

Leda and the Swan Summary

Writer: William Butler Yeats | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Summary

Leda's Powerlessness Against Zeus: The poem shows the sudden and violent moment when Zeus, in the form of a swan, attacks the helpless Leda. Yeats uses strong and clear images to show how powerless Leda is, both physically and emotionally, against the great force of Zeus. In the first few lines, Zeus's powerful body is described as holding Leda down while her "terrified vague fingers" are too weak to push away the swan's "feathered glory."

Consequences of the Act: In the second part of the poem, Yeats talks about the results of this act. The "broken wall, the burning roof and tower" represents the fall of Troy, and "Agamemnon dead" is about the Greek king being killed after the Trojan War. The shudder, or shaking, that happens in the act creates all these future events. This shows that Leda's attack is the beginning of many tragic events in Greek mythology.

Zeus's Indifference and Leda's Insignificance: In the last lines, the poem wonders if Leda, while being overpowered, gained some knowledge or understanding from Zeus. But the poem ends by showing Zeus as cold and uncaring. He simply drops Leda with his "indifferent beak," showing that she is not important in the larger plans of the gods. This makes Leda's experience seem small and meaningless in the grand story of the gods.