

Art has no boundaries because it can take many different forms. Art is not governed by anything except for the creative impulses of the artist and therefore it can manifest itself in countless ways. Two unique types of art are written art and visual art. These two styles are very different but skilled artists can manipulate the composition of either form to convey similar ideas, themes, or tones. The manner in which *Leda and the Swan* is composed gives the poem a mix of both intimacy and doubt. Physically, Leda and Zeus are very close together but the central focus of the poem is whether or not they are bound in any other ways. The poem's composition helps to explore the intimacy in Zeus and Leda's relationship. Similarly, the painting, *Paris and Oenone*, examines the closeness of a relationship. Paris and Oenone appear to be a loving couple who are involved in a stable relationship but the composition of the painting questions the permanence of their union. In short, through the composition of their works, both artists are able to question the degree and authenticity of intimacy in relationships.

Pieter Lastman's painting, *Paris and Oenone*, depicts the mythological story of Paris. The composition of this painting connotes both a realistic and an abstract feeling. The painting is life-like in its depiction of Paris and Oenone. Both figures are rendered in realistic fashion with particular attention paid to the details of their clothing. Paris's sinewy arms are painted in such a manner that every muscle stands out. The folds in Oenone's dress are so clear it is as if she was photographed. In the picture the two are shown in a loving embrace. Both figures are looking almost fully forward and this gives their expressions a sense of intimacy because the viewer can clearly see what they are doing. The realistic elements of the composition lend their embrace a sense of genuineness because it is depicted as being so authentic. In the way that they are painted



there is nothing mysterious or doubtful about them and there is no reason to think that these are not two happy lovers.

The realistic aspect of the composition sets the couple up as being deeply in love. However, the composition of this painting is much too complex and intricate to be defined by only one set of emotions. The composition is rich with symbolic allusions. In the painting, color is used to separate the two figures even though they are seated right next to each other. Oenone is on the left side of the painting and she is surrounded by light colors, like the blue sky and the green fields. On the right side of the painting, Paris is clouded in darker colors from the thick forest that surrounds him. In this sense the color is used to show that even though the two are physically seated beside each other they are actually worlds apart. Additionally, other elements of the composition serve to question the intimacy of the relationship. In the background behind Paris there are two goats, a melon, and bagpipes. All of these objects symbolize sexual activity and lust. Strategically placed behind Oenone there is a couple kissing as well as dog. These things represent fidelity. The composition of the painting questions the very intimacy that it creates. At first glance the painting seems to be of two content lovers but there is a strong underlying theme of doubt that questions this intimacy. In the Greek myth, Paris eventually leaves Oenone for the more beautiful Helen and the composition of this painting hints at the restless nature of Paris and the fleeting quality of his relationship with Oenone.

In the poem, *Leda and the Swan*, Yeats looks at intimacy in relationships but he does so in a different way. In *Paris and Oenone*, the viewer is led to believe that the couple has a healthy relationship until further scrutiny reveals that they do not. However, in *Leda and the Swan* the reader is never led to believe that Leda and Zeus share a happy or healthy relationship because their relationship is founded on a violent sexual assault. Instead, the question of intimacy surfaces in relation to whether or not Leda came to enjoy the closeness she shared with Zeus. In



other words, the poem charts the changing dynamics of Zeus and Leda's relationship and the question arises as to what degree the intimacy described was shared.

The composition of the poem is used to reflect the way the relationship shifted over time as well as Leda's doubts about her time with Zeus. Before the poem is even read it can be noted that it is composed in the style of a traditional sonnet. This form is traditionally thought of in reference to love poems and therefore from the very beginning a level of closeness is assumed. At the start of the poem the diction gives the feeling of grandeur and beauty even though it is describing a rape. The poem reads, "The great wings beating still/Above the staggering girl." The word choice in these lines like "great" and "beating still" gives the impression that Zeus is graceful in his motions and that he is a refined creature. Additionally, describing Leda as "the staggering girl" shows that she is not a willing participant. The poem continues, "He holds her helpless breast upon breast." The tone is interesting because it characterizes Leda as helpless and unwilling but the image is one of closeness. It is clear that at this point, Zeus is the one who seeks intimacy in the relationship and that Leda is resisting.

As the poem continues there is a shift and the question develops as to whether or not the rape came to be something that Leda enjoyed or even gained knowledge from. Yeats writes, "A shudder in the loins." This portion of the poem refers to the fact that Leda had an orgasm. Orgasms tend to be a sign of sexual stimulation and therefore this is a curious portion of the poem because it implies that Leda is now enjoying, at least on a physical level, the closeness with Zeus. Continuing on in the poem, Yeats uses the words "burning roof and tower," and this could be seen as further evidence of sexual lust and excitement on Leda's part. Following the line about Agamemnon's death, the compositional structure of the poem becomes important because there is a break in the lines. This pause is like a moment of inflection for Leda to consider what has just happened. Following the pause a question is raised, "Did she put on his knowledge with



his power/Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?” The poem is asking if Leda gained anything from her encounter with Zeus. Additionally, it points out a shift in Zeus’s character because he is now described as “indifferent.” At first, Zeus was hungry for Leda but after he conquered her he was indifferent about her. On the other hand, Leda initially resisted Zeus but ended up having an orgasm and possibly gleaning some of Zeus’s vast reserve of knowledge. The poem forces the reader to confront whether or not the intimacy related was shared and to what degree it was shared.

Yeats and Lastman, both use compositional elements to look at intimacy in relationships and to question its degree of authenticity. Yeats uses specific words to create a feeling. The diction of *Leda and the Swan* is precise and is used to reflect the varying quality of the relationship. Additionally, the compositional structure of the poem works to heighten the tension between Leda and Zeus. Lastman uses colors and symbolism to guide the viewer to a deeper understanding of the relationship that is depicted in the picture. Both artists use compositional structure, an abstract term, as a way to reveal some of the underlying questions in a relationship. Similarly, it is easier for a person to see the problems in their own relationships when they can look at them in an uninvolved way. When a person can remove themselves from their relationship and analyze it as they might do a painting or a poem, the problems are easier to see. However, intimate relationships are, by their nature, deeply personal which makes detached inspection nearly impossible. Yeats and Lastman are able to get around this problem by describing relationships that they are not part of and they are able to raise questions about the intimacy in these relationships.