



**Book of
Poems
(Selection)**

A Dual-Language Book

**Libro de
poemas
(selección)**

Federico García Lorca

**Edited and Translated by
Stanley Appelbaum**



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STANLEY APPELBAUM

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INTRODUCTION

Lorca

The most widely translated Spanish author, surpassed only by Cervantes in the amount of critical commentary devoted to him, is Federico García Lorca.¹ Though his already popular works are a sufficient foundation for anyone's fame, successive editions of so-called Complete Works publications continue to add more juvenilia, fragments, and other hitherto unpublished items, some of which still appear only in altogether separate compilations; not many occasional readers are aware of the full scope of his output, and many treasures await universal recognition.

Lorca was born in 1898 into a talented family residing in an unusually liberal and culturally alert village, Fuente Vaqueros, just a few miles west of Granada in the fertile plain called the Vega. Fortunately his father had become quite wealthy growing sugar beets, because Federico had to be subsidized by his father for almost all of his short life, achieving financial independence very late. In 1907 the family moved to another village, Vega de Zujaira (both villages, along with Granada and Madrid, are cited in *Libro de poemas* as places where individual poems were written).

In 1909 the family moved to the city of Granada, where Federico attended secondary school (which he had begun the previous year in somewhat distant Almería). He also took piano and guitar lessons; later he was to be a good pianist and enough of a composer to harmonize local folk songs. In addition he had a talent for drawing; his mature works, very linear, are reminiscent of similar cartoonlike pieces by Cocteau and Dalí.

In 1915 Lorca entered Granada University, taking courses in law and in "philosophy-and-letters"; though highly gifted, he was a lazy student, but his exuberance and charm (despite a morbid fear of death, related to childhood experiences) made him many lasting friendships, some of which were to smooth his way in Madrid. It was probably around this time, too, that he began to write poetry. In 1917 he had his first article published: prophetically, a fantasy dialogue about Granada. He was constantly sketching plays, both whimsical and more realistic, and writing brief prose poems and other prose pieces; these early works already reflect subject matter and themes that were to preoccupy him all his life.

The result of university-sponsored group trips all around Spain in 1916 and 1917 was his first book in 1918, the prose *Impresiones y paisajes* (Impressions and Landscapes); one of the three local people who persuaded his father to finance the printing was the guitarist Andrés Segovia. (The book sold poorly and Federico soon withdrew it.)

In 1919 Lorca moved to Madrid, which he had visited briefly the year before, making valuable contacts. Now he went to live in the prestigious Residencia de Estudiantes (Students' Hostel), where he renewed older Granada friendships and met many celebrities and future celebrities from other parts of Spain. (With a few interruptions, he lived in the Residencia during semesters until 1928.)

Meanwhile, his assiduity at studies hadn't increased, and his father exerted a great deal of pressure, urging him to "succeed" in a recognizable profession. Federico's younger brother Francisco (Paquito) was a model student and an achiever, but Federico never resented the implied "competition." Eventually, almost as an afterthought, he took a law degree in 1923.

His first play to be produced was *El maleficio de la mariposa* (The Butterfly's Evil Spell; Madrid, 1920). Though it was performed under the most favorable auspices (the director was the eminent playwright Gregorio Martínez Sierra, and the role of the butterfly was danced by the great La Argentinita), it was a dismal failure; audiences of the day didn't warm to this story about a young cockroach-poet who dies because he can never win the love of the gorgeous butterfly. Nevertheless, this verse play is highly readable, and many of its features prefigure later work. Particularly, some of the poems in *Libro de poemas* (pieces written between 1918 and 1920) are very close to *Mariposa* material. La Argentinita, whose real name was Encarnación López Júlvez, was to come back into Lorca's life time and again; in 1931 they made a series of recordings of folk songs he had harmonized with her singing and him at the piano. (Also, between 1920 and 1923 Lorca was writing the poems which he collected into *Suites*, never published in his lifetime.)

In 1921 he published the above-mentioned *Libro de poemas*, his first (and longest) volume of verse; the source of the 55 poems reprinted and translated in their entirety in this Dover volume. The second section of this Introduction discusses the *Libro de poemas* at some length.

In 1919, Lorca had met the eminent Andalusian composer Manuel de Falla, with whom he was now in 1922, associated in a flamenco (strictly speaking, *cante jondo*) festival in Granada. In 1923 they also staged one of Lorca's inventive puppet plays together. All through the early 1920s Federico was getting ideas for, and slowly writing, a good number of poems and plays that were not to see the light for some time. The plays were generally held back for lack of a producer; the poems, because Lorca was reluctant to share them with the world (one of his greatest delights was to recite them, very dramatically, to small groups of appreciative friends; at most, he might include an as-yet unpublished poem in one of his frequent lectures). As a result of these delays, for several years none of his poem volumes or theatrical premieres contained brand-new product, and he himself habitually expressed dissatisfaction at the material, as representing a stage in his development which he had already passed by.²

In 1923, at the Residencia, Lorca met the great love of his life, the artist Salvador Dalí. They enjoyed each other's company frequently for the next few years, and images of Lorca appear in a number of Dalí's works from that era. If they never had sex together, it wasn't for want of encouragement on the part of Lorca, who was decidedly homosexual and had a number of male bedfellows over the years, though he wasn't promiscuous and he tried to establish lasting relationships. He wrote a major ode to Dalí in 1925 (published 1926).

The year 1927 was one of major importance for Federico. Many of his pieces were published in periodicals. He had an exhibition of drawings in Barcelona (thanks to the influence Dalí was able to exert in his native Catalonia). His play *Mariana Pineda*, about a historical "Betsy Ross" from Granada martyred because she embroidered a flag for rebels who *lost*, premiered successfully in both Barcelona and Madrid. (This play, with its strong reminiscence of the Scarpia-vs.-Tosca element in Sardou's play and Puccini's opera, is a good example of the melodrama which was to make Lorca's later rural-Andalusian prose plays so powerful and so popular.) A volume of lyric poems written between 1921 and 1924 was published with the title *Canciones* (Songs). And lastly, he participated in the tercentary-of-death celebrations that rehabilitated the sublime Baroque poet Luis de Góngora, and that helped give the "generation of 1927" (writers of approximately the same age as Lorca) its

sobriquet. The trip for seven from Madrid to Andalusia for the Góngora homage was financed by a torero of high culture, with many literary friends, Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who, incidentally, in this same year of 1927, became the lover of Lorca's old friend La Argentinita.

In 1928 Federico became the cofounder and the copublisher of both issues of the avant-garde magazine *gallo* (rooster). In the same year, he published the thrilling *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy Ballads), deservedly his most popular work. These poems, reviving the form and technique of Spanish medieval and Renaissance narrative ballads, had been written between 1923 and 1927.

An old acquaintance of Lorca's, the Granada law professor Fernando de los Ríos, an ardent socialist (and anathema to the dictator then governing Spain, Miguel Primo de Rivera), was now invited to lecture at Columbia University in New York. Lorca accepted his invitation to go along and enroll as a graduate student. He let it be known that he was trying to become more cosmopolitan, but he may have actually been escaping, both from his father's pressure (his successes hadn't been lucrative) and from romantic disappointments. For one thing, Luis Buñuel (the future great filmmaker) had estranged Dalí from him, luring the Catalan to Paris, and Lorca was convinced that the (now famous) short experimental film the two had made together in 1928, *Un chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog), specifically targeted him and held him up to ridicule.

Lorca was in the New World from June 1929 to June 1930, spending some of the time in Vermont and the last three months in Cuba. The bitter Expressionistic or Surrealistic poems inspired in him by the metropolis weren't published until after his death—*Poeta en Nueva York* (The Poet in New York) Mexico, 1940 (except for the "Oda a Walt Whitman," which was published in Mexico in 1934 in an edition of fifty copies). The Harlem poems in *Poeta*, like Lorca's earlier poems about downtrodden Gypsies, seem to stem from a well-to-do young man's guilt feelings about impoverished and marginalized minorities, but the unmistakably heartfelt tones may stem from Lorca's very real "outsider" status as a gay in the prim, *macho* Spain of his day.

At the very end of the year 1930, Lorca's play *La zapatera prodigiosa* (The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife) had its premiere in Madrid. But he was never able to achieve a production of the highly experimental, often openly homosexual play he had written in Cuba, *El público* (The Audience; generally nontranslated as *The Public*). It has been suggested that he undertook his rural Andalusian tragedies (his greatest theatrical successes) as a relatively safe bet, in view of the brick wall *El público* had run up against.

In 1931 he published the *Poema del cante jondo* (Poem of Cante Jondo), written in 1921 and 1922. The same year also witnessed the beginning of the Second Spanish Republic. While Fernando de los Ríos, Federico's old friend and mentor, was minister of education, he pushed through a scheme for a mobile theater to tour the provinces, bringing culture to the masses. Lorca was recruited as one of two directors in 1932. From then until 1935, with increasingly long interruptions when his personal projects finally took off and occupied more of his time, he was associated with La Barraca (The Cabin), as this student theater was called, directing and adapting (sometimes with huge tendentious cuts) Spanish classic plays.

Madrid in 1933 was the site of the premieres of two plays: the fanciful tragicomedy *Amor de don Perlimpín con Belisa en su jardín* (The Romance of Don Perlimpin and Belisa in His Garden; generally referred to in English as *Don Perlimpin*) and the enormously successful *Bodas de sangre* (Blood Wedding), the work that finally began to earn real money for its author. That same year, in Barcelona, an expanded version of *La zapatera prodigiosa* was staged. Oddly enough, it was at this time that Federico decided to move in with his parents again (they were now in Madrid). Before the

year was over, Lorca had also made an absolutely triumphant journey to Buenos Aires, where he directed his plays and gave lectures.

The year 1934 was signalized by the highly successful premiere of *Yerma* in Madrid. Also in that year, Lorca's friend and patron Ignacio Sánchez Mejías was gored in the bullring and died because of inadequate medical attention. Lorca's stirring ode, *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (often known in English as *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter*), was published in 1935, with a dedication to La Argentinita. Also in 1935: a minor off-Broadway production of *Blood Wedding* in English in New York; the premiere in Barcelona of *Doña Rosita la soltera; o Lenguaje de las flores* (Doña Rosita the Spinster; or, Language of Flowers); and the publication of *Primeras canciones* (First Songs), poems written in 1922.

In 1936, *Bodas de sangre* was published. Lorca was planning a trip to Mexico, to direct his plays there as he had done in Argentina. He gave a reading of his play *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (The House of Bernarda Alba), and put into rehearsal his highly experimental, almost hermetic play *Así que pase cinco años* (translated as *When Five Years Pass*; the meaning is more like "just as soon as five years have gone by"). But public events caught up with him. Strong rumors of a coup being prepared against the Republic made him panicky. Though he was advised he'd be safer in Madrid, and much safer in France, his temperament led him to return to the womb, to Granada, where his parents had recently taken up residence again.

Lorca reached Granada only days before Franco's coup actually occurred in mid-July. By July 23, Granada, through the mutiny of its garrison, was in anti-Republican hands, and a reign of terror (fueled, as always in Spain, by personal vendettas) began. Lorca was harassed as a perceived atheist, vocal anti-fascist, and a despised homosexual. Placed under house arrest for no cogent reason, he foolishly broke it and hid in a friend's house, where he was readily ferreted out. Arrested, he was shot out in the countryside, with numerous other political victims, on August 19, becoming a martyr to the Republican cause and a permanent embarrassment to Franco.

Both his plays and his poetry are imbued with Andalusian folklore (often, children's rhymes), which inspires and structures entire large works, as well as significant details. As a playwright, he was greatly indebted to the avant-garde plays of Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866–1936). As a poet, he was greatly influenced early on by *mod-ernismo* (a synthesis of French Symbolism and Parnassianism), as introduced to Spain by the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío around the time of Lorca's birth, and as later modified and made quieter and subtler by another Andalusian, Juan Ramón Jiménez. As Lorca matured, however, it was his own genius that gave his best work its unmistakable stamp of passionate excitement and thoroughly poetical thought.

The *Libro de poemas*

The *Libro de poemas*, Lorca's first volume of verse (but not his earliest efforts!) was published in Madrid in 1921 by "Imprenta Maroto"; Gabriel García Maroto, the (vanity) publisher, was a painter by profession. Six of the poems had been printed earlier: "Madrigal" (the one beginning "Mi beso"), "Encrucijada," and "La sombra de mi alma" first appeared in the December 11, 1920 issue (No. 293) of *España* (Madrid); "Veleta," "Deseo," and "Sueño" (the one beginning "Mi corazón") were first published in the January 1921 number (II, 8) of *La Pluma* (Madrid).

No editor doubts that the dates assigned by Lorca to all the poems but one (dates ranging between

1918 and 1920) are really those of their composition. The only poem not dated in its heading is “Camino,” which from many indications seems to have been added in proofs into a very tight space, without enough room for a date (the manner of its appearance in the 1921 volume misled some later editors into thinking it was a continuation of the preceding poem); because of the time of its insertion “Camino” may very well date from 1921, thus being the most recent item in the book.

Assuming (safely) that “Camino” is a separate poem, there are 68 altogether in the 1921 first edition: 12 dated 1918, 26 dated 1919, and 29 dated 1920, plus “Camino.” Of this total, the present Dover volume includes 55, omitting 4 from 1918, 2 from 1919, and 7 from 1920; the ones selected appear in their entirety and in their original sequence, and include the opening and closing poems of the 1921 volume.³ Later editions of *Libro de poemas* (usually in “complete-works” editions) vary in punctuation, line and stanza breaks, and very occasionally in wording; the form of the Dover selection is much like that of 1921, merely making the emendations of typos that all editors agree on.

Libro de poemas, in the eyes of one major historian of literature, has the most complex spiritual content of any of Lorca’s volumes. Another preeminent critic states that Lorca, in this volume, was still finding his own voice, and that he had not yet mastered all the means eventually at his disposal, but that nevertheless the *Libro de poemas* goes well beyond a mere promise of greater things to come and includes many highly successful poems. In fact, Lorca is already a master of technique (which he always considered as important as content), making dashing use of a number of traditional meters and stanza forms, assonance, and pure rhyme, as well as introducing bold innovations. For one thing, he is already employing repeated refrains based on Spanish folklore and lyric verse of the Golden Age and earlier, and he is beginning to renovate such forms as the *romance* (the traditional, assonating narrative ballad) and the *serranilla* (lyrics depicting encounters between amorous noblemen and self-respecting country girls). Some of the pieces in *Libro de poemas* are heartfelt and flawless, and are surpassed only by the poet’s own later work, which can be more intense and searing, and even bolder in conception.

In the *Libro de poemas*, Lorca was only marginally influenced by such trends of the moment as ultraism, creationism, and futurism, which tended to be artificially galvanic, exalting machinery and material “progress.” He was already earthy, playful, and solemn in turns, appreciative of the Andalusian countryside and of nature in general, and already concerned with his personal emotional preoccupations, particularly death, with which he frequently associates a coldly metallic, oddly unfriendly moon. Above all, he was already a master of metaphor, not merely locally applied for coloration, but fundamental to an entire poem, underlying it as well as ramifying into brilliantly inventive offshoots. Symbols he would use throughout his oeuvre are already present: the weather vane, the rose, the iris.

Just as he consciously avoided milking the fad, very popular in those days, of tinselly Moorish Andalusianism, so he makes no use of local dialect or any oddities of syntax, apart from one or two nonstandard verb forms. The few unusual words he employs are generally of his own coinage, but readily understandable. (The forms *pentágrama* and *metamórfosis*, historically correct, were still permissible at the time; nowadays they are written without accent marks, and are stressed on the next-to-last syllable.)

The 1921 edition contained the following “Words in Justification,” which most editors believe are by Lorca himself, though some are convinced they were added by his publisher Maroto:

“In this book, which is all youthful ardor, torture, and measureless ambition, I offer the true image of my days of adolescence and young manhood, those days which connect the present moment to my

own not-too-distant childhood.

“These disordered⁴ pages are a faithful reflection of my heart and mind, tinged with the coloring that would be lent to them, if it possessed it, by the throbbing life all around which has only recently opened up to my sight.

“The birth of each one of these poems that you hold in your hand, reader, is akin to the sprouting of a new shoot on the lyrical tree of my flowering life. It would be an act of vileness to belittle this work which is so closely entwined with my own life.

“Despite its formal flaws, despite its undoubted limitations, this book will have the power, among many others that I find in it, of reminding me at every moment about my passionate childhood, which traipsed about, nude, in the meadows of a fertile plain against the backdrop of a mountain range.”

The entire 1921 volume was dedicated: “To my brother Paquito.” Among the dedicatees of individual poems are the following: Adolfo Salazar was an eminent composer and critic; the poem dedicated to him is of particularly musical interest. Emilio Prados was a poet, a friend of Lorca’s at the Residencia de Estudiantes, and (later) the publisher of his volume *Canciones* (in 1927). Melchor Fernández Almagro was a Granada friend who had reached Madrid before Lorca, as was José Mora Guarnido, later a journalist and author of an important biography of Lorca in 1958. Manuel Ángeles Ortiz was a painter who later worked in Picasso’s studio in Paris. “María Luisa” may very well be María Luisa Egea González, whom Lorca had a crush on in 1917; she was in Madrid by 1918; another early poem by Lorca is dedicated to her. Pepe Cienfuegos (Pepe is normally a pet name for José) was perhaps a relative of the Granadan poet Alberto Álvarez de Cienfuegos (or even Alberto himself with an unusual nickname).

The poems in *Libro de poemas* have no need of elucidation or interpretation, but a few comments are in order:

“Los encuentros de un caracol aventurero” is concerned with humble small creatures, like the 1920 play *El maleficio de la mariposa* (in which most of the characters are roaches and grubs). The poem reflects the youthful author’s rebellion against social norms and his questioning of traditional religion.

“Elegía a Doña Juana la Loca” is addressed to Juana (Joanna, Joan; 1479–1555), daughter of the “Catholic monarchs” Ferdinand and Isabella (Fernando II of Aragon and V of Castile, and Isabel I of Castile [and León]). When her mother died in 1504, Juana became queen of Castile, her father retaining Aragon (and control over her). When her husband, Philip the Handsome (son of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I), died in 1506, Juana’s latent insanity worsened and she could no longer rule. Some pious, patriotic Spaniards believe that Juana, her parents, and her husband are still buried in the Royal Chapel of Granada Cathedral (where they have funerary monuments), even though the ravages of Napoleonic troops in 1812 caused irreparable confusion in the gravesites. “Dauro” is a rare alternative Arabic name for the Darro, the river that runs through (and now largely under) Granada. In this poem Lorca is using a traditional lofty style, which occurs in some other early poems, but which he later decided not to pursue.

“Elegía” is a magnificent tribute to a woman whose chance for love and motherhood has been wasted. It is a worthy forerunner of later works with analogous themes: *Yerma*, *Doña Rosita la soltera*, and *La casa de Bernarda Alba*.

“Santiago” is, of course, Saint James the Apostle, patron saint of Spain and martial killer of Moors; his remains traditionally believed to rest in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia.

“El diamante” occurs in more different versions—four—than any other poem in the *Libro de poemas*. Besides the version in the 1921 volume, there is an early manuscript (in which it is entitled “Lección” [Lesson]), and two versions from the early 1930s, one in the handwritten manuscript and the other in the typescript of one of Lorca’s lectures; he had revised the poem to show a new approach to the *romance* form, and there is no indication that he wished to revise the *Libro de poemas* any further. (Unlike Juan Ramón Jiménez, for example, who was constantly rewriting already published material, Lorca was always impatiently looking ahead.)

“Balada de un día de julio” is a dialogue reminiscent of Renaissance *serranillas* (see above). The *viudita* jingle (from little girls’ round games) is also used prominently in an early melodramatic play never published by Lorca, *La viudita que se quería casar* (The Little Widow Who Wanted to Marry; 1919–1920).

“Tarde” shows the strongest Rubén Darío influence, the opening line being a striking reminiscence of Rubén’s poem “Sinfonía en gris mayor” (Symphony in Gray Major).

“Prólogo” (like a couple of other items in the *Libro de poemas*) shows the influence of French nineteenth-century Satanism, as exemplified by Baudelaire and others. In this poem, Lorca identifies himself with the hero of Goethe’s *Faust*. The cry “Heinrich! Heinrich!” (Faust’s Christian name), uttered by a receding voice, to be identified with that of Margarete (Gretchen) as she is whisked away to heaven, closes Part One of Goethe’s work.

“Aire de nocturno” has a recurring refrain which Lorca reused, in an adapted form, in his play *Así que pasen cinco años* (completed in 1931).

The present Dover translation is line-for-line and literal, making no attempt at meter, rhyme, or assonance; any euphony it may possess is a secondary phenomenon.

Veleta

Julio de 1920

(Fuente Vaqueros, Granada)

Viento del Sur.
Moreno, ardiente,
llegas sobre mi carne,
trayéndome semilla
de brillantes
miradas, empapado
de azahares.

Pones roja la luna
y sollozantes
los álamos cautivos, pero vienes
¡demasiado tarde!
¡Ya he enrollado la noche de mi cuento
en el estante!

Sin ningún viento,
¡hazme caso!
Gira, corazón;
gira, corazón.

Aire del Norte,
¡oso blanco del viento!,
llegas sobre mi carne
tembloroso de auroras
boreales,
con tu capa de espectros
capitanes,
y riyéndote a gritos
del Dante.
¡Oh pulidor de estrellas!
Pero vienes
demasiado tarde.

Weather Vane

July 1920

(Fuente Vaqueros, Granada)

South wind.
Swarthy, ardent,
you blow upon my skin,
bringing me the seed
of flashing
glances, steeped as you are
in orange blossom.

You turn the moon red
and cause the captive
poplars to sob, but you come
too late!
I have already rolled up the night of my tale
on the shelf!

Without any wind,
pay heed to me!
Spin around, my heart;
spin around, my heart.

Air from the North,
the wind's polar bear!
You blow on my skin,
trembling as you are with the aurora
borealis,
with your cape of spectral
captains,
laughing loudly
at Dante.
O polisher of stars!
But you come
too late.
Mi almarío está musgoso

y he perdido la llave.

Sin ningún viento,
¡hazme caso!
Gira, corazón;
gira, corazón.

Brisas, gnomos y vientos
de ninguna parte,
mosquitos de la rosa
de pétalos pirámides,
alisios destetados
entre los rudos árboles,
flautas en la tormenta,
¡dejadme!
Tiene recias cadenas
mi recuerdo,
y está cautiva el ave
que dibuja con trinos
la tarde.

Las cosas que se van no vuelven nunca,
todo el mundo lo sabe,
y entre el claro gentío de los vientos
es inútil quejarse.
¿Verdad, chopo, maestro de la brisa?
¡Es inútil quejarse!

Sin ningún viento,
¡hazme caso!
Gira, corazón;
gira, corazón.

Los encuentros de un caracol aventurero

Diciembre de 1918

(Granada)

A Ramón P. Roda

Hay dulzura infantil
en la mañana quieta.
Los árboles extienden
My soul-armoire is overgrown with moss
and I've lost the key.

Without any wind,
pay heed to me!
Spin around, my heart;
spin around, my heart.

Breezes, gnomes, and winds
from nowhere,
gnats of the rose
with petals like pyramids,
trade winds weaned
among the rough trees,
flutes in the storm,
leave me!
My memory
has sturdy chains,
and captive is that bird
which sketches the afternoon
with its warbling.

The things that depart never return,
as everyone knows,
and amid the bright throng of the winds
it's pointless to lament.
Isn't that so, black-poplar, teacher of the breeze?
It's pointless to lament!

Without any wind,
pay heed to me!
Spin around, my heart;
spin around, my heart.

The Encounters of a Venturesome Snail

December 1918

(Granada)

To Ramón P. Roda

There is childlike sweetness
in the still morning.
The trees lower
sus brazos a la tierra.
Un vaho tembloroso
cubre las sementeras,
y las arañas tienden
sus caminos de seda
—rayas al cristal limpio
del aire—.

En la alameda
un manantial recita
su canto entre las hierbas.
Y el caracol, pacífico
burgués de la vereda,
ignorado y humilde,
el paisaje contempla.
La divina quietud
de la Naturaleza
le dio valor y fe,
y olvidando las penas
de su hogar, deseó
ver el fin de la senda.

Echó a andar e internóse
en un bosque de yedras
y de ortigas. En medio
había dos ranas viejas
que tomaban el sol,
aburridas y enfermas.

«Estos cantos modernos

—murmuraba una de ellas—
son inútiles.» «Todos,
amiga—le contesta
la otra rana, que estaba
herida y casi ciega—.
Cuando joven creía
que si al fin Dios oyera
nuestro canto, tendría
compasión. Y mi ciencia,
pues ya he vivido mucho,
hace que no lo crea.
Yo ya no canto más . . .»

Las dos ranas se quejan
their arms to the ground.
A wavering vapor
covers the sown fields,
and the spiders stretch out
their silken paths—
lines across the clean crystal
of the air.

In the poplar grove
a spring recites
its song amid the grass.
And the snail, peaceful
citizen of the trail,
unknown and humble,
contemplates the landscape.
The divine stillness
of Nature
has lent him courage and faith,
and, forgetting the sorrows
of his home, he has conceived a desire
to see the end of the path.

He started walking and he entered
a forest of ivy
and nettles. Midway
there were two old frogs
basking in the sun,
bored, ailing old ladies.

“These modern songs,”
one of them muttered,
“are meaningless.” “They all are,

my friend,” replied
the other frog, who was
injured and nearly blind;
“when I was young I thought
that if God finally heard
our singing, he’d show
compassion. But the knowledge I’ve acquired,
for I have lived a long time,
causes me to disbelieve it.
Now I don’t sing any more.” . . .

The two frogs complain,
pidiendo una limosna
a una ranita nueva
que pasa presumida
apartando las hierbas.

Ante el bosque sombrío
el caracol, se aterra.
Quiere gritar. No puede.
Las ranas se le acercan.

«¿Es una mariposa?»,
dice la casi ciega.
«Tiene dos cuernecitos
—la otra rana contesta—.
Es el caracol. ¿Vienes,
caracol, de otras tierras?»

«Vengo de mi casa y quiero
volverme muy pronto a ella.»
«Es un bicho muy cobarde
—exclama la rana ciega—.
¿No cantas nunca?» «No canto»,
dice el caracol. «¿Ni rezas?»
«Tampoco: nunca aprendí.»
«¿Ni crees en la vida eterna?»
«¿Qué es eso?»

«Pues vivir siempre
en el agua más serena,
junto a una tierra florida
que a un rico manjar sustenta.»

«Cuando niño a mí me dijo

un día mi pobre abuela
que al morirme yo me iría
sobre las hojas más tiernas
de los árboles más altos.»

«Una hereje era tu abuela.
La verdad te la decimos
nosotras. Creerás en ella»,
dicen las ranas furiosas.

«¿Por qué quise ver la senda?
—gime el caracol—. Sí, creo
begging for alms
from a young little frog
who passes by, conceitedly,
shoving apart the blades of grass.

Faced with the dark forest,
the snail becomes frightened.
He tries to cry out. He can't.
The frogs approach him.

“Is it a butterfly?”
the nearly blind one asks.
“He’s got two little horns,”
the other frog replies;
“it’s the snail. Snail,
are you arriving from other lands?”

“I’m coming from my home, and I want
to return there as soon as I can.”
“He’s a very cowardly creature!”
the blind frog exclaims.
“Don’t you ever sing?” “I don’t sing,”
says the snail. “Or pray, either?”
“No: I never learned how.”
“Don’t you believe in life eternal?”
“What is it?”

“Why, living always
in the calmest water,
next to a blossoming soil
which produces plenty to eat.”

“When I was a boy, I was told
one day by my late grandmother

that when I died I'd depart
above the tenderest leaves
of the tallest trees.”

“Your grandmother was a heretic.
The truth is what you're hearing
from us. Believe it,”
the enraged frogs say.

“Why did I want to see the path?”
moans the snail. “Yes, I believe
por siempre en la vida eterna
que predicáis . . .»

Las ranas,
muy pensativas, se alejan,
y el caracol, asustado,
se va perdiendo en la selva.

Las dos ranas mendigas
como esfinges se quedan.
Una de ellas pregunta:
«¿Crees tú en la vida eterna?»
«Yo no», dice muy triste
la rana herida y ciega.
«¿Por qué hemos dicho entonces
al caracol que crea?»
«¿Por qué? . . . No sé por qué
–dice la rana ciega–.
Me lleno de emoción
al sentir la firmeza
con que llaman mis hijos
a Dios desde la acequia . . .»

El pobre caracol
vuelve atrás. Ya en la senda
un silencio ondulado
mana de la alameda.
Con un grupo de hormigas
encarnadas se encuentra.
Van muy alborotadas,
arrastrando tras ellas
a otra hormiga que tiene
tronchadas las antenas.
El caracol exclama:
«Hormiguitas, paciencia.

¿Por qué así maltratáis
a vuestra compañera?
Contadme lo que ha hecho.
Yo juzgaré en conciencia.
Cuéntalo tú, hormiguita.»

La hormiga medio muerta
dice muy tristemente:
«Yo he visto las estrellas.»
forever in the life eternal
that you preach.” . . .

The frogs
move off very pensively,
and the frightened snail
loses his way more and more in the woods.

The two beggar frogs
remain like sphinxes.
One of them asks:
“Do you believe in life eternal?”
“Not me,” is the very sad reply
of the injured, blind frog.
“Then, why did we tell
the snail to believe?”
“Why? . . . I don’t know why,”
says the blind frog.
“I get filled with emotion
when I hear how staunchly
my children call
to God from the irrigation ditch.” . . .

The poor snail
turns back. By now on the path
waves of silence
emanate from the poplar grove.
He encounters a group
of red ants.
They are in a great commotion,
dragging after them
another ant who has
her antennae snapped.
The snail exclaims:
“Little ants, be patient!
Why do you so mistreat
your companion?”

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