

**Relationship Between Language and Meaning:
“Leda and the Swan” by William Butler Yeats**

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LEDA AND THE SWAN / WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,

So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Source: <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/865/>

I. Introduction

“Leda and the Swan” by William Butler Yeats (1924) is a symbolist poem that tells the mythological story of rape. The conflict and point of tension is a married woman, Leda’s being “physically” raped by Zeus in the shape of a white swan. The incident is told by an omniscient narrator through violent tones and diction as in the action itself. Via this poem, Yeats draws attention to an enigmatic relationship between modern humans and power. To achieve this goal, meaning in the poem is equally and concurringly produced and enhanced by two elements: language and imagery, which can be seen through transactional reader-response criticism.