

LEDA.

The heavy air hangs faint  
And tangled ; so no bird complaint  
Athwarts it ; songs of beetles swoon  
Upon the heavy afternoon.

Leda, for greed of shade,  
And eager faltering through the glade  
Of stammering, pleading feet, lets fall  
The fetter of her purple pall ;

And, folding her bright hair  
Within the twin frail fillet, bare  
Lays all the treasure of her neck,  
Adorned with one blue jewel fleck

Hung to a tender cord,  
The circling crease, which doth afford  
Steadfast, exact similitude :  
The ring of Venus and her brood.

The gleaming grass lies prone :  
The yews seem bronze, the poplars stone.  
The very flowers at Leda's feet  
Distil a desolating heat.

Refreshing shade is not.  
The darkness of the mossy plot  
The willows shelter, doth oppress  
The air with added heaviness.

All palpitant and dazed,  
Across the lawn doth Leda haste,  
To where the dreaming water lies ;  
Therein to cool her mirrored eyes.

A bubbly fount makes wet  
The low contiguous parapet ;  
Recumbent in a wealth of green,  
Against the same doth Leda lean.

The fountain's splash beyond,  
In stiller reaches of the pond,  
Where weakest ripples spend their strength,  
Despairing to attain its length,

The awful heavens burn  
Repeated in the hollows ; yearn  
With ruddier purpose, to unfold  
The swelling destiny they hold.

And, in a certain place,  
Suspended on the water's face,  
The doubled swans sit motionless,  
For ease against the summer stress.

Yet, lo, why stoop their crests  
Contritely to their fluttering breasts,  
Which hurrying wavelets break upon?  
Hush, Leda, whence this goodly swan,

This new majestic third,  
Unmated, as becomes a bird  
So proud imperious? (For so fair  
A fowl were matchless anywhere.)

Incomparable down  
Of breast, and red-billed royal frown,  
And gradual wings outspread to fold,  
And back most lustrous to behold,

Are but the little part  
Of his enticement, which doth start  
From jocund curl of every plume,  
A stalwart song, a cool perfume.

#### THE SWAN :

Though grasses deep  
Contrive to keep  
Whole for memory, and cherish  
The print thy form  
Leave deep and warm,  
Leda, lady, grasses perish.

Essay the pool,  
O beautiful  
Leda, for a softer cushion ;  
Glorious float  
About thy throat,  
Pillow fair, thy hair's profusion.

Thine arm let deck  
My willing neck,  
Naught let trouble or afear thee ;  
So on the tide  
Against his side  
Haughtily thy swan shall bear thee

Into a nook  
Of gorgeous look,  
Gay with strange and varied shadow,  
Whereof the floor  
Is even more  
Flowered than the Elysian meadow.

With which the swan floats near ;  
And bidding Leda not to fear  
Adventure with him, by the beck  
Of his keen eyes and writhing neck,

Enticeth till her breast  
Beyond the parapet doth rest ;  
Until a timid hand leans out  
And folds his downy breast about.

Over the margin slips  
The lithe blithe line of Leda's hips ;  
And straightway hence the swan doth speed,  
Exultant for his rapturous deed,

The glory of their course :  
Whence his quick gesture and his force  
Excite the like in Leda's limbs,  
Who, like a sturdy swimmer, swims

Beside her feathered lord,  
And swift assistance doth afford.  
Athwart where pendant vines above  
Curtain a shallow water grove,

The swan and Leda break  
Triumphant from the spreading lake ;  
And pause beneath acacias' shade,  
Which drops perfume, a sheer cascade.

Till sudden lightnings split  
The burning sky, and empty it ;  
And raucously as eagles cry  
An eagle screamed across the sky.

JOHN GRAY.