



The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trode with a lighter tread.
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.

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?

Understanding the Poem

1. How do the 'trees in their autumn beauty', 'dry woodland paths', 'October twilight', 'still sky' connect to the poet's own life?
2. What do 'the light tread' and 'the sore heart' refer to?
3. What is the contrast between the liveliness of the swans and human life?
4. What contributes to the beauty and mystery of the swans' lives?

Language Study

Notice the rhyme scheme in the poem. Do you notice a consistent pattern? We use a new letter for every new sound at the end of the lines. The rhyme scheme for the first stanza is given alongside the lines. Do it for the rest of the poem.

Suggested Reading

The Green Helmet by W.B. Yeats

The Celtic Twilight by W.B. Yeats.