

Discuss ways in which violence is presented in leda and the swan essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



'Leda and the Swan' presents the stark, brutal and raw violence that emanates from within feelings of superiority, the motivations for violence as well as the ironic passion that violence could bring. Yeats opens the poem on an abrupt and somewhat shocking note, describing 'a sudden blow' to Leda, with the swan and 'its great wings beating still', the raw nature of physical violence as a result of male dominance over females.

Leda is described as 'staggering' in response, and clearly the emotional effects of this violence results to her being reduced into having 'terrified vague fingers'. The shortness of the lines in the poem also contribute to the brutal nature of the act of rape; Zeus' actions in the poem are short, abrupt, uncaring and often rushed, and Leda is often seen being treated by him with little respect or regard, instead 'her helpless'.

The violence is also linked to animalistic nature, with Zeus in his form of a swan being described with 'dark webs' and this results to Leda being completely overwhelmed by the violence towards her, 'her nape caught in his bill'. The stark contrast between human and animal serves to increase the effect of the violence towards Leda as something brutal, raw and physically damaging; she is 'mastered by the brute blood of the air', and how rape is portrayed in the poem as a selfish act of violence, motivated by lust and brutality, the 'indifferent beak' simply 'her drop' after an atrocious act.

Leda's own shock is also described by Yeats, who explains how she results in having 'loosening thighs' which may be out of shock and possibly submission to the fact that she no longer has control of the situation she

finds herself in. The poem notes that there is a 'shudder in the loins', and the mix of animalistic imagery contrasted with human emotions presents the act of violence as one that can bring fear and confusion; Leda's emotions are questionable and even Yeats himself does not explicitly describe how Leda herself may be feeling in the scene.

The first stanza quickly switches between the present and past tense, linking itself with the idea of confusion brought upon by Leda by 'the feathered glory's act of violence, and she herself does not know how she should respond, leading to her 'nape caught in her bill' and yet her being unable to 'push the feathered glory from her'.

Interestingly Yeats also presents the idea that violence could possibly be as a result of passion; despite the violent acts committed by Zeus Leda is still described as having her 'thighs caressed', somewhat contrasting with the brutal act of rape itself. Reference to her 'nape' also suggests a somewhat caring and affectionate tone to the swan's brutality, yet the act itself is brutal and selfish, linking to the idea that violence quite often brings a sense of confusion and distress.

The structural difference between the initial octave followed by the sestet serve to portray this sense of confusion within her; the octave establishes a wide variety of different feelings that could possibly be felt by Leda, while the sestet serves to raise questions on those feelings and the confusing consequences of a single violent act. Confusingly, Yeats notes how despite

the violence of the act, Leda still happens to ' feel the strange heart beating where it lies', a sense of closeness portrayed in the poem.

Yeats also raises the question whether this violence was in some ways even ' acceptable' to an extent for Leda; the poem maintains a confused tone and even raises questions as to whether Leda had ' put on his knowledge with his power', and submitted to the fact that ultimately Zeus was part of divinity. Yet despite this the shifts between passion and violence, in the end Yeats ends on a note of sheer brutality, describing Zeus with his ' indifferent beak... her drop'. Violence is also portrayed as bringing destruction.

Yeats links Leda's rape by Zeus in the play to the Greek myth of the destruction of Troy that results from a single act of violence, showing how violence can in fact lead to violent consequences, or even death as it notes how Leda's rape leaves ' Agamemnon dead'. Violence is raised as a questionable issue by Yeats, as he himself asks whether it is possible to understand the full consequences of a single act that results from a surge of male lust and violence, especially in relation to the sack of Troy.

Yeats touches upon the idea that violence may also be a form of supernatural intervention, linking to the myth where it is violence that results in a complete turn in in history, and therefore showing how violence can also be viewed as inherently dangerous. The destruction in the poem can also be linked to how Yeats arguably had his dreams destroyed, with lust and temptation only leading to ' Broken Dreams' where inadvertently, Maud

Gonne sends Yeats into a personality 'stubborn with...passion' and 'muttering like a fool'.

With this poem, Yeats describes how a single simple action done purely on a sudden impulse as Zeus does only causes trouble in the future, and Yeats hints towards the destruction of Troy as being the ultimate consequence of his actions; Yeats also notes in 'An Irish Airman foresees his Death' that the single impulse decision of the airman has led him to be in a situation which brings to end to his own life. Yeats presents the theme of violence as abrupt, sharp, stark and shocking when describing the horrors of Zeus' actions towards Leda, presented with an animalistic, uncaring sense.

Despite this, he suggests that the violence used by Zeus was somewhat overwhelming for Leda, and the poem clearly shows how her own thoughts are confused; she does not seem to be able to attempt to push Zeus away from her, yet arguably somewhat tries to prevent him. Ultimately despite the ironic passion, Yeats ends on a note that the violence by Zeus was brutal, shocking and would only end in further destruction, the final consequence of a single action.