

## Rubén Darío: “El cisne” [The Swan] (1888)

Fue en una hora divina para el género humano.  
El cisne antes cantaba sólo para morir.  
Cuando se oyó el acento del Cisne wagneriano  
fue en medio de una aurora, fue para revivir.

Sobre las tempestades del humano océano  
se oye el canto del Cisne; no se cesa de oír,  
dominando el martillo del viejo Thor germano  
o las trompas que cantan la espada de Argantir.

¡Oh Cisne! ¡Oh sacro pájaro! Si antes la blanca Helena  
del huevo azul de Leda brotó de gracia llena,  
siendo de la Hermosura la princesa inmortal,

bajo tus blancas alas la nueva Poesía  
concibe en una gloria de luz y de armonía  
la Helena eterna y pura que encarna el ideal.

It happened in a divine moment for the human species.  
The swan used to sing only in order to die.  
When we heard the accent of the Wagnerian Swan  
it was in the midst of a dawn, it was in order to live again.

Above the tempests of the human ocean  
we hear the song of the Swan; it is heard unceasingly,  
overwhelming the hammer of old Germanic Thor  
or the trumpets sung by the sword of Argantir.

Oh, Swan! Oh, sacred bird! If before white and pure Helen  
from the blue egg of Leda sprang forth full of grace,  
as she was the immortal princess of Beauty,

under your white wings the new Poetry,  
in glorious rays of light and harmony, conceives  
the pure and eternal Helen who incarnates the ideal.

(Translated by William Little© Gainesville, Florida, Santa Fe College, 2007.)

## Cultural references:

- “Swan song”: swans don’t sing; they croak when they die
- Richard Wagner: German opera composer: “The Ring” = modern classical (i.e., late Romanticism) music + medieval culture
- Wagnerian swan: opera *Lohengrin*: medieval knight pulled in a boat by a swan
- Thor: Norse mythology, hammer-wielding god of strength, thunder, lightening, storms, oak trees, protector of mankind and the sacred, healing, fertility
- Leda: Zeus disguised as swan seduced Leda, who creates egg to conceive Helen
- Argantir: mythical Islandic warrior with famous sword: Tyrting
- Helen: Helen of Troy (perfect female beauty); daughter of Zeus and Leda; Helen hatched from egg