

Summer Madrigal,¹
August 1920 (Vega de Zujaira)
By Federico García Lorca (Spain)
Translated from the Spanish by Catherine Brown

Mix your red mouth with mine,
oh Estrella,² gypsy girl!³
And under the golden midday sun
I'll bite the Apple.

Line
5 In the olive grove on the hill
stands a Moorish tower⁴
the color of your peasant flesh
that tastes of dawn and honey.

10 Your scorched body is
celestial food that offers
flowers to the tranquil riverbed
and stars to the wind.

15 Why did you give yourself to me,
dark light? Why give me,
full of love, your lily sex,
the murmur of your breasts?

Was it for my mournful face?⁵
(Oh, my awkward bearing!)⁶



Federico García Lorca
1898-1936

¹ A madrigal is a polyphonic unaccompanied vocal piece on a secular text, developed especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

² The name means "star" in Spanish.

³ García Lorca is describing an actual gypsy (more properly, the Romani people)-- not a symbolic or metaphoric one. Gypsies in southern Spain are known as Gitanos, and they are an important component of traditional Andalusian cultural life. Though they ethnically Romani, they traditionally speak Caló, a Spanish dialect with Romani loan words, and rather than being perceived as foreign or outsiders (as the Romani usually are in other parts of Europe), Gitanos are often perceived by the Spanish as embodying the "real" and most traditional Spain.

⁴ The Moors were the northwestern African Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent who conquered the Iberian peninsula in the 8th century and were only driven out of power in southern Spain in the 15th century.

⁵ This is a probable allusion to Miguel de Cervante's *Don Quixote* (published in two volumes in 1605 and 1615), especially given the title of the poem (which is recalling a musical tradition from this time period). In the book, Alonso Quixano, a retired country gentleman, spends his hours reading stories of knights and chivalry, believing every word to be true. At some point he reads so many of these works that he loses his mind; dons an old, rusty suit of armor; renames himself "Don Quixote de la Mancha;" and sets out for adventure as a knight-errant to combat the evils of the world (that, in reality, exist merely as figments of his own frenzied imagination). Throughout the book, Don Quixote is referred to as the "knight of the sad countenance" ("caballero de la triste figura"-- becoming "figura entristecida" in the Spanish of "Summer Madrigal").

⁶ Christopher Maurer (in his edition of the Collected Poems) sees this as an autobiographical reference, and quotes from García Lorca's brother Francisco García Lorca in reference to this line:

Perhaps you pitied
20 my wilted life of song?

Why did you choose my laments,
and not the sweaty thighs
of a peasant St. Christopher,⁷
slow in love and handsome?

25 A Danaid⁸ of pleasure you are
with me, feminine Silvanus.⁹
Your kisses smell of
wheat parched in summer.

Cloud my eyes with your song.
30 Spread your hair,
solemn as a cloak of shadow
on the meadow.

Paint me a heaven of love
with your bloodied mouth,
35 and the violet star of pain
on a background of flesh.

Your open eyes have caught
my Andalusian¹⁰ Pegasus;¹¹
it will fly, desolate and pensive,
40 when it sees them dead.



People have often spoken with great exaggeration of the physical clumsiness of Federico's movements. Certain biographical sketches depict him as slightly lame. The truth is that when he was older he had a very personal way of getting around, best described in his own words: '¡Oh mis torpes andares!' [Oh, my clumsy gait!]."

⁷ St. Christopher was a legendary 3rd century Roman martyr whose most famous story involves him helping a child cross a river by carrying the child on his back. In the story, the child is later revealed to be Christ himself. Therefore, St. Christopher became the patron saint of travelers.

⁸ In Greek mythology, the Danaïdes were the fifty daughters of Danaus, set to marry the fifty sons of Danaus' twin brother Aegyptus, a mythical king of Egypt. In the most common version of the myth, all but one of them killed their husbands on their wedding night and are condemned to spend eternity carrying water in a sieve or perforated device. In the classical tradition, they came to represent the futility of a repetitive task that can never be completed.

⁹ In Roman mythology, Silvanus was a god of woods and fields. As protector of the forest, he especially delighted in trees growing wild. He is also described as a god watching over the fields and husbandmen, protecting (in particular) the boundaries of fields.

¹⁰ Andalusia is an autonomous community in southern Spain, encompassing Almería, Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, Jaén, Málaga and Seville.

¹¹ In Greek mythology, Pegasus is a winged horse (a pterippus) who sprang from the blood of the Gorgon Medusa (whose gaze turned living creatures to stone) upon her decapitation by the Greek hero Perseus. Pegasus is most associated with the Greek hero Bellerophon, who rode her when slaying the monster Chimera and other famous exploits. Ultimately Bellerophon tried to ride Pegasus up to Mount Olympus (the mythical home of the gods), but he fell from the back of Pegasus and perished. Afterward, Zeus transformed Pegasus into a constellation of stars.

Even if you did not love me,
I'd love you for your somber gaze
as the lark loves the new day--
only for the dew.

45 Mix your red mouth with mine,
oh Estrella, gypsy girl!
Let me, beneath the bright midday,
consume the Apple.

Madrigal de verano
Agosto de 1920
(Vega de Zujaira)

Junta tu roja boca con la mía,
¡oh Estrella la gitana!
Bajo el oro solar del mediodía
morderá la manzana.

En el verde olivar de la colina
hay una torre mora,
del color de tu carne campesina
que sabe a miel y aurora.

Me ofreces en tu cuerpo requemado
el divino alimento
que da flores al cauce sosegado
y luceros al viento.

¿Cómo a mí te entregaste, luz morena?
¿Por qué me diste llenos
de amor tu sexo de azucena
y el rumor de tus senos?

¿No fue por mi figura entristecida?
(¡Oh mis torpes andares!)
¿Te dio lástima acaso de mi vida,
marchita de cantares?

¿Cómo no has preferido a mis lamentos
los muslos sudorosos
de un San Cristóbal campesino, lentos
en el amor y hermosos?

Danaide del placer eres conmigo.
Femenino Silvano.
Huelen tus besos como huele el trigo
reseco del verano.

Entúrbiame los ojos con tu canto.
Deja tu cabellera
extendida y solemne como un manto
de sombra en la pradera.

Píntame con tu boca ensangrentada
un cielo del amor,
en un fondo de carne la morada
estrella de dolor.

Mi pegaso andaluz está cautivo
de tus ojos abiertos;
volará desolado y pensativo
cuando los vea muertos.

Y aunque no me quisieras te querría
por tu mirar sombrío,
como quiere la alondra al nuevo día,
sólo por el rocío.

Junta tu roja boca con la mía,
¡oh Estrella la gitana!
Déjame bajo el claro mediodía
consumir la Manzana.