

Four Poems by Federico García Lorca

The Unfaithful Wife (from "The Gypsy Ballads")

To Lydia Cabrera and her black girl

So I took her to the river.
I thought she wasn't married,
but she had a husband.

It was St. James' eve,
and almost as if we agreed.
The streetlights went out,
the crickets went on.
At the far edge of town,
I touched her sleeping breasts.
They opened to me suddenly
like fronds of hyacinth.
The starch of her petticoat
made a sound in my ears
like a piece of silk
being ripped by ten knives.
Silver light gone from their leaves,
the trees have grown bigger,
and a horizon of dogs
barks far from the river.

Out beyond the brambles,
the hawthorns and the reeds,
beneath her mane of hair
I made a hollow in the sedge.
I took off my necktie.
She took off her dress.
I, my belt and pistol.
She, four bodices.
No silken shell or spikenard
is finer than her skin,
nor did moons or mirrors
ever glow like this.
Her thighs eluded me
like startled fish,
one half filled with fire,
the other half with cold.
That night the road I ran
was the finest of them all,
without a bridle or stirrup

on a filly made of pearl.
 As a man, I won't repeat
 the things she said to me.
 The light of understanding
 has made me more discreet.
 I took her from the river
 soiled with kisses and sand.
 The sabers of the irises
 were stabbing at the breeze.

I behaved as what I am.
 As a true-born gypsy.
 I gave her a sewing basket
 made of straw-gold satin,
 and refused to fall in love
 because she had a husband,
 though she said she wasn't married
 when I took her to the river.

-Translated by Will Kirkland

Selections from "Mirror Suite"

Symbol

Christ,
 a mirror
 in each hand.
 He multiplies
 his shadow
 He projects his heart
 through his black looks.
 I believe!

The Giant Mirror

We live beneath
 a giant mirror.
 Man is blue!
 Hosanna!

Reflection

Lady Moon.
 (Did someone shatter the quicksilver?)
 No.
 What child has flicked on
 the lantern?
 Even a butterfly could

blow you out.
 Be quiet!... (Can it really!)
 That glowworm
 is the moon!

Rays

Everything's a fan.
 Brother, open up your arms.
 God is the pivot.

Replica

Only a single bird
 is singing.
 The air is cloning it.
 We hear through mirrors.

Earth

We walk on
 an unsilvered
 mirror,
 a crystal surface
 without clouds.
 If lilies would grow
 backwards,
 if roses would grow
 backwards,
 if all those roots
 could see the stars
 and the dead not close
 their eyes,
 we would become like swans.

Capriccio

Behind each mirror
 is a dead star
 and a baby rainbow
 sleeping.

Behind each mirror
 is a blank forever
 and a nest of silences
 too young to fly.

The mirror is the wellspring,
 becomes mummy, closes
 like a shell of light

at sunset.

The mirror
is the mother of dew,
the book of desiccated
twilights, echo become flesh.

Initium

Adam and Eve.
The serpent cracked
the mirror
in a thousand pieces,
and the apple
was his rock.

Air

The air
pregnant with rainbows
shatters its mirrors
over the grove.

-Translated by Jerome Rothenberg

Ghazal of Dark Death (from "The Tamarit Divan")

I want to sleep the sleep of apples,
far away from the uproar of cemeteries.
I want to sleep the sleep of that child
who wanted to cut his heart out on the sea.

I don't want to hear that the dead lose no blood.
that the decomposed mouth is still begging for water.
I don't want to find out about grass-given martyrdoms,
or the snake-mouthed moon that works before dawn.

I want to sleep just a moment,
a moment, a minute, a century.
But let it be known that I have not died:
that there is a stable of gold in my lips,
that I am the West Wind's little friend,
that I am the enormous shadow of my tears.

Wrap me at dawn in a veil,
for she will hurl fistfuls of ants;
sprinkle my shoes with hard water
so her scorpion's sting will slide off.

Because I want to sleep the sleep of apples
and learn a lament that will cleanse me of earth;
because I want to live with that dark child
who wanted to cut his heart out on the sea.

-Translated by Catherine Brown

Landscape of a Vomiting Multitude (from "Poet in New York")
(Dusk at Coney Island)

The fat lady came first,
tearing out roots and moistening drumsticks.
The fat lady
who turns dying octopuses inside out.
The fat lady, the moon's antagonist,
was running through the streets and deserted buildings
and leaving tiny skulls of pigeons in the corners
and stirring up the furies of the last centuries' feasts
and summoning the demon of bread through the sky's clean-swept hills
and filtering a longing for light into subterranean tunnels.
The graveyards, yes, the graveyards
and the sorrow of the kitchens buried in sand,
the dead, pheasants and apples of another era,
pushing into our throat.

There were murmurings from the jungle of vomit
with the empty women, with hot wax children,
with fermented trees and tireless waiters
who serve platters of salt beneath harps of saliva.
There's no other way, my son, vomit! There's no other way.
It's not the vomit of hussars on the breasts of their whores,
nor the vomit of a cat choking down a frog,
but the dead who scratch with clay hands
on flint gates where clouds and deserts decay.

The fat lady came first
with the crowds from the ships, taverns and parks.
Vomit was delicately shaking its drums
among a few little girls of blood
who were begging the moon for protection.
Who could imagine my sadness?
The look on my face was mine, but now isn't me.
The naked look on my face, trembling in alcohol
and launching incredible ships
through the anemones of the piers.

I protect myself with this look
that flows from the waves where no dawn would go,
I, poet without arms, lost
in the vomiting multitude,
with no effusive horse to shear
the thick moss from my temples.
But the fat lady went first
and the crowds kept looking for the pharmacies
where the bitter tropics could be found.
Only when a flag went up and the first dogs arrived
did the entire city rush to the railings of the boardwalk.

-Translated by Greg Simon and Steven F. White