"ANOTHER EMBLEM THERE": THEME AND CONVENTION IN YEATS'S "COOLE PARK AND BALLYLEE, 1931"

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"Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" was completed during the last months of Lady Gregory's fatal illness in 1932. Yeats originally intended it to be an introductory piece to the Cuala Press edition of Lady Gregory's Coole, a book of personal reminiscences about the great house and its meadows, lakes, and woods, but when it was not finished in time for publication, he substituted for it his earlier Lady Gregory poem, "Coole Park, 1929." On 3 February 1932 he wrote to his wife, "I am turning the introductory verses to Lady Gregory's 'Coole' (Cuala) into a poem of some length—various sections with more or less symbolic matter. Yesterday I wrote an account of the sudden ascent of the swan—a symbol of inspiration I think." The finished poem commemorates the fall of the great ancestral house that Yeats had come "to love more than all other houses," and the impending death of its owner, who had been, as Yeats put it, "for nearly forty years my strength and my conscience." For the poet, the demise of Coole marked the end of the great tradition of the Protestant aristocracy in Ireland; after Lady Gregory's death in April, the house, which had been sold to the Forestry Department in 1927, was in fact pulled down, thus fulfilling Yeats's prophecy in "Coole Park, 1929":

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand  
When all those rooms and passages are gone,  
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound  
And saplings root among the broken stone. . .

Much has been written about the background of "Coole Park and Ballylee," but the poem itself remains a puzzle. It is one of Yeats's

4 All references to Yeats's poems are to The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York, 1957).  
5 Aside from Yeats's Autobiography, the most important sources are Lady Gregory's Coole (Dublin, 1931) and her Journals, 1916–30, ed. Lennox Robinson (New York,
most popular, most frequently anthologized and quoted works—every
discussion of the poet refers, sooner or later, to its famous lines, "We
were the last romantics—chose for theme / Traditional sanctity and
loveliness"—and yet the few critics who have read the poem as a poem
rather than as thinly veiled autobiography have concluded that its
structure is faulty. Thus, in a recent essay on The Winding Stair,
Denis Donoghue uses "Coole Park and Ballylee" as an example of
Yeats's unfortunate tendency in his later poetry "to flaunt a pose, to
strike a gesture, to cut a dash." Donoghue's case in point is the second
stanza, particularly the lines "For nature's pulled her tragic buskin
on, / And all the rant's a mirror of my mood":

Yeats, not Nature has pulled the tragic buskin on, and the rant is his own.
One has only to recall Coleridge's 'Dejection' to see that Yeats's lines are a
Romantic commonplace devoid of Coleridge's tact. Yeats is planting himself
in front of a suitably grandiose backcloth; he is worried about the decor, not
about reality and justice. And when he sees the mounting swan he says:

Another emblem there! That stormy white
But seems a concentration of the sky;

—and for the present he is more interested in self-exalting emblems than in
swans.6

For Thomas Parkinson, the poem is ultimately a failure, not be-
cause of its excessive rhetoric, but because its iconography is "arbi-
trary and compelled." If the water of Stanza I and the swan of Stanzas
II and III are both symbols of the soul, Parkinson argues, then the
last line of the poem, "Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood,"
makes no sense: "... if we examine the last line in terms of the as-
sociative web of the poem, we have the soul drifting upon the darken-
ing generated soul when the generated soul is at its highest point. . . .
Reminiscing, his [Yeats's] mind moved in one set of associations, while
his habit of symbolic design was working in another."7 The poem is
therefore "divisible": there is a split between the symbolic passages

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about water and swan in the first four stanzas and those of elegiac reminiscence in the last three.

Both Parkinson and Donoghue conclude that "Coole Park and Ballylee" is inferior to its companion piece "Coole Park, 1929," in which the central metaphor of Lady Gregory as the compass point upon which the "swallows" (the great Irish poets and cultural leaders) whirl in an emblematic pattern, a "dance-like glory," is given straightforward development; Yeats introduces no "self-exalting emblems" here and is guilty of no inconsistencies.8 Parkinson observes that Yeats himself must have been aware of the structural irresolution of "Coole Park and Ballylee," for, shortly before its original publication in *Words for Music Perhaps* (1932), he thought of appending it to "Coole Park, 1929," thus making it a mere component of a larger poem.9 The two Coole Park poems were not, however, welded into one poem; what did happen is that the original sixth stanza of "Coole Park and Ballylee" was deleted when the poem was printed in its definitive form in *The Winding Stair* of 1933. The discarded ottava rima stanza became a separate poem called "The Choice," and was printed a few pages further on in the same volume (see *Variorum*, p. 495). It is this little poem which gives us the clearest hint as to how to read "Coole Park and Ballylee":

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story's finished, what's the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

This is an unusually explicit presentation of the Yeatsian antinomies, whose conflict is dramatized in almost every poem in *The Winding Stair*, most notably in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" and in "Vacillation." Man is forced to choose between "perfection of the life or of the work," between life and art, sense and intellect, body and soul, day

8 See Donoghue, pp. 122–23; Parkinson, p. 146.
9 In an unpublished manuscript quoted by Parkinson (p. 146), Yeats writes, "The poem might perhaps make together with the lines introductory to Lady Gregory's 'Coole' a single poem. The lines from 'Coole' headed 'A flight of swallows' as dated. Stanzas I-II-III of present poem called 'The Wood' or 'Swan and Waters' stanzas IV and V called 'The House' and VI and VII called 'The Comment' or 'The High Horse' or 'The last romantics.'"
and night. In either case, the poem concludes, there is no real satisfaction: the artist's reward is "an empty purse," while the man of action is ultimately confronted by "the day's vanity, the night's remorse."

Yeats is not usually so pessimistic: in most of the Dialogues of Self and Soul in *The Winding Stair*, the tension between antinomies is resolved in favor of the triumphant Self who demands "A charter to commit the crime once more," to "live it all again." "Byzantium" is one of the few poems in the volume in which the scale tips the other way: the "moonlit dome" of the great cathedral "disdains / All that man is, / All mere complexities, / The fury and the mire of human veins," and the miraculous golden bird, "Planted on the star-lit golden bough," scorns the "Common bird or petal" of the earth. "The Choice," however, represents a rare moment for Yeats when neither alternative—Self or Soul—seems preferable and when no resolution of the antinomies seems possible.

Yeats no doubt removed the stanza from "Coole Park and Ballylee," not only because it was too explicit, too out-of-key with the meditative-descriptive mode of the poem, but, more significantly, because the "choice" had already been dramatized in terms of the experience that the poem's speaker undergoes. "Coole Park and Ballylee" is, in fact, another Dialogue of Self and Soul, a débat in the vein of Part VII of "Vacillation." But the débat convention is easily overlooked because "Coole Park" so obviously falls into another genre, that of the topographical poem, more specifically what has been called the "estate poem" or "great house poem" in which the poet compliments his patron by means of a description of his estate as an image of order, courtesy, and responsible hospitality. If one compares "Coole Park and Ballylee" to Jonson's "To Penshurst," which is the prototype of the estate poem in English, it may indeed seem "divisible" and disorganized, for the elaborate water and swan symbolism in the opening stanzas seems to have little bearing on the real subject: the celebration of the "traditional sanctity" of Coole. What Yeats does, however, is to fuse the conventions of the great house poem with those of the débat, possibly using as his model, not "To Penshurst," or Carew's "To My Friend G. N., from Wrest," or Pope's "Windsor

10 For a description of the genre, see R. A. Aubin, *Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England* (New York, 1936), especially Ch. III, "Groves of Eden." In "Yeats and the Practicing Poet" (*An Honoured Guest*, p. 6), Charles Tomlinson writes, "His [Yeats's] poems on great houses, and on their ruin, stand at the end of the line of the English country-house poem."
Forest,” but that great seventeenth-century estate poem, Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House.” The curious parallels between Marvell’s “topographical debate” and Yeats’s will be discussed later in this essay. My immediate subject, however, is the question of unity and coherence in “Coole Park and Ballylee” itself.

On 9 February 1931, shortly before he began “Coole Park and Ballylee,” Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear, “I have really finished A Vision. . . . Even my simplest poems will be the better for it. I think I have done one good deed in clearing out of the state from death to rebirth all the infinities and eternities, and picturing a state as ‘phenomenal’ as that from birth to death. I have constructed a myth” (Wade, p. 781). The opening stanza of “Coole Park and Ballylee” elliptically applies this rebirth myth to certain geographical facts about Coole River. The passage can be glossed by three prose descriptions of Coole, two by Yeats and the third by Lady Gregory. In an early essay, “‘Dust Has Closed Helen’s Eye’” (1902), Yeats describes how during a visit to Ballylee Castle, the celebrated tower that later became his home, an old man told him the romantic story of Mary Hynes, the “Handsomest girl in Ireland”: “I talked to him about a poem in Irish, Raftery, a famous poet, made about her, and how it said, ‘There is a strong cellar in Ballylee.’ He said the strong cellar was the great hole where the river sank underground, and he brought me to a deep pool, where an otter hurried away under a grey boulder, and told me that many fish came up out of the dark water at early morning ‘to taste the fresh water coming down from the hills.’”

This description of the river’s course corresponds to that found in the first half of the stanza; the second half may be read in conjunction with the following passage from the Autobiography: “Coole House, though it has lost its great park full of ancient trees, is still set in the midst of a thick wood, which spreads out behind the house in two directions, in one along the edges of a lake, which, as there is no escape for its water except a narrow subterranean passage, doubles or trebles its size in winter” (p. 260). Lady Gregory’s description of the same phenomenon is more fanciful:

Our own river that we catch a glimpse of now and then through hazel and ash . . . has ever been an idler. Its transit is as has been said of human life

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‘from a mystery through to a mystery’; suddenly appearing, as a French writer has put it, ‘dans le beau parc privé de Coole, derrière le village de Kiltartan.’ . . . Then, flowing free, it helps to form a lake whose fulness, finding no channel above ground is forced ‘de chercher sa route, par les passages souterrains de lac vers la mer’. . . . (Coole, pp. 27–28)

Lady Gregory is content to see the flowing stream as a vague symbol of “mystery,” but in “Coole Park and Ballylee” Yeats attaches a specific meaning to it. The stream that flows freely beneath the poet’s window at Thoor Ballylee, a few miles from Coole, sinks underground into the dark pool known as “Raftery’s cellar,” rises again in Coole Park as the source of a lake, and then drops “into a hole” once more. It is less important to know that line 8 is a reference to Porphyry, who believed that fountains and rivers symbolize the soul’s “generation” into the finite world of nature and matter,12 or to Heraclitus,13 than it is to recognize that the imagery of the whole stanza is based on Book III of A Vision, “The Soul in Judgment,” which expounds Yeats’s doctrine of reincarnation. In the poem there is not, of course, any doctrinaire reference to the seven distinct stages through which the soul must pass in its progress from death to rebirth (the “vision of the life just completed,” the “dreaming back” in which the Spirit must relive the events that have moved it most deeply, etc.); rather, the philosophy of A Vision is assimilated into the poetic fabric. Thus, the water which at first runs “for a mile undimmed in Heaven’s face,” but then “darkening through ‘dark’ Raftery’s ‘cellar,’” descends “underground,” symbolizes the soul, whose brief span of human happiness is followed by death. Just as the water rises again “in a

12 See Mythologies, p. 80; A Vision (New York, 1961), p. 220; and especially “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry” in Essays and Introductions (New York, 1961), pp. 82–85. In “Symbolic Landscape in Wordsworth and Yeats” (In Defense of Reading, ed. Reuben A. Brower and Richard Poirier [New York, 1962], pp. 22–37), Paul de Man draws an ingenious parallel between Raftery’s “cellar” and Porphyry’s Cave of the Nymphs, as it is described in Yeats’s essay on Shelley. He concludes that the poem expresses Yeats’s belief in the doctrine that “considers the incarnate state of the soul as a relative degradation, and looks upon death as a return to its divine origin and, consequently, as a positive act” (p. 34). This reading seems forced because the imagery in Stanza I is explicitly cyclical; it does not allude to the soul’s ultimate escape from its generated state. Moreover, de Man’s interpretation of the water symbolism puts him in the untenable position of arguing that Yeats is not mourning for Lady Gregory and Coole Park in the poem since his patroness is “associated with the decaying and misleading world of matter” (p. 35).

13 In An Honoured Guest, Denis Donoghue writes, “The racing waters which dropped into a hole suggested the death of the elements—Heraclitus again—and particularly the death of fire (the soul) in water which is therefore the generated soul” (p. 119).
rocky place / In Coole demesne," spreads "to a lake," and finally drops "into a hole," so the soul will be reborn after it has undergone the necessary purification "underground," and will go through the life-cycle once more. The "generated soul" is the soul constantly reborn into a new stage. Even line 2, "Otters below and moor-hens at the top," suggests the cyclical pattern symbolized by the water: the otters fish below the surface; the birds rise above it.

In most of the Winding Stair poems, this rebirth cycle is celebrated: in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," for example, the Self refuses the Soul's demand for deliverance from the wheel of life and is "content to follow to its source / Every event in action or in thought." Similarly, in "Vacillation," the poet deliberately seeks the cycle of corruption in generation symbolized by Samson's riddle of the lion and the honeycomb. In "Coole Park and Ballylee," however, the cyclical water imagery is dropped after the first stanza; the poem does not allude to it again. The "lake" beside which the speaker stands in Stanzas II is not a symbol of rebirth; nor is it the Coole Lake lovingly described by Lady Gregory: "And whatever terrible creatures may hide or be dreamed of in the water's depths its still surface is a mirror of much tranquil beauty" (Coole, p. 35). Yeats's lake mirrors no tranquil beauty; it reflects nothing but the poet's own despondent mood. The forest landscape, "Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun," is simply an extension of himself; the imagination cannot, for the moment, transcend selfhood. But when the "mounting swan" flies into the poet's field of vision with "sudden thunder," it rekindles his imagination which now makes a second attempt at transcendence.

The phrase "Another emblem there!" is not mere theatrical gesture, as Donoghue believes, but the speaker's way of signaling the fact that this emblem produces another, not the same, answer to the philosophical question posed in the first stanza: what is the nature and destiny of the soul? The originally projected title for Stanzas 1–3, "Swan and Waters," clearly designates the two alternatives considered by the speaker. In the course of revising the third stanza, Yeats dropped the idea of making the swan a symbol of inspiration (see the opening paragraph, above) and explicitly compares it to the soul. This soul, however, is not reborn into the world; it escapes from the wheel of life and ascends to heaven. Rising above "the glittering reaches of

14 Note that "source" is again a water image and that the image is developed in the line "So great a sweetness flows into my breast."

15 See n. 9, above.
the flooded lake,” it becomes a tiny white fleck, a piece of sky as it were, “so lovely that it sets to right / What knowledge or its lack had set awry.”

The ascent of the swan is thus comparable to the Soul’s “steep ascent” up the “winding ancient stair” to “That quarter where all thought is done” in “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”; the sky to which the swan flies corresponds to the starlit dome of “Byzantium” or to the “purity of the unclouded moon” in “Blood and the Moon.” In terms of A Vision, the swan’s flight to heaven recalls the enigmatic Thirteenth Cone, which is “that cycle which may deliver us from the twelve cycles of time and space,” which may, in other words, deliver us from our endless rotation upon the wheel of life. “Within it live all souls which have been set free”; it is the place where the antinomies are finally transcended (p. 210). At the end of “The Soul in Judgment,” Yeats calls the Thirteenth Cone his substitute for God: “All imaginable relations may arise between a man and his God. I only speak of the thirteenth cone as a sphere . . . though to Man, bound to birth and death, it can never seem so” (p. 240).

Water and swan, then, symbolize Yeats’s polarity in A Vision between the Great Wheel and the Thirteenth Cone. It is the familiar battleground between self and soul, day and night, sword and tower, mortality and immortality, the cycle of generation and the direct ascent to eternity. It is the great feat of “Coole Park and Ballylee” that the debate is fully dramatized; it is incorporated into the topographical framework so that it seems as if the poet is doing no more than fulfilling Samuel Johnson’s well-known prescription for “local poetry,” based on Denham’s “Coopers Hill”: “A species of composition . . . of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation.”

But how is the debate between water and swan, Self and Soul resolved? Does the soul undergo endless cycles of generation or does it escape from the wheel of life permanently and ascend to heaven? The turning point in the poem comes in the last two lines of Stanza III:

So arrogantly pure a child might think
It can be murdered with a spot of ink.

These lines have either been ignored by commentators or have received a rather far-fetched interpretation. T. R. Henn writes, “The
ink is perhaps related, not only to the idle gesture of a blot flung by a child, but to the scholar or writer as the potential murderer of the swan's beauty.' Similarily Donald Torchiana observes that "perhaps the spot of ink could murder the swan-blessed mind" of the poet. But the poem is not about scholarship or even about art, except indirectly; its theme is the very meaning of life itself. In an earlier draft of Stanza III, Yeats refers to the swan as "An image of the soul's uncertain flight" (Parkinson, p. 143). It is the idea of uncertainty that is suggested by lines 23-24; although the swan (soul) appears "arrogantly pure" as it ascends to heaven, its movement toward eternity is somehow "uncertain"; the white dot becomes smaller and smaller until the poet, with the sudden, spontaneous intuition of a child, imagines that the tiniest black spot in the world—a blot of ink—could destroy it completely. The passage may be glossed by Part III of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," in which the swan (an image of "the solitary soul") begins bravely enough with its "breast thrust out in pride," but similarly leaps "into the desolate heaven"—it cannot escape from the daily round.

The "spot of ink" brings the speaker sharply down to earth. The burning metaphysical question: is the soul endlessly reborn into this life or does it transcend human life and attain immortality, cannot be answered with the "fitting confidence" with which the speaker of a related poem, "At Algeciras—A Meditation Upon Death," replies. There is nothing left, therefore, but to return to the human sphere: the poet leaves the lakeside and enters Coole House where the "dry sticks" of the wood become the "stick" Lady Gregory uses for support as she "toils from chair to chair." The conventions of the estate poem dominate the next two stanzas in which Yeats describes the house and its traditions. Again, the poem corresponds to Lady Gregory's description of Coole, this time to her chapter "The Library." Describing the varied and unique collections of Coole Library, she writes, "Yet not even one inheritor, I believe, could have been so dull of eye as to fail to delight in the mere appearance of these walls of leather and vellum mellowed by passing centuries" (p. 2). Ironically, in the poem the "one inheritor" becomes Lady Gregory herself, the "last inheritor / Where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame."

If one compares Stanzas IV and V to an estate poem such as

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Jonson's "Penshurst," one notices a curious difference. Jonson praises Penshurst as a golden mean, neither pretentious nor "low," neither lavish nor niggardly. Penshurst, like Carew's Wrest or Herrick's Pemberton, symbolizes a moment of perfect poise and equilibrium; every creature from the animals to the serving maids, to the lord and lady of the manor, to King James, who pays a visit to the estate while hunting, has his or her proper place and performs it willingly. But Coole is celebrated, not as a golden mean, a symbol of natural virtue, but because it is old and venerable. Nothing is said of the "marble heads" and "pictures" but that they are, in fact, "old;" the trees are "ancestral," the gardens "rich in memory glorified." The successive owners of Coole are celebrated for their fame and stability: "A spot whereon the founders lived and died." Without such stability ("Marriages, alliances, and families"), "We shift about—all that great glory spent—/ Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent."

What does this celebration of "name and fame" have to do with swan and waters? And why does the symbolic language of the first three stanzas give way to such straightforward, abstract statements as "Great rooms where travelled men and children found / Content or joy..."? In answering these questions, it must be remembered that the speaker has found it impossible to make "the choice" between the claims of Self and Soul, water and swan. Weighed down by the knowledge of Lady Gregory's illness, the demise of her estate, and his own old age, the poet has tried to find a religious consolation, a blessedness whether "secular" or supernatural. Since the ultimate reality can be known only through symbols, the language of the first three stanzas is symbolic and elliptical. But the mood of ecstasy in which "everything we look upon is blest" will not come and so the poet must face not eternity but time. There is no suggestion in Stanzas IV and V that the glory of Coole will recur, that we must simply wait for the wheel to come round once more. Nor is there any indication that the sorrow and tragic loss of the speaker will be redeemed in another life. Rather, the view of history implicit in the passage is curiously linear: the past is past, the last inheritor is "old," the days of Coole are numbered. The speaker looks squarely at what Wallace Stevens calls "things as they are"; his language thus becomes matter-of-fact and denotative.

If we read the poem this way, the last stanza is perfectly consistent

18 Richard Ellmann, in The Identity of Yeats (New York, 1954), uses the phrase "secular blessedness" in referring to the peculiar triumph of the Self in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (p. 9).
with what has gone before. The first two lines seem puzzling at first, for it was, of course, not the Romantics who celebrated the "traditional sanctity and loveliness" of great houses, but the great seventeenth-century poets from Jonson to Pope. Richard Ellmann argues that Yeats is "writing ironically, equating the word [romantic] with all the defenders of 'traditional sanctity and loveliness', and would no doubt have said that the first romantics were Homer and Sophocles" (Identity, pp. 3–4). The reading is perfectly possible, but there is another sense in which the poet and his circle were "the last romantics": the speaker has been "romantic" enough to believe that the soul is immortal. It is this spiritual vision—this "sanctity"—that has animated his poetry; he has tried to capture "whatever most can bless / The mind of man or elevate a rhyme." Not long before writing "Coole Park and Ballylee," Yeats wrote in his journal, "I must kill skepticism in myself . . . yet because my divinity is far off I blanch and tremble." This conflict is at the heart of the poem. The phrase "But all is changed" refers not only to the fall of ancestral houses, but also to the change in the speaker's mood that has occurred in the course of the poem: unable to transcend the painful facts of existence, his imagination now views a dying civilization:

... that high horse riderless
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

Pegasus, the winged horse of poetry, is "riderless"; not even the poet himself feels, at this moment, that he can mount "in that saddle Homer rode." And because there is no transcendence, the beautiful white swan which once "mounted" and "sailed" now drifts upon a darkening flood—it moves passively toward death.

Parkinson's contention that the last line makes no sense because it depicts "the soul drifting upon the darkening generated soul," ignores the dual meaning of the water symbol in Stanza I. As the "generated soul," the water stands for both life and death. In Stanza II, the "flooded lake" is a neutral element; the poet calls it "a mirror of my mood." As that mood grows more and more somber, the "flooded lake" becomes the "darkening flood" of death—"darkening" recalls, of course, the death image in line 4: "Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar.'" The ominous "darkening flood" is a favorite Yeatsian image; one recalls the destructive "flooded stream" of "A

19 Unpublished manuscript quoted by Ellmann, Identity, pp. 239–40.
Prayer for My Daughter,” the “blood-dimmed tide” of “The Second Coming,” and the “flood” which the smithies must “break” in “Byzantium.” It is not necessary to allegorize the final image as does John Unterecker, who comments that “swans on dark waters symbolized always for Yeats the artist who, dying, sings in fading light.” We do not need to equate swan and poet; the connotations of the words themselves are suggestive enough—a world in which the swan “drifts” aimlessly upon a “darkening flood” is clearly a doomed one.

It is a convention of the estate poem to mythologize the landscape, to see the hills of Penshurst as a place where “Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made,” and its woods as the pleasure haunts of satyrs and fauns. But in “Coole Park and Ballylee,” one of Yeats's most pessimistic poems, efforts to mythologize the landscape fail. The mysterious river with its alternate flow above and below ground seems the perfect image of the reincarnated soul; the “stormy white” swan, on the other hand, “sails into the sight” like the soul ascending to heaven. The poem records the experience of a man who tries to read spiritual meanings into the landscape but fails and must accordingly come to terms with the temporal reality of human loss. The structure of the poem is circular: at the beginning, the landscape is the occasion for a debate between opposed religious views; the outcome of the debate is, in turn, the occasion for a return to that landscape, now seen through disenchanted eyes. The conventions of débat and topographical poem are admirably fused to create a poem that is perfectly consistent both in its tonal development and in the articulation of its imagery.

If “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931” does stand, as the poet Charles Tomlinson has recently observed, at the end of the line of the English country-house poem which begins with Jonson’s “To Penshurst” ((Honoured Guest, p. 2)), it has a very special relationship to one early exemplar of the form, Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House.” One cannot prove that Yeats was directly influenced by this poem since, to the best of my knowledge, his writings contain no reference to it, but surely he must have known “Appleton House,” for as early as 1907 he

20 John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York, 1959), p. 213. An unusual reading of the last stanza is that of Thomas R. Whitaker, who argues that, although the poem ends on a sad note, “winter does lead to spring, a riderless horse may be ridden, a drifting swan may mount. Even in despair the emblems cannot deny the force of life that produces a continual dialogue between Yeats and the temporal world” (Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History [Chapel Hill, 1964], p. 221).
had praised its companion poem “An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell” ("It had been easier to fight, to die even, for Charles's house with Marvell's poem in the memory"), and Margoliouth’s definitive edition of Marvell’s poems was published in 1927, four years before the writing of “Coole Park and Ballylee.” A number of parallels between Yeats and Marvell have been cited by scholars: T. R. Henn, for example, suggests that the bird symbolism in Stanza VII of “The Garden” is the source of the imagery of the last stanza of “Sailing to Byzantium”; Amy Stock believes that the furniture imagery of “Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient” is based on Marvell’s “The Gallery”; Ruth Wallerstein compares “Dialogue of Self and Soul” to Marvell’s “Dialogue between Soul and Body”; and Lawrence Hyman discerns links between Yeats’s political poems and the Cromwell ode. It is then perfectly possible that “Upon Appleton House” served as the model for “Coole Park and Ballylee.” At any rate, there are some fascinating parallels.

Both estate poems have as a backdrop the menacing shadow of civil war. In the Ireland of the 1920’s, the Civil War brought on the final destruction of the great ancestral houses of the Protestant gentry; in the England of the 1650’s, the Civil War meant, among other things, that the old rural England, the “garden of the world” as Marvell calls it, had become a thing of the past. “Upon Appleton House” was written in 1652 after Marvell had gone to Nun Appleton as the tutor of Mary, the only child of the poet’s patron, Lord Fairfax. The latter had led the victorious armies against the King but was appalled by the subsequent actions of the Parliament, and when Cromwell raised his expedition against the Scots in 1650, Fairfax resigned his command and retired to his country estate. Like Coole, then, Appleton House is regarded by the poet who memorializes it as a place of tranquil beauty and dignified leisure, threatened by the “darkening flood” beyond its gates.

A second curious parallel—although an extra-literary one—is that

21 Essays and Introductions, p. 255.

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both Coole House and Appleton House were, according to contemporary descriptions, relatively modest houses, distinguished not by their architecture or furnishings but by their magnificent setting in a heavily wooded, well-watered landscape.²⁴ It was natural, therefore, for Marvell and Yeats to celebrate the moderation, the proper use of riches of their patrons, and to contemplate the landscape rather than to characterize banquet halls and galleries.

As in the case of "Coole Park and Ballylee," most critics believe that Marvell's poem lacks unity. Pierre Legouis, for example, maintains that "Upon Appleton House" is "composite rather than composed." It "misses unity of impression..." The order in which the themes succeed one another cannot be called inevitable, even if not faulty. But Marvell sins less against order than against society. He babbles pleasantly, adds still more images, more sentiments, more descriptions, until he suddenly stops. He does not husband his inspiration; he exhausts it and only then does he end."²⁵ D. C. Allen calls "Upon Appleton House" "a sequence of dramatic poems, skilfully divided, that celebrates the 'house' in several ways" (p. 117). His own interest is in the sequence that extends from Stanza XXVI to LX, in which the description of the garden can be read as a political allegory of the Civil War. Again, Ruth Wallerstein deals almost exclusively with the Neoplatonism of the forest passage (LXI–LXXXI). The historical "digression" about Isabel Thwaites has been deprecated by almost all commentators: in their excellent anthology, Ruth White, Helen Wallerstein, and Ricardo Quintana omit the twenty-three stanzas that relate this episode.²⁶

The framework of "Upon Appleton House" is, in the words of Joseph Summers, whose Introduction to Marvell in the Laurel Poetry Series contains the best discussion of the poem, "a guided tour of the house and grounds." "The speaker introduces us to the house and describes how, in its humility, usefulness, and naturalness, it reflects its owner. While we are looking at the interior, he relates the history of the house in an episode chiefly concerning an ancestress, Isabel Thwaites. We then turn to the gardens, the meadows, the woods, and finally the river. Although the tour theoretically lasts but one day, our 'guide' describes his own characteristic actions and the scenes from

²⁴ See Hone, p. 138; Allen, p. 365.
But this seemingly casual topographical framework is merely the occasion for a debate between the claims of the active and the contemplative life, between engagement and retirement. The first ten stanzas of "Upon Appleton House" praise the place of Fairfax's retirement as a symbol of honor, modesty, and humility: the lines "Humility alone designs / Those short but admirable Lines, / By which, ungirt and unconstrain'd, / Things greater are in less contain'd," remind us of the description of Coole House in "Coole Park, 1929" as a place where great men "Found pride established in humility, / A scene well set and excellent company." The historical episode that follows is not unrelated to the retirement theme of the first part for, as Summers points out, "The nunnery is the image of corrupt and false retirement. The nun appeals to pride, vanity, 'unnatural' epicureanism, and perverse sensuality, all under the disguise of a virtuous retirement. . . . the nuns wish to consecrate the lady's estate rather than her person, and their success would 'intercept' the 'great race' which fate has ordained for an active role in England and Europe. Whatever the poem's image of the proper life, it will not be found that of the nunnery" (pp. 18–19). The true will of the founders is not fulfilled until Appleton House becomes the home of Isabel Thwaites and her Fairfax husband:

Though many a Nun there made her Vow,  
'Twas no Religious House till now. (ll. 279–80)

The third part of the poem (XXXVI–XLVI) turns from the house to the gardens. When Fairfax retired from military life, he transferred his "warlike studies" to his gardens, and "laid these Gardens out in sport / In the just Figure of a Fort; / And with five Bastions it did fence, / As aiming one for ev'ry Sense." This garden scene reminds the speaker of the prewar Edenic England in which the only wars fought involved flowers as regiments and bees as sentinels: "The Nursery of all things green / Was then the only Magazeen." In Stanzas XLIV and XLV, the speaker says, somewhat regretfully, that Fairfax could have restored England to its garden state, "had it pleased him and God"; but it did not—the former commander-in-chief preferred to "till" conscience and to "weed" ambition. The speaker tells himself that he is glad his patron has retired from the field, but in the fourth

section (XLVII–LX), images of the political turmoil outside the walls return to plague his mind. Whether or not we read this passage as an allegorical battle between King (the grasshoppers) and Parliament (the mowers), as does D. C. Allen (pp. 131–33), clearly the action in the meadow does represent some kind of warfare: the grass is an “Abyss,” to be “massacred” by the “whistling scythe,” the low-nesting rail is slain, and the flooding river of Stanza LIX all but overthrows the natural order: “Let others tell the Paradox, / How Eels now below in the Ox; / How Horses at their Tails do kick, / Turn’d as they hang to Leeches quick. . . .” This great flood, reminiscent of the “darkening flood” of “Coole Park and Ballylee,” marks the turning point of the poem.

In Stanza LXI, the speaker says:

But I, retiring from the Flood,  
Take Sanctuary in the Wood;  
And while it lasts, my self imbark  
In this yet green, yet growing Ark. . . .

The retirement to the woods is an attempt to escape from the pressures of life, very much like the attempt in “Coole Park and Ballylee” to follow the swan in its flight to heaven. The “arching boughs” of the forest form a “temple” within which the nightingale sings, charming the trees and plants. Here the poet observes the “hewel” (green woodpecker), which paradoxically murders the oak tree in the process of purging its bark from the corrupting wood-moths. The poet delights in this symbolic representation of the destruction of sin by death:

Thus I, easie Philosopher,  
Among the Birds and Trees confer:  
And little now to make me, wants  
Or of the Fowles, or of the Plants.  
Give me but Wings as they, and I  
Straight floating on the Air shall fly:  
Or turn me but, and you shall see  
I was but an inverted Tree. (LXXI)

Like the speaker in “Coole Park and Ballylee,” he longs for “wings” to escape from the temporal world; he dreams of being a tree rooted in heaven with its limbs touching the earth below. In the mystical ecstasy that follows, he longs to merge with the creatures of the forest: he begs the vines to “curl about” him, the brambles to “chain” him, and the “courteous Briars” to “nail me through” so that, like Christ
on the Cross, he may hope for release from the corruption of earthly life.

But, as he contemplates the perfection of a life spent idling beside the river bank with his feet "sliding" into the cooling waters, the vision breaks (LXXXII). Maria Fairfax, his young patroness appears walking beside the river, and what follows is an extravagant compliment to her as the source of all the beauties of nature: "'Tis She that to these Gardens gave / That wondrous Beauty which they have; / She streightness on the Woods bestows; / To Her the Meadow sweetness owes . . ." (LXXXVII). With the entrance of Maria, thoughts of a life of action return, and the poet is thinking of his own future as well as hers when he asserts that some day soon, "For some universal good," she will marry and re-enter the world. The poet knows that this world is not Eden: "'Tis not, what once it was, the World; / But a rude heap together hurl'd; / All negligently overthrown, / Gulfs, Deserts, Precipices, Stone." But the poet's retreat to Appleton House, which is "an ordered image of the disordered world which we know" (Summers, p. 25), has given him the strength to return to that world:

Your lesser World contains the same.
But in more decent Order tame;
You Heaven's Center, Nature's Lap.
And Paradise's only Map. (LXXXXVI)

As darkness gradually comes on, the speaker is not frightened; confidently, he declares, "Let's in."

Like "Coole Park and Ballylee," then, "Upon Appleton House" is a débat placed in a topographical framework, a dialogue between the speaker's Self and Soul. The Self is moved to action, to an acceptance of what Yeats calls "the fury and the mire of human veins," while the Soul longs for contemplation and wants to escape to the forest temple. In contrast to Yeats, however, Marvell finds a positive solution: as a Christian, he sees Nature as the Book of Creatures; he finds "Strange Prophecies" in the "scatter'd Sibyls Leaves" of the forest:

What Rome, Greece, Palestine, ere said
I in this light Mosaic read.
Thrice happy he who, not mistook,
Hath read in Natures mystick Book. (LXXIII)

Nature is the image of its Creator, and Maris Fairfax will be the mediator through whom the prelapsarian garden world of England will be restored. As D. C. Allen says, "Even the world, which was origi-
inally created a smooth sphere, and is now because of the Flood ‘All negligently overthrown,’ still is preserved by divine wisdom’ (p. 153).

Both Marvell and Yeats, then, read meanings into the landscape and use the Great House that they celebrate as an occasion for philosophical debate. Formally, the two poems are very much alike; certainly, “Coole Park and Ballylee” is closer to “Upon Appleton House” than to the more logically organized estate poems of Jonson, Carew, Herrick, or Pope. The difference between them can be measured by comparing Yeats’s lake to Marvell’s river. In Stanza LXXX of “Upon Appleton House,” Marvell describes the meandering river as “a Chrystal Mirrour slick; / Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt / If they be in it or without.” The river mirrors all; it is the microcosm in which the sun is reflected. The natural world is a symbol of the divine order. For Yeats, however, “all that rant’s a mirror of my mood”; the lake reflects only his own emotions—it is not “Nature’s mystick Book.” At Lady Gregory’s estate, as Yeats says in “Coole Park, 1929,” “great works” have been created “in nature’s spite”; those who come to pay their respects to the memory of her “laurreled head” must turn their backs upon “the brightness of the sun / And all the sensuality of the shade.” The “dark hemisphere” does not dismay the speaker of “Upon Appleton House,” but the “darkening flood” upon which Yeats’s swan “drifts” is ominous. In “Coole Park and Ballylee,” Yeats’s speaker learns that when he temporarily loses faith in the claims of Self and Soul, in both the wheel of life and the straight line to heaven, his “high horse” is indeed “riderless.” In 1934, Yeats wrote:

A year ago I found that I had written no verse for two years; I had never been so long barren; I had nothing in my head, and there used to be more than I could write. Perhaps Coole Park, where I had escaped from politics, from all that Dublin talked of, when it was shut, shut me out from my theme; or did the subconscious drama that was my imaginative life end with its owner? (Variorum, p. 855)

A Full Moon in March (1935) is an eloquent testimony to the fact that Yeats’s imaginative life did not end with Lady Gregory’s death. “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931,” however, represents a moment of crisis in Yeats’s poetic career when nothing that he looked upon seemed “blest.”