

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 2 - Number 1 Fall 1951

CONTENTS

GYPSY BALLADS by Federico García Lorca

Translated by Langston Hughes
Illustrated by John McNee, Jr.
Introduction by Robert H. Glauber

Introduction	1
Ballad of the Moon, Moon	5
Preciosa and the Air	7
Brawl	9
Ballad of the Sleepwalker	10
The Gypsy Nun	13
The Faithless Wife	15
Ballad of Deep Sorrow	18
San Miguel	20
San Rafael	22
San Gabriel	24
Arrest of Antoñito El Camborio on the Road to Seville	27
Death of Antoñito El Camborio	29
Death of Love	31
Ballad of One Doomed	33
Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard	36

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

First translated at the "Alianza de Escritores" in Madrid during the Civil War with the aid of the poets, Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other friends of Lorca's. Revised in New York, July, 1945, with the aid of Miguel Covarrubias; and in June, 1951, with the poet's brother, Francisco García Lorca, at Columbia University. Checked with the Lloyd, Spender, Humphries, and Barea versions of certain poems, also with the published French and Italian translations. Final copy, June 10, 1951.

Lorca

GYPSY BALLADS

Translated by LANGSTON HUGHES

Illustrated by JOHN McNEE, Jr.

Introduction by ROBERT H. GLAUBER

INTRODUCTION

To a lesser or greater degree, all writers, because of the mimetic nature of their craft, reflect and illuminate the society from which they spring. Doubtless, there are exceptions to this rule. Poe probably was such a one. But, they are rare. No less rare, however, are the writers who completely project their society. Such a poet is Federico García Lorca. He is the crystalization of all the cross currents which went into the molding of Spain.

In Lorca's work, both poetry and prose, the Arab, the gypsy, the peasant, and the grandee are mixed through intense, personal Catholicism, paganism, complicated mores, and willful conservatism into traditional patterns of cruelty, sex, religion, violence, beauty, and death. Lorca's literary output is a microcosm of Spanish history, thought and behavior. He was an observer whose ethnic instincts were developed to a prodigious degree. In him, the Spanish racial memory found its perfect spokesman.

"Gypsy Ballads", the most widely read book of contemporary Spanish poetry, was first published in 1928. Though it was only Lorca's third collection of poems to appear, his reputation was tremendous. Previous to it he had published "Book of Poems" (1921) and "Songs" (1927). Another work, "Poem of the Deep Song", had already been written but did not appear in book form until 1931. Two plays, "The Spell of the Butterfly" and "Mariana Pineda", had been produced with indifferent success. A puppet play had also been staged.

Lorca worked on his "Gypsy Ballads" from 1924 to 1927. As successive versions of the poems appeared, he

2

recited them to his friends. Spaniards are accustomed to an oral tradition and by word of mouth the poems spread. He recited them in the cafes, in the "Residencia de Estudiantes" where he lived in Madrid, and at private gatherings. The poems caught so much of the gypsy spirit, that is to say the essential spirit of Spain, and were framed in so lively and contagious a diction that many of them soon became virtually public property. A curious outcome of this was that one finds in Spanish literary criticism of the period references to Lorca's work and its effects on other writers even before its publication in book form. He became the "official" amanuensis of the gypsy.

Lorca cautioned, however, that these poems were not meant as case histories, either real or imagined. He had utilized the gypsy "as a literary theme for a book. Nothing more." To him, the gypsy was the clearest personification of the principal preoccupations and symbols of Spanish life.

What are these preoccupations? Simply, they can be categorized as **death** and **sex**. To the Anglo-Saxon mind, these are strange companions, especially so as the dominating forces of life, but to the Spaniard they are the two inevitable partners. All men share them. From the early "Ballad of the Little Square," Lorca evidenced his great concern with death. It supplied him with a theme capable of endless variations. In "Gypsy Ballads" seven of the poems deal with death and "black pain". Yet they are not morbid. To have been so would have meant a condemnation of life.

It would be interesting to speculate at length about the origins of the peculiar Spanish attitude toward death. Briefly, it is the combination of a holdover of medieval man's natural acceptance of birth and death, the terrorization of the people during the Counter Reformation, the ever-present starkness of the Spanish landscape, and the lack of social advance. "In every country," Lorca said, "death is the end. It comes and the curtains are drawn. Not in Spain. In Spain they are opened. . . . In Spain the dead are more alive, dead, than in any other place in the world."

For the writer, one interesting outcome of this pre-occupation has been a fertile symbology. Lorca's work abounds in oblique references to death. In a lecture he once outlined the principal figures which signify death to the Spaniard. "The chopping knife, and the cartwheel, and the clasp knife, and the prickly beard of shepherds, and the baldheaded moon, and the fly, and dank cupboards, and rubble, and the images of saints covered in lace, and quicklime, and the stabbing outline of eaves and bay windows, they all have in Spain the minute grasses of death". All of these are in Lorca's verse.

The Spanish attitude toward sex should not be considered in a Freudian light. There is in it no concern with the subconscious as such. It is not a verbalization of dreams. To the Spaniard, sex is frank eroticism tempered by a great reverence for chastity. It is a constant battle between desire and virginity, between sadistic cruelty and masochistic piety. The classical literature abounds in what Barea characterized as "the ideas and ideals of Lust through Pain, Holiness through Horror, and Virginity triumphant over Violence." In Lorca, too, this is evident.

This pitting of an erotic love against a desire for spiritual chastity is a heritage of the Arabic domination of Spain. Moorish poetry treated it frequently in many of the early "casidas." With the development of the ballad form, the idea became more widespread. Eventually, it worked its way into popular consciousness.

From this dichotomy come many of the images in the Ballads. The poems devoted to the patron saints of Granada, Córdoba, and Seville visualize the saints as "adorned with laces", "encrusted with spangles and sequins", and as a "cross between a lily and a smile". Blunt masculinity plays no part in this religious attitude. In "The Faithless Wife", though satisfied by the woman he took to the river, the gypsy "didn't want to fall in love with her." She had lied. ". . . having a husband, she told me she was single". Passion was not enough.

"Gypsy Ballads" is a summing up of these attitudes toward death and sex and a masterly use of their symbols. It is obvious why the poems are so popular in all Latin countries. The men can easily see their own in the dis-

4

appointment of the gypsy in "The Faithless Wife". Here is the perfect excuse for their often feeble sallies as Don Juan. They understand all too well the submission of Antonio Heredia. The women feel the sorrow of Soledad Montoya and the terror of Preciosa. They know the pregnant solitude of the gypsy nun. All recognize the brutality of the Civil Guard and the indifference of the judge. For a non-Spaniard, this identification is often very difficult, but for the Spaniard Lorca created in "Gypsy Ballads" a contemporary Iberian folklore whose prime strength is its anonymity.

These factors all contribute to the extremely high position in Spanish literature of the Ballads. Yet there is another aspect of the work which must be considered; their place in the totality of Lorca's work.

Significantly, here too they are unique. Most of these poems mark the close of the first period of Lorca's creative life. He dealt in them for the last time wholly in poetry with his interpretation of the folk idiom. After the Ballads, he went his own way. "Poet in New York" (1929) and "Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" (1935) are far more sophisticated both in content and form than any of his previous poetry.

Lorca used the Ballads as a testing ground for many of his growing dramatic theories. Each poem in the book is a theatrical scene complete with situation, characterization, conflict, and resolution. Several have dialogue. His interest in the theatre was getting the upper hand. Many of the later plays, particularly "Blood Wedding", have their roots in "Gypsy Ballads". He refined and measured his dramatic techniques here and proved that, working within the strict, octosyllabic, traditional patterns of the ballad, he could create a form that successfully bridged the gap between poetry and drama. After the Ballads, Lorca was seldom interested again in the purely lyrical. He had awakened to his ability as a playwright and was now in full possession of his powers. It might be said that the success of "Gypsy Ballads" gave Lorca the necessary confidence and stimulation to go on to become one of the few truly great poetic dramatists of all times.

Robert H. Glauber



BALLAD OF THE MOON, MOON

The moon came to the forge
with her bustle of spikenards.
The child looks, looks.
The child is looking.
In the trembling air
the moon moves her arms
showing breasts hard as tin,
erotic and pure.

6

Fly, moon, moon, moon,
for if the gypsies come
they'll make rings
and white necklaces
out of your heart.

Child, let me dance!
When the gypsies come
they'll find you on the anvil
with your little eyes closed.

Fly, moon, moon, moon,
because I hear their horses.

Child, leave me alone, and don't
touch my starchy whiteness.

The horseman draws near
beating the drum of the plain.
Within the forge the child
has its eyes closed.

Through the olive groves
come gypsies bronzed and dreamy,
their heads held high
and their eyes half-closed.

How the owl hoots!
How it hoots in the tree-tops!
Through the sky the moon goes
with a child by the hand.

Within the forge
gypsies weep, crying loudly.
The air veils her, veils her.
The air is veiling her.

PRECIOSA AND THE AIR

Playing on her parchment moon
Preciosa comes
down an amphibious path
of crystals and of laurels.
The silence, without stars,
flies from the beat of the music
to fall where the pounding sea
sings a night full of fishes.
On the peaks of the mountain
the carabineers sleep
guarding the white towers
where the English live,
and the gypsies of the water
to amuse themselves
build pavilions of snail-shells
and branches of green pine.

Playing on her parchment moon
Preciosa comes.
When he saw her the wind,
that never sleeps, got up.
Old Saint Christopher, naked as a bird
and full of celestial tongues,
looks at the child playing
on a sweet absent bagpipe.

Child, let me lift up
your dress to look at you.

8

Open to my ancient fingers
the blue rose of your belly.

Preciosa throws away her tambourine
and runs off without stopping.

The stud-wind pursues her
with a hot sword.

The sea scowls up its roar.

The olive trees turn pale.

Flutes of forest shade sing,
and the smooth gong of snow.

Preciosa, run, Preciosa,
before the green wind catches you!

Preciosa, run, Preciosa!

Watch where he's coming!

Satyr of fallen stars
with flaming tongues.

Preciosa, scared to death,
runs into the house where,

above the pines,

the English consul lives.

Startled by her cries

come three carabineers,

black capes belted

and caps on their temples.

The Englishman gives the gypsy lass

a glass of warm milk

and a little glass of gin

Preciosa won't drink.

While she tells those people

weeping about her adventures,

furiously the wind bites

the roof-tiles of slate.

BRAWL

Half way down the ravine,
gay with rival blood
the knives of Albacete
shine like fishes.
A light hard as playing cards
in the acid greenness
silhouettes furious horses
and the profiles of riders.
On the crest of an olive tree
two old women cry.
The bull of the dispute
charges up the walls.
Black angels bring
handkerchiefs and snow-water,
angels with big wings
made of knives from Albacete.
Juan Antonio of Montilla
rolls dead down the hill,
his body full of lilies
and a pomegranate at his temples.
Now he rides a cross of fire
on the road of death.

The judge, with the Civil Guards,
comes through the olive groves.
Slippery blood sings
a silent song of serpents.
Honorable Civil Guards:
the same as usual—
four Romans dead
and five Carthaginians.

Crazed with hot rumors and fig trees,

10

the afternoon falls fainting
on the wounded limbs of the riders.
Black angels fly
through the western air,
angels with long braids
and hearts of oil.

THE BALLAD OF THE SLEEPWALKER

Green as I would have you green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The boat on the sea
and the horse in the mountains.
With a shadow around her waist
she dreams on her railing,
green flesh, green hair,
with eyes of cold silver.
Green as I would have you green.
Under the gypsy moon
things are looking at her
but she can't look back at them.
Green as I would have you green.
Big frosty stars
accompany the fish of darkness
opening the road to dawn.
The fig-tree polishes the wind.
with the sandpaper of its branches,

and like a wild cat the mountain
bristles with acid fibres.
But who's coming? And whence?
She lingers on her railing,
green flesh, green hair,
dreaming of the bitter sea.

Friend, let me change
my horse for your house,
my saddle for your looking-glass,
my knife for your blanket.
Friend, I've come bleeding
from the mountain passes of Cabra
If I could, youngster,
we'd close the deal.

But I am no longer I,
and this house is not my house.

Friend, I would like to die
decently in my bed
by steel, if I could
on sheets of Holland linen.

Don't you see this cut I have
from my chest to my throat?

Three hundred dark roses
stain your white shirt front.
Your blood oozes pungent
around the edge of your waistband.

But I am no longer I,
and this house is not my house.

Let me go up at least
as high as the highest railings.

Let me go up!

Up to the green railings!

Banisters of the moon
where the falling water sounds.

12

The two friends go up,
up toward the highest railing,
leaving a trail of blood,
leaving a trail of tears,
Little tin-plate lanterns
tremble on the roof-tops.
A thousand tambourines of crystal
wound the early dawn.

Green as I would have you green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The two friends went up.
A steady wind left in the mouth
a strange taste of gall,
mint, and sweet basil.

Friend, where is she, tell me?
Where is your bitter maiden?
How often she waited for you!
How often she would wait,
Cool face, black hair,
at this green railing.

On the face of the cistern
a gypsy girl sways.
Green flesh, green hair,
with eyes of cold silver.
An icicle of moonlight
supports her on the water.
The night becomes intimate
as a little plaza.

Drunken Civil Guards
pound on the door.
Green as I would have you green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The boat on the sea
and the horse in the mountains.



THE GYPSY NUN

Silence of lime and myrtle.
Mallow among the herbs.
The nun embroiders gilliflowers

14

on a straw-colored cloth.
Seven rainbow birds
fly through the grey chandelier.
The church growls in the distance
like a bear on its back.
How well she embroiders!
With what grace!
On the straw-colored cloth
she would embroider
the flowers of her fancy.
What a sunflower!
What magnolias of spangles and ribbons!
What saffron and what moons
on the cloth for the mass!
Five citrons are candied
in a nearby kitchen.
The five wounds of Christ
cut in Almeria.
In the eyes of the nun
two horsemen gallop.
A last muffled rumor
loosens her chemise,
and at the sight of clouds and mountains
in the distant stillness,
her heart of sweet herbs
and sugar breaks.
Oh! What a steep plain
with twenty suns above!
What rivers walking upright
her visions half-see.
But she keeps on with her flowers
while the light in the breeze
plays a game of chess
on her high latticed window.

THE FAITHLESS WIFE

I took her to the river
thinking she was single,
but she had a husband.

It was St. James' Eve,
and almost because I had to.
The street lights went out
and the crickets lit up.

At the farthest corners
I touched her sleeping breasts
and they opened for me quickly
like bouquets of hyacinths.

The starch of her underskirts
rustled in my ears
like a piece of silk
slit by ten knives.

With no silver light to crown them
the trees grew bigger,
while a horizon of dogs barked
afar from the river.

Beyond the brambles,
the bulrushes, and the hawthorns,
I made her mat of hair
hollow the muddy bank.



I took off my tie.
She took off her dress.
Me, my belt with the pistol.
She, the four parts of her bodice.
Neither lilies nor snail shells
have such a lovely skin,
nor do the crystals of the moon
shine with such a light.
Half bathed in fire
and half bathed in ice,
her thighs slipped from me
like frightened fish.
That night I rode
down the best of roads
on a mother-of-pearl filly
with no bridle and no stirrups.
Being a man, I can't tell you
the things that she told me.
The light of understanding
makes me very careful.
Soiled with kisses and sand
I led her away from the river
While the swords of the lilies
battled with the breeze.
I acted like the thoroughbred
gypsy that I am,
and gave her a present,
a big sewing box
of straw-colored satin.
But I didn't want
to fall in love with her
for, having a husband,
she told me she was single
when I took her to the river.

BALLAD OF DEEP SORROW

The picks of the roosters
dig looking for dawn
as down the dark mountain
comes Soledad Montoya.
Yellow copper, her skin
smells of horses and of dusk.
Smoky anvils are her breasts
moaning round songs.

Soledad, whom are you seeking,
alone and so late?
I'm seeking whom I seek!
What's it to you?
I come for what I'm looking for,
me and my joy.

Soledad of my sorrows,
horse that takes its head,
you will end up in the sea
where the waves will swallow you.
Don't speak to me of the sea—
for black pain gushes
through the land of the olives
under the rustle of their leaves.

Soledad, what sorrows!
 What awful sorrows!
 You weep juice of lemons
 sour with waiting and whispers.
 Sorrow more than I can bear!
 Like a crazy woman
 I run through the house.
 My two braids sweep the floor
 from the kitchen to the bedroom.
 Deep in sorrow, turning jet-black
 from skin to clothes.
 Oh, my shirt of linen!
 Ah, my thighs of poppies!
 Soledad, wash your body
 in the broth of larks,
 and leave your heart in peace,
 Soledad Montoya.

Below the river sings:
 ruffle of sky and leaves.
 With the flowers of the squash-vine
 the new light is crowned.
 Oh, sorrow of the gypsies!
 Sorrow clean and always lonely
 Sorrow of the hidden river
 and the far-off dawn.

20

SAN MIGUEL (Granada)

You see from your railing
in the mountain, mountain, mountain,
mules and the shadows of mules
loaded down with sunflowers.
Their eyes in the shadows
are blurred with vasty night.
At the corners of the air
the salt dawn crackles.
A sky of white mules
closes quick-silver eyes,
giving the shadowy quiet
an ultimate of heartbeats.
And the water turns cold
so no one will touch it,
crazy uncovered water
in the mountain, mountain, mountain.

San Miguel, adorned with laces
in the bedroom of his tower,
shows his splendid thighs

garlanded by globes of light.
 Archangel domesticated.
 at the stroke of twelve,
 pretending sweet anger
 of plumes and nightingales.
 San Miguel sings at his window,
 a youth of three thousand evenings,
 fragrant with eau-de-cologne
 far from the breath of flowers.

On the beach the sea
 dances a poem made of balconies.
 And the banks of the moon
 loose their rushes, gain in voices.
 Loosely luscious ladies pass
 eating sunflower seeds,
 their behinds large and hidden
 Like planets of copper.
 Tall gentlemen pass
 and gentlewomen of sombre mien
 dark with nostalgia for
 a yesterday of nightingales.
 And the Archbishop of Manila,
 poor, and blind with saffron,
 says a double-edged mass,
 one for men and one for women.

San Miguel is quiet
 in the bedroom of his tower,
 his vestments encrusted
 with spangles and sequins.

San Miguel, king of balloons
 and all odd numbers,
 in the Berber arabesques
 of balconies and cheers.

22

SAN RAFAEL (Córdoba)

Closed carriages arrive
at the edge of the reeds
where waves polish
naked Roman torso.
Carriages the Guadalquivir
holds in its ripe crystal
between prints of flowers
and echoes of tempests.
The children sing weaving
the disillusionment of the world
beside these old carriages
lost in the night.
But Córdoba does not tremble
in the strange confusion
for when the darkness lifts
its architecture of smoke,
a foot of marble shows

its chaste shrunken glow.
Petals of flimsy tin
embroider the pure greys
of the breeze unfurled
on the arches of triumph.
And while the bridge whispers
ten rumors of Neptune,
tobacco sellers flee
along a broken wall.

Only one fish in the water
that joins the two Córdovas:
pliant Córdova of reeds,
Córdova of architecture.
Children with impassive faces
undress on the river bank,
apprentices of Tobias
and Merlins of waist,
and they tease the fish
with ironic questions
as to whether he wishes wine-flowers
or waterfalls of half-moons.
But the fish that gilds the water
and puts the marble in mourning,
gives them a lesson in equilibrium
like a lone column.
The Archangel, adorned
in dark spangles,
looks for rumors and a cradle
in the assemblage of the waves.

Only one fish in the water.
Two Córdovas of beauty.
Córdova of broken streams.
Dry celestial Córdova.



SAN GABRIEL
(Seville)

Handsome reed of a boy,
wide shoulders, slender body
skin like a midnight apple,
sad mouth and large eyes,
nerves of hot silver,

he roams the deserted street.
 His patent-leather shoes
 crush the dahlias of the air
 with two rhythms that sing
 short celestial dirges.
 On the shores of the sea
 there walks no palm like him,
 nor emperor crowned,
 nor morning star.
 When he bows his head
 on his chest of aspens,
 the night looks for a plain
 to kneel and worship.
 The guitars all play
 for San Gabriel Archangel,
 tamer of pigeons
 and enemy of willows.

San Gabriel, the child
 cries in the womb of its mother!
 Don't forget the gypsies
 gave you your suit.

Annunciation of the Kings,
 poorly dressed and bathed in moonlight,
 opens her door to the morning star
 walking down the street.
 The Archangel San Gabriel,
 cross between a lily and a smile,
 great-grandson of the Giralda,
 comes on a visit.
 In his embroidered jacket
 hidden crickets chirp.
 The stars of the night
 turn into little bells.

San Gabriel, here I am

26

with three nail-wounds of joy.
Your brilliance opens jasmines
in my shining face.

God bless you, Annunciation,
marvellous dark one!

More beautiful than stems of the wind,
you shall bear a son!

Ah, San Gabriel of wonder!

Kid Gabriel of my dreams!

For you to rest I vision

a great big chair of small carnations.

God bless you, Annunciation,
poorly dressed and bathed in moonlight!

Your son shall have a mole
and three wounds on his chest.

Ah, San Gabriel, how you shine!

Dearest Gabriel of my dreams!

Deep in my breasts I feel
the warm milk being born.

God bless you, Annunciation,
mother of a hundred dynasties!

Your eyes shine dryly,
landscapes of horsemen.

The child sings in the lap
of the astonished Annunciation.

Three bullets of green almonds
tremble in his little voice.

On a rope ladder
San Gabriel mounts the air.

The stars of the night
become straw-flowers.

**ARREST OF ANTOÑITO EL CAMBORIO
ON THE ROAD TO SEVILLE**

Antonio Torres Heredia,
son and grandson of Camborios,
starts out for Seville
to the bullfights,
with a dry reed for a cane.
Dark as a copper-green moon,
he walks slowly and proudly.
His oily blue curls fall
shining into his eyes.
Half way down the road
he starts cutting round lemons
and throws them in the water
until the water turns golden.
And half way down the road

28

under the branches of an oak,
the Civil Guards patrolling
march him off bound at the elbows.

The day passes slowly.
The afternoon hangs on one shoulder
and sweeps its bullfighter's cape
over the sea and over the streams.

The olive groves await
the night of Capricorn,
while a little breeze on horseback
jumps over the hills of lead.

Antonio Torres Heredia,
son and grandson of Camborios,
without his reed of a cane,
walks between five guards
in three-cornered hats.

Antonio, what kind of a man are you?
If you were really a Camborio
you'd have made a fountain of blood
with five streams.

You're neither a legitimate Camborio
nor anybody else's son.

The gypsies are gone who used
to wander the hills alone.

Their old knives
are shivering in the dust.

Nine o'clock at night
they took him to jail
while the Civil Guards
all were drinking lemonade.

At nine o'clock at night
they locked up the jail
while the sky shone brightly
like the haunches of a colt.



DEATH OF ANTONITO EL CAMBORIO

Voices of death resounded
near the Guadalquivir.
Ancient voices lay siege
to the voice of the male carnation.
With the bite of a wild boar,
he gnashed at their boot tops.
In the fight he leaped
like a soapy dolphin.
He bathed his crimson tie
with enemy blood—
but there were four blades
so he had to go down.
When the stars with their javelins
stabbed the grey water,
when the young bulls dreamed
veronicas of clove-pinks,
voices of death resounded
near the Guadalquivir.

30

Antonio Torres Heredia,
Camborio of the tough mane,
dark as a green moon,
voice of male carnation:
Who took your life
near the Guadalquivir?

My four cousins, the Heredias,
sons of Benamejí.

What they didn't envy in others,
they always envied in me:
my raisin-red shoes,
my medallion of ivory,
my skin that's kneaded
of olives and jasmine.

Ah, Antoñito el Camborio,
worthy of an Empress!
Put your mind on the Virgin
for you're about to die.

Oh, Federico García!

Call the Civil Guards.

My body's broken
like a stalk of grain.

Three spurts of blood
and he died in profile,
a piece of live money
that can never be repeated.

A cocky angel placed
his head on a cushion.
Others bashfully weary
lighted a lamp.

And when his four cousins
got home to Benamejí,
voices of death were stilled
near the Guadalquivir.

DEATH OF LOVE

What is that shining
high up in the sky-halls?
 Shut the door, son of mine,
 the clock's just struck eleven.
In my eyes, in spite of me,
four lights are sparkling.
 It must be those folks
 there polishing copper.

Garlic-pod of dying silver,
the waning moon dresses
yellow towers in yellow hair.
The night, followed by a thousand
strange dogs that don't know her,
knocks trembling at
tall balconies of crystal,
and an odor of wine and amber
drifts down the sky-halls.

A breeze of wet cane

32

and the rumor of old voices
whine through the broken arch
of midnight.

Oxen and roses sleep.

Alone in the sky-halls
four lights clash
with the fury of Saint George.

The sad women of the valley
come with the blood of man
quiet as cut flowers

and bitter as young thighs.

The old women of the river
weep at the foot of the mountain
in an unbearable moment
of names and flowing hair.

Facades of lime

make the night square and white.

Seraphim and gypsies
play on accordions.

Mother, when I die,
let everybody know.

Send blue telegrams
North and South.

Seven cries, seven bloods,
seven double poppies
shatter dark moons in dusky rooms.

Full of cut hands
and little crowns of flowers,
a sea of oaths echoed

I don't know where.

The sky slammed its doors
at the rude sound of the woods,
while the lights kept up their clamor
in the high sky-halls.

BALLAD OF ONE DOOMED

Loneliness without rest!
The little eyes of my body
and the big eyes of my horse
never close at night
nor look that other way
where a dream of thirteen boats
quietly disappears
in the distance.
Instead, shields of wakefulness,
my eyes clean and hard
look toward a north
of metals and of cliffs
where my veinless body
consults decks of frozen cards.
Heavy water-oxen charge
boys who bathe in the
rippling moons of their horns.
And the hammers sing
on the somnambulous anvils
the insomnia of the rider
and the insomnia of the horse.
On the twenty-fifth of June
they said to Amargo:



Now, you may cut, if you wish,
the oleanders in your courtyard.
Paint a cross on your door
and put your name beneath it,
for hemlock and nettle
shall take root in your side
and needles of wet lime
eat at your shoe-leather.
It will be night, in the dark,
in the mountains of magnet
where water-oxen drink
in the dreaming reeds.
Ask for lights and bells.
Learn to cross your hands,
to taste the cold air
of metals and of cliffs
because within two months
you'll lie down shrouded.
Santiago moved his misty
sword in the air.
Behind him heavy with silence
the curved sky flowed.

On the twenty-fifth of June
Amargo opened his eyes,
and the twenty-fifth of August
he lay down to close them.
Men came down the street
to look upon the doomed one
who cast on the wall his shadow
of loneliness at rest.
The impeccable sheet
with its hard Roman accent
gave death a certain balance
by the rectitude of its folds.

BALLAD OF THE SPANISH CIVIL GUARD

Their horses are black.
Black are their iron shoes.
On their capes shimmer
stains of ink and wax.
They never weep because
their skulls are of lead.
With their patent leather souls
they ride down the road.
Crouched like hunchbacks and dark
wherever they pass
they spread silences of murky rubber
and fear of fine sand.
They go by, if they wish to go,
concealing in their heads
the vague astronomy
of abstract pistols.

Oh, city of the gypsies!
On the corners, banners.
The moon and pumpkins
preserved with gooseberries.
Oh, city of the gypsies!
Who could see you and not remember you?
City of grief and of musk
with towers of cinnamon.
When the night came
that nightly comes nightly,

the gypsies at their forges
forged suns and arrows.
A horse with a mortal wound
knocked at door after door.
Glass roosters crowed
toward Jerez de la Frontera.
The naked wind swirled
round a corner of dismay
in the night-silver night
that nightly comes nightly.
Saint Joseph and the Virgin
lost their castanets
so came looking for the gypsies
to see if they could find them.
The Virgin comes dressed
like a village Mayor's wife
in tinfoil from chocolate candy
and necklaces of almonds.
Saint Joseph swings his arms
under a silken cape.
Behind comes Pedro Domecq
with three sultans of Persia.
The half moon dreams
an ecstasy of cranes.
Banners and torches
invade the roof-tops.
In the looking-glasses sob
dancers without hips.
Water and shadow,
shadow and water
toward Jerez de la Frontera.
Oh, city of the gypsies!
On all the corners, banners.

38

Put out your green lights
for the Civil Guards are coming.
Oh, city of the gypsies!
Who could see you and not remember you?
Leave her far from the sea
with no combs for her hair.

Two by two they ride
into the city in fiesta.
A rustle of straw-flowers
invades their cartridge belts.
Two by two they ride,
a shadow-show but doubled.
To them the sky is nothing
but a window full of spurs.

Swept clean of fear, the city
multiplies its doors.
Forty Civil Guards
burst through them like a storm.
The clocks all stopped
and the cognac in the bottles
put on a November mask
to arouse no suspicions.
A flight of screams unending
rose among the weathervanes.
Sabres cut the air
that horses trampled.
Through the dusky streets
gypsy crones fled
with drowsy nags
and crocks full of coins.
Up the steep streets
mounted sinister capes
followed by a fugitive



40

whirlwind of scissors.
At Bethlehem's manger
the gypsies gather.
Saint Joseph, covered with wounds,
shrouds a young maiden.
All through the night
stubborn guns sound sharply.
The Virgin heals the children
with star-drops of saliva.
But the Civil Guard
advances sowing sparks
that set fire to imagination,
young and naked.
Rosa de los Camborios
sobs on her doorstep,
her two breasts cut away
and put on a platter.
Other girls flee
pursued by their tresses
through the air where black roses
of gun-powder explode.
When all the roof-tops are nothing
but furrows on the earth,
dawn shrugs her shoulders
in a vast profile of stone.
Oh, city of the gypsies!
As the flames draw near
the Civil Guards ride away
through a tunnel of silence.
Oh, city of the gypsies
Who could see you and not remember you?
May they seek you in my forehead,
a game of the sand and the moon.