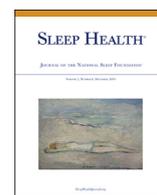


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Cover Art

Sleep as a symbol of calm in the universe



Kees van Dongen, *Leda without the Swan*, ca. 1925. Oil on canvas, 33x46. Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Mizne-Blumental Collection. Photo credit for the journal cover image and the image above: Elad Sarig.

There are some works of art or literature that ignite curiosity and the imagination. The painting, *Leda without the Swan*, was one of those. In the foreground there is an image of a slim woman, asleep, perhaps on a beach—the background was indistinct. The author had no knowledge of the painter, Kees van Dongen, and was puzzled by the mysterious title, *Leda without the Swan*.

Van Dongen was a Dutch painter who lived in Paris and was a contemporary of Matisse, Rousseau and Picasso. He is most well-known for works with strong, pure colors. His paintings were often almost garish, a far cry from the delicate *Leda without the Swan*.

Most readers will remember some elements of the ancient Greek myth of Leda and the Swan. The lustful Zeus, the most powerful of the ancient Greek gods, famously seduced or raped mortals or goddesses, often having disguised himself. He transformed himself into a white swan and raped Leda, the daughter of a king and wife of the King of Sparta. Later that night she also slept with her husband. The result of the forced and consented unions were four offspring who changed the course of Greek mythology. The offspring were the twins Castor and Pollux, Helen and Clytemnestra. The 10-year Trojan War started

because of Helen of Troy. Clytemnestra was responsible for the murder of her husband, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and the leader of the Greek armies during the Trojan War. The story is complicated and described in Homer's *Iliad*.¹ The rape of Leda changed the course of ancient Greek history.

This story fascinated artists over the ages and there have been many works (paintings and sculptures) by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Corregio, Boucher, and Cézanne depicting the violent seduction and rape. Indeed, even van Dongen created such an image. His version, painted in 1922, was erotic in nature.

Two years before van Dongen painted *Leda without the Swan*, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote a poem called *Leda and the Swan*. That same year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. His poem was violent in its description of the rape. Interpretations of the poem have mostly focused on two themes. The rape of Leda (Ireland) by Zeus (Britain) was a metaphor for the centuries' long British "colonization" of Ireland which ended the year before the poem was published in 1922. Others interpreted the poem as describing how a horrible event can ultimately result in positive and beautiful outcomes.

The timing (two years after the publication of Yeats' poem) and the title of van Dongen's work (*Leda without the Swan*) suggest that he is describing a stable beautiful world that had never been convulsed by the horrible rape. Or, perhaps a world which had healed from horrible events. In either case sleep is a metaphor for calm in the universe.

Disclosures

The author has declared that he has nothing to disclose.

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Reference

1. Homer. *The Iliad*. Richmond Lattimore, translator. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1951.