



The Wild Swans at Coole

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The title poem, “THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE,” contains the most important themes of the collection and is one of the landmark poems of modern poetry. The speaker stands contemplating the wild swans that float on the water at the country estate of Lady Gregory, Yeats’s patron. They cause him to reflect on the years that have passed and the changes in himself since he first saw these swans, seemingly the same ones, nineteen years before.

The speaker’s reverie suggests attitudes about death and eternity and the possibility of immortality. The poem is essentially romantic, with a distinctly modern obliqueness, in its treatment of these themes, and in the movement between external nature and the inner longings of the poet.

Many of the poems of this collection were written during the time of World War I, a period of great personal as well as international turmoil. One of the personal tragedies of Yeats’s life was the death of the brilliant Major Robert Gregory, the only son of his patron and a symbol for Yeats of a kind of enlightened aristocracy which he felt was crucial to Ireland’s future.

Yeats wrote a number of powerful poems on Robert Gregory’s death, genuinely lamenting him and, at the same time, using the occasion to meditate on death in general.

The transition to Yeats’s important later poetry begins in this book with the introduction of poems based on his theories of the mask, cones, gyres, phases of the moon, and so on--as later detailed in his book, *A VISION* (1925). Yeats infuses personal aspects of his private life, such as the restored tower which he seeks to make his home, with great symbolic and universal meaning in a foreshadowing of his later efforts to wed the temporal and transcendent worlds in a unified whole.

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