."- the swans are wild characterized by free will and are untamable by the onslaughts of time. They are just being and becoming. So passion or conquest attend them wherever they go.

19. "Mysterious beautiful."- the swans are physically beautiful because of their white gleaming feathers. However, they seem mysterious to the poet because age cannot wither them. Theirs is an evergreen joyous buoyant spirit. Passion or conquest always accompany them.

20. "Among what rushes will they build...to find they have flown away." - The swans are at Coole now. As they characterize free will and are untamable by time and space and are free from the world of human doubt and uncertainty, there is every possibility they would build nest somewhere else. Makes the poet remember his own lack of free will, limitations and mortality by contrast.[Contrast between mankind and nature]

21. The swans are called wild because they characterize free will and are untamable by time and space and are free from the world of human doubt and uncertainty.

22. The swans symbolize eternal youth and passion. In the second sense they stand for life force. Again in another sense they stand for the union of time and timelessness.

23. Type of the poem: elegy/lyric.

Compiled by Dr.A Rahman.