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# LITERARY GENRE

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Imagery and Symbolism in *How Many Miles to Babylon?* *Juno and the Paycock* and *I'm Not Scared*

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# HOW MANY MILES TO BABYLON?

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- Symbol of grace, freedom and companionship.
  - Their presence brings out the best in everyone, even Alicia.
  - Link to Irish mythology and poetry - Children of Lir, Yeats.
  - Alec refers to Yeats and quotes his poetry
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- Swans in *How Many Miles to Babylon?* are associated with Jerry and Alec's friendship.
  - Swans are noted for their loyalty: they stay together for life, just as the friends plan to do.
  - Happiest in their own environment: on land they are awkward and clumsy, on the lake or in the air they are graceful and free.
  - Alec and Jerry are also happiest in their home place: their friendship begins with a swim in the lake and it is the last place they go together before joining up.
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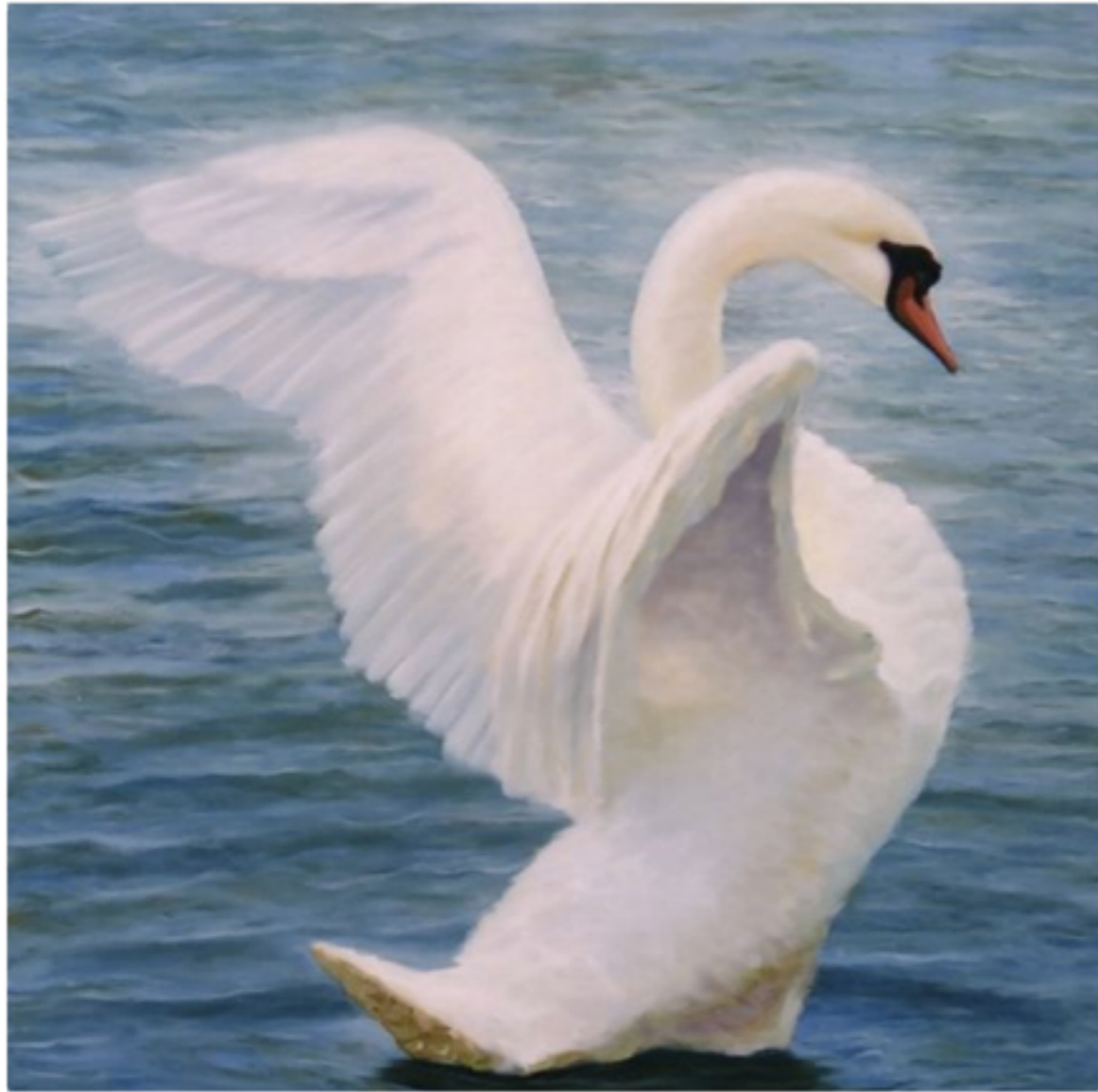
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- when Jerry is in prison awaiting his sentence for going AWOL, Alec sees a pair of swans flying overhead as he leads his men on a march.
  - The swans grace and freedom is in stark contrast with the disorder and filth of the ragged lines of marching men.
  - Alec is pleased to see the swans and raises a hand in greeting.
  - One of the soldiers shoots down the leading swan. Alec is dismayed but the soldier is unrepentant.
  - The swan's death foreshadows Jerry's death.
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- The killing of the swan is another reminder of the horrors of war. There is no place for beauty, dignity or the joy of friendship in this place.
  - Alec's protest at the killing of the swan falls on deaf ears. His voice is 'blown back' and the men take no notice of him.
  - Alec's inability to convince his men that it was wrong to shoot the swan foreshadows his inability to protect Jerry. Major Glendinning is as deaf to his pleas as the soldiers are to his protests.
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# QUOTES

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- ‘The beating of our hearts was like the cracking wings of swans lifting slowly from the lake’. - *Alec, when he and Jerry lay together for warmth after the latter returned from being AWOL.*
  - An ugly mass of flesh and feathers fell to the ground. - *Alec, when one of his men had shot a swan flying overhead.*
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# JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

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- Just as the swans represent a sort of sanctuary and freedom for Alec and Jerry, so do the symbols of religion for Johnny in *Juno*.
  - However, the religious symbols - the statue of the Virgin and the votive light - do not seem to have the same happy memories that the swans do for Alec in *Babylon*. Johnny turns to religion out of fear and the knowledge that he needs protection because of his betrayal of Robbie Tancred.
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- The swans in *Babylon* represent unwavering loyalty and love but Johnny turns to religion to save him from the consequences of disloyalty and cowardice.
  - Johnny is obsessed with the votive light and terrified that it might be extinguished as its flame has become, for him, a symbol of his own life. In this way, the light is similar to the pair of swans in *Babylon*: the killing of one is an ominous symbol and is linked to Jerry's impending death.
  - Unlike the swans, which are associated with happy memories and thoughts, the votive light torments Johnny although he seeks its protection. It illuminates his guilty vision and he believes he sees Robbie Tancred kneeling before the statue of the Virgin Mary.
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## Votive light

The extinguishing of the votive light is symbolic: when a church is deconsecrated its altar furniture is removed and the sanctuary lamp extinguished.

The house is no longer a sanctuary for Johnny and before long he is taken away and executed for his betrayal of Robbie Tancred.



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# QUOTES

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- ‘is the light lightin’ before the picture o’the Virgin?’
  - ‘I seen him ... I seen Robbie Tancred kneelin’ down before the statue an’ the red light shinin’ on him’
  - *Johnny Boyle*
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# I'M NOT SCARED

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- As in *Babylon* and *Juno*, imagery and symbolism play an important role in *INS*.
  - Just as the swans in *Babylon* represent freedom and childhood joy, so the wheat fields in *INS* provide the backdrop to some of Michele's happiest times. They are places of childhood innocence and fun.
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- Like Alec and Jerry, Michele and Filippo are able to escape the realities of life for a short while when they play together.
  - Just as the swans in *Babylon* remind us of the myths and literature with which they are associated, so too do the wheat fields in *INS* remind us that fields of corn are often linked to death and endings. Death is personified as the Grim Reaper and therefore when the reaping of the fields begins, we view this as symbolic. It could mean the death of innocence or even the literal death of one of the characters. Similar to the killing of the swan and the extinguishing of the votive light which are both ominous signs in the other two texts, the cutting down of the wheat foreshadows unhappier times to come.
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## Symbolism

Images of violence in all three texts remind us of the threat hanging over the characters' lives.

In *Babylon*, as well as the horror of war, we have the pointless shooting of the innocent swan. This shows us that the men have become immune to death and suffering.



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- In Juno, the death of Robbie Tancred and the gruesome description of his injuries are a striking example of the sort of violence that is part and parcel of everyday life in Civil War Ireland.
  - In all three texts, images of violence highlight the idea that life is cheap and that people have less control over their destinies than they may believe.
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