

## Detailed analysis of The Wild Swans at the Coole by William Butler Yeats

### Stanza One

The trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
The trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

'The Wild Swans at Coole' opens up with the description of beautiful woodland in the autumn. One can imagine the gorgeous colors of the leaves before they fall, and see the twilight reflecting off the water, where there are fifty-nine swans swimming. It is interesting that the speaker has been focused on the swans enough to count all fifty-nine of them. He is clearly intently studying them. The way the speaker describes the beauty has a calming effect on the readers. This place, called Coole, is a place

to be quiet and serene. The scenery itself demands it. Readers can picture themselves there, in this beautiful place, watching the swans.

### Stanza Two

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me  
Since I first made my count;  
I saw, before I had well finished,  
All suddenly mount  
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
Upon their clamorous wings.

With this stanza of 'The Wild Swans at Coole,' the tone shifts to one of melancholy remembrance. The speaker says that it has been nineteen years since his first visit to Coole when he first counted the swans on the lake. It is not clear whether the speaker is saying that he has been coming to that place for nineteen years, or whether it has been nineteen years since he started keeping track of his time there, or whether it has been nineteen years since he started counting the swans. Whatever the case, the speaker makes it clear that he has been to this place every fall for many years. Before the

speaker even finishes counting these swans, they take off suddenly. He describes their departure as one of “wheeling in great broken rings”. They appear “clamorous” to him as they take off in a flutter.

### Stanza Three

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore.  
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
Trode with a lighter tread.

Here, the speaker turns his thoughts inward. After watching the “brilliant creatures” he admits that his “heart is sore”. The reason for his aching heart is that everything has changed so much since he first watched those swans take flight nineteen years earlier. It appears in ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ that when he first saw the swans, they did not make his heart sore. Something has changed over the years so that the sight of these swans now brings sadness to his heart. Perhaps it because there seems to be such a sharp contrast between the swans and

himself. While he is tied down to earth where there are many cares and worries, they are free to fly, worry-free into the sky. The sight of the swans brings him back to the days when he “trode with a lighter tread”. Perhaps he is remembering when he was younger and quite literally lighter, or perhaps he is remembering days when he did not live under such heavy burdens and could walk with a spring in his step. Whatever days he is remembering, he reveals that “all’s changed since” those days.

#### Stanza Four

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
They paddle in the cold  
Companionable streams or climb the air;  
Their hearts have not grown old;  
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still.

In this stanza of ‘The Wild Swans at Coole,’ the speaker contrasts the swans with himself. He has changed so much, and the swans have not changed at all. They are “unwearied still” and still paddle next to the very same lover. He says that “their hearts

have not grown old”. Neither has their passion faded. They are still free to “wander where they will.” Again, he implies the contrast between the swans and himself. While they have not grown old, he has. The awareness of how much he has changed brings sadness to his heart. The speaker also continues to contrast the swans with himself. He notes that the swans swim in pairs, each having its own companion. The speaker contrasts this with his own lonely heart.

### Stanza Five

But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful;  
Among what rushes will they build,  
By what lake's edge or pool  
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
To find they have flown away?

In this stanza of 'The Wild Swans at Coole,' the speaker seems to be afraid that someday, they will simply leave him and everything will have changed. He admits that they are mysterious and beautiful creatures, and he does not know what they will do.

He doesn't know whether or not they will always be at the lake in Coole, or whether they will find another "lake's edge or pool". He doesn't know which men's eyes they will delight someday when he wakes up "to find they have flown away". Since so much has changed already in the speaker's life, the swans are a symbol of stability for they are always there and seem never to change. And yet, the speaker has a fear that one day they will take off, never to return to the lake at Coole. At that point, everything will change for the speaker.

It seems the swans are the one thing he can depend on as being the same year after year, and so he fears that one day they will leave him. He fears this change because he has already endured so much change, and the swans have been the one stable, unchanging thing in his life. Even though the swans have been there at least nineteen years, the speaker still seems to fear that they will leave. Earlier, he said that all had changed except for the swans at Coole. Perhaps he believes that they, too, will leave him, just as everything else in his life has changed. The speaker has clearly become acutely aware of his own mortality. He is aware of the way his body had

changed since he had first visited the park, and he is aware of the way his life has changed. He has more worries and cares, and probably more aches and pains associated with old age. In short, he is aware that his life has quickly passed him by, and while nature stays the same, everything else in his life has changed. He compares himself to the swans at the lake because they have not changed at all, and he has changed so much. This makes the readers also aware of their own mortality.