

Degree 1 English (mb 50 marks)

Section – Poetry

The Wild Swans at Coole by W B Yeats

The Wild Swans at Coole is a bleak mournful poem, composed by a great poet of Modern Age W B Yeats. It is a poem of remembrance of the past. In which the speaker returns to a lake in Ireland (the Coole of the title) that he first visited 19 years ago. Here, he observes a group of swans, just he had years before. But instead of boring him joy, the swans' beauty and vitality now fill the speaker with bittersweet feeling. This is because the unwearied swans seem to have stayed the same – still filled with passion, mystery and brilliance while the speaker's own life has been changed irreversibly by the onward passage of time.

The poem is essentially a tale of two moments: the memory of the speaker's first visit to Coole, and the present day in which he finds himself there again though its not clear if has visited in between those two moments, the poem is able to explore the way the relentless passage of time has affected the speaker, diminishing his lust for life and making him weary.

The poem begins by signalling that the speaker feels himself to be in the autumn of his life. The general setting establishes a sense of

transition, one which echoes the way that the speaker feels that, ultimately his hopes and dreams – later phrased as passion or conquest- have passed by him. Looking at the numerous elegant swans on the lake, the speaker starts to draw a distinction between the time when he first saw them 19 autumns ago and the present moment. He clearly admires the swans, calling them brilliant. Everything is changed since he first stood on the shore at Coole. The swans’ brilliance is kind of constant – true then and true now- which contrast with the way that the speaker feels himself to have changed over the years. Back then, the speaker walked with a lighter tread, now his age and life experiences make him metaphorically heavier and slower. This of course, juxtaposes with the ever – present grace of the swans, which again appears the same now to the speaker as it was back then.

To that end, the swans ‘way of being reminds the speaker of how he himself used to be. This is drawn out by the way the poem describes the differences between the swans and the speaker in the present time, implying that he used to have more of the traits he continues to perceives in the birds. Whereas the swans are unwearied still and hearts have not grown cold, the speaker can no longer say the same of himself. The poem implies that he has grown weary, and his heart has grown cold.

The poem *The Wild Swans at Coole* shows an individual struggling to come to terms with the path that life has taken. Ultimately, this speaks to the way that life runs an irreversible course- people can't go back or change the way that things have turned out. The speaker holds on to happier memories, but these are tinged by the sadness that they are fated never to become real experiences again.

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