

BORNSTEIN, George, ed. 2017. W. B. Yeats, *The Wild Swans at Coole: A Facsimile Edition*. New York: Scribner. Pp. xxi + 146. ISBN 9781501106040, Paper \$17.00.

W. B. Yeats' *The Wild Swans at Coole: A Facsimile Edition*, with introduction and notes by George Bornstein, is the third in a trilogy of facsimile editions. Richard Finneran initiated this project with Scribner in 2004 with Yeats' *The Tower* (1928), then in 2011 Bornstein edited *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), and now Bornstein concludes with the first in order of original publication, *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919). Bornstein's contributions to Yeats scholarship, in particular his study of the material production of Yeats' collections, are well known, and this edition provides readers with a concise history of the production of the book and Yeats' design collaboration with T. Sturgis Moore. He also provides brief, explanatory annotations that gloss passages and provide documentary evidence for creative sources.

Before enjoying this edition, a useful kind of preface would be Bornstein's *Material Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) and his own essay on the *Winding Stair* edition, "Facsimiles and their Limits: The New Edition of Yeats's *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*". They both outline reasons to study the material production of modernist works and what we miss by not seeing how poems appeared in their initial publication. In the article especially, Bornstein lays bare the impossible feat of trying to create a replica of an original edition through facsimile: "a facsimile nowadays is not merely an effort to transcribe out of an original, but to reproduce as many material features of the original as possible. As such, it is doomed to failure, or more kindly to partial success. Yes, a facsimile can use the same size of the same font, it can use the same size paper, it can even reproduce layout and cover design, but some features will always elude it — for instance, paper stock, binding, feel, or weight" (BORNSTEIN 2011, 92).

Such "partial successes" appear in this edition of *Coole*. For example, compared to the first edition, the paper quality of the new one is inferior, the cover lacks the luster of the original, and the back cover's marketing copy is misleading: "This facsimile of the 1919 edition presents the reader with the work in its original form, the way Yeats himself would have seen it in the early twentieth century". The "original form" can never be replicated in terms of using exactly the same materials. Types of paper, ink, and cover materials no longer exist or likely exceeded the budget for this new edition. What it does give us, though, is Yeats' arrangement of the poems, the original layout, and a representation of the Moore cover design that

Yeats commissioned. Here is Bornstein's description of the Yeats-Moore collaboration, the symbolic elements on the cover and the care given to the design of the interior pages: "Stamped in gold on a blue background, the new cover featured a swan in a circle at the top looking down and the top half of a swan at the bottom, both in flight. They thus reinforced the prominence of the title poem of the book, and at the same time enacted one of Yeats's favorite dichotomies of up/down, or 'as above, so below'. The interior layout stressed the formal integrity of each poem, beginning each on a new page, even if that required an unusual amount of white space" (xx).

The original presentation order of the poems can provide revelatory readings of some verses. You may be familiar with poems such as "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "Men Improve with the Years" through having read them in newly edited anthologies. If so, you might not have connected lines such as "Their hearts have not grown old" in the title poem and "But I grow old among dreams" in "Men Improve with the Years". In the original edition these appear close together, alongside "O heart, we are old" in "The Living Beauty" and "That the heart grows old" in "A Song". This persistent sigh of old age for youth irked (as Bornstein points out) some of the original reviewers of the collection, but these recurring phrases can also soothe readers as they make their way through the poems, recognizing that Yeats was reckoning with his own advancing age — 54 in 1919 — his frustrated romantic entanglements, and the deaths of old friends to illness and young men to World War I. Bornstein's explanation of these biographical points is incredibly helpful for those uninitiated with Yeats' life and the effect certain events had on the poems.

Bornstein also uses documentary evidence to connect ideas across the poet's writings. For example, the note to "Tom O'Roughley", a brief, two-stanza poem about one of Yeats' folk figures, emphasizes the connection between the lines "And wisdom is a butterfly / And not a gloomy bird of prey" (26) and a note Yeats added to the 1922 "Meditations in Time of Civil War": "I have a ring with a hawk and butterfly upon it, to symbolize the straight road of logic, and so of mechanism, and the crooked road of intuition: 'For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey'" (134). This useful note reveals that the "bird of prey" can symbolize logic in contrast with intuition and wisdom, symbolized by the butterfly, a point not directly stated in the poem. Similarly, readers will appreciate notes such as the one that connects lines in "The Phases of the Moon" and in other poems to Yeats's philosophical work *The Vision* (1925). Still another helpful category

of notes describe places in Ireland that held personal importance for Yeats and connect some poems to specific places.

Notes to some of the other poems, unfortunately, do not give uniquely revelatory or otherwise largely-unknown information. For example, there is a note that identifies “The great war beyond the sea” in line 23 of “The Sad Shepherd” as World War I. There are also, I think, unnecessary notes for a mortar-and-pestle reference (“On Woman”), for Dante and Keats in reference to “Ego Dominus Tuus”, and for well-known points of geography. Policies of annotation in scholarly and in teaching editions are notoriously idiosyncratic, and one is hard pressed to find an edition that pleases everyone in terms of what it chooses to gloss in a literary work. But I suspect that there are few readers who actually need all of the notes that Bornstein offers.

Explanations of Yeats’ revisions are some of the most exciting parts of the edition. We learn how the poet reorganized stanzas of the title poem so that the closing was different than its first serial publication: “The final lines [ . . . ] instead hold open a possibility of a more positive ending, together with an ambiguity about what the poet will ‘awake’ to” (xii). We are told that “On Being Asked for a War Poem” was indeed a poem commissioned for a collection of war poems that Edith Wharton initiated to raise money for victims, and that his poem was then titled “A Reason for Keeping Silent” and the second line later revised. The poem could have been construed only for Wharton’s charitable cause but instead is reframed by Yeats for this collection, a small but noteworthy point.

It is time well spent to discover and rediscover Yeats’ verse, and we are lucky to have this trilogy of Scribner’s facsimile editions to enjoy. As time marches further away from the years when the books were first published, we all the more need facsimile editions that provide us with an invaluable historical record of their original textual presentation. This presentation allows us to read the poems in a way that Yeats deliberately envisioned, the poems as part of a specific collection rather than as individual entities.

Amanda Gagel  
*Independent scholar*

## Work Cited

- BORNSTEIN, George. 2011. “Facsimiles and their Limits: The New Edition of Yeats’s *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*”. *Textual Cultures* 6.2: 92–102.