



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (193)

TEXT: *Gypsy Romances & Poem of the Deep Song*

AUTHOR: Federico García Lorca

EDITOR: Dan Veach

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on Dan Veach's introduction)

LORCA'S LIFE, DEATH, AND AFTERLIFE

Biographical frame:

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) is one of Spain's most important 20th-century poets and dramatists. Born in Fuente Vaqueros near Granada, in the heart of Andalusia, he grew up between rural landscapes and the city of Granada. His early training as a classical pianist shaped his intense musical sensibility, from Debussy to flamenco.

Madrid and the "Generation of 1927":

The turning point in Lorca's life came with his move to the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid (1919), where he encountered key intellectuals (Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Juan Ramón Jiménez) and made lifelong friends with avant-garde artists like Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. This environment exposed him to European modernist and Surrealist currents.

Murder and repression:

In 1936, amidst the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Lorca was arrested in Granada by Franco's Nationalist forces, beaten, and executed. His body was never found. Franco's regime banned his works and burned his books. Only after Franco's death (1975) was Lorca fully restored as a central figure of modern world literature.

GYPSY ROMANCES: FOLK FORM, MODERN IMAGES

The Spanish romance tradition:

The *romance* is a traditional Spanish ballad form dating back to the Middle Ages, originally narrative songs in octosyllabic lines with assonant rhyme, performed by minstrels. They condensed epic episodes (e.g., from *El Cid*) and contemporary events into intense, image-rich vignettes, becoming a kind of "oral newspaper" and a reservoir of collective memory.

Lorca's adaptation:

In the *Romancero gitano* (*Gypsy Romances*, 1928), Lorca appropriates this popular form to create highly modern poems. He combines: the **folk, narrative basis** of the romance; **Gypsy themes** (love, law, persecution, honor, conflict with the Civil Guard); and **Surrealist imagery** absorbed from his friendship with Dalí.

The result is a cycle of poems with strong narrative "pull" but elusive, dreamlike meanings. They read like miniature Dalí paintings: impossible situations rendered with precise, almost hyperreal clarity.

Style and structure:

Though traditional romances are printed without stanza breaks, Lorca often organizes his poems into internal sections (marked here by asterisks), many of which naturally fall



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into quatrains. Veach notes how these divisions correspond to shifts in speaker or scene and uses them to introduce “breathing spaces” in English. Lorca’s compression, abrupt openings, and unresolved endings contribute to the sense of myth and enigma.

POEM OF THE DEEP SONG: FLAMENCO AND ANDALUSIAN CULTURE

Cante Jondo and flamenco:

Poema del cante jondo (*Poem of the Deep Song*, begun 1921) is Lorca’s poetic homage to flamenco, particularly its most ancient and intense forms, known as **Cante Jondo** (“Deep Song”). These styles likely originated with Gypsies and intersected with Moorish and possibly Sephardic musical traditions. Flamenco’s non-Western 12-beat compás, with off-beat accents, underpins the Soleá, Siguiriyá, Petenera, and certain Saetas.

Four core forms in the book:

Soleá: From *soledad* (loneliness). A 12-beat form often dealing with heartbreak and solitude. Rhythmic pattern with accents on 3, 6, 8, 10, 12 gives it a syncopated, “jazzy” feel.

Siguiriyá: Originally sung by Gypsy blacksmiths at the forge, sometimes to the hammer’s beat. Extremely slow, grave, and emotionally “deep”—the most intense of Deep Songs.

Petenera: Associated with the legendary singer La Petenera, called “the damnation of men” for her destructive charm. Lorca’s poem about her evokes the dangerous power of erotic seduction and gossip.

Saeta: A non-Gypsy religious song form, sung from balconies during Holy Week as processions pass below. It functions as a Catholic Deep Song with possible Moorish and Jewish roots; its “arrow” (saeta) metaphor ties music to piercing sorrow.

Poetry and music:

Lorca’s Deep Song poems do not merely describe music; they seek to enact its rhythms, pauses, and emotional intensities. He writes about specific singers, cities, cafés, instruments, and the social spaces where flamenco lives, situating Cante Jondo within a complex Andalusian cultural matrix.

GYPSIES, MARGINALITY, AND IDENTIFICATION

The Rom as mirror:

Lorca sees Andalusia’s Gypsies in ways comparable to his later sympathy for African Americans in Harlem: as a marginalized community resisting “modern, materialistic civilization,” living closer to nature, passion, and art. Their refusal to fully assimilate makes them targets of scorn, exclusion, and violence—especially in their perpetual conflict with the Spanish Civil Guard.

History and stereotyping:

The Gypsies (Rom) entered Spain around 1500, just as Jews and Moors were being expelled. European misunderstanding led to the misnomer “Gypsy” (from “Egyptian”), while their own ethnonym *Rom* may trace back to Sanskrit *Dom*. In Granada, many settled in caves opposite the Alhambra—dwellings that reinforced their image as “primitives” even as they occupied some of the best views in Europe.

Lorca’s ambivalent “Gypsy poet” label:

Lorca admired Gypsy culture, especially its music, but resisted being reduced to a “Gypsy poet,” perceived as a folk curiosity rather than a cosmopolitan artist. He wanted his work read within broader European modernism, not as picturesque ethnography. His



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Gypsy figures are at once mythic archetypes and contemporary social subjects, inhabiting a space where poetic symbolism and social critique converge.

NEW YORK, HARLEM, AND THE DUENDE

New York and Whitman:

In 1929–1930 Lorca traveled to New York, studying at Columbia and frequenting Harlem. He sympathized deeply with black Americans, linking their spirituals to *Cante Jondo* as parallel expressions of collective suffering and resistance. Walt Whitman became a model of expansive, homoerotic, socially engaged poetry (*Poet in New York* includes an “Ode to Walt Whitman”).

The duende:

In his 1933 lecture “Theory and Play of the Duende,” Lorca defines duende as a dark, earth-bound inspiration rooted in:
an acute awareness of death;
a visceral connection to the national soil;
and a recognition of reason’s limits.

Duende is not the angel or the muse (transcendent ideals), but a struggle with something deep, dangerous, and real. Both *Gypsy Romances* and *Poem of the Deep Song* can be read as poetic embodiments of duende: they place death, passion, and the land at the center of artistic creation.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Form and Tradition: The Romance as Modernist Vehicle

How does Lorca use the traditional Spanish romance form in *Gypsy Romances*? Identify specific formal traits (meter, narrative compression, abrupt openings) and discuss how he combines them with Surrealist imagery. In what ways is he both preserving and radically transforming a folk genre?

Image vs. Narrative: Reading “Surreal Clarity”

Choose one Gypsy romance and track its sequence of images. Which narrative elements are clear, and which remain ambiguous? How do highly concrete details (e.g., “breasts of hard tin” for the moon) interact with the dreamlike logic of the poem?

Music into Language: Cante Jondo and Poetic Rhythm

In *Poem of the Deep Song*, how does Lorca translate musical structures (e.g., the 12-beat compás of the Soleá and Siguiriya) into verbal rhythm and stanza structure? Compare a Deep Song poem with an actual recording of flamenco (if possible): what aspects of intensity, lament, or repetition does Lorca capture?

Gypsies, Marginality, and Identification

How does Lorca construct Gypsy identity in these poems? Do the Gypsies appear as idealized “noble outsiders,” as social victims, as dangerous figures, or all of these at once? How might we read his sympathy for Gypsies in relation to his own marginal position (as a homosexual artist, as a critic of bourgeois society)?

Lorca, Harlem, and Racialized Music

Drawing on the introduction’s mention of Lorca’s time in Harlem and his admiration for Negro spirituals, compare his view of Gypsy flamenco with his view of African American music. What parallels does he draw between these communities, and what ideological or romanticizing pitfalls might such comparisons involve?



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Duende, Death, and Rural Tragedy

How do the concepts articulated in “Theory and Play of the Duende” appear in *Gypsy Romances* and *Poem of the Deep Song*? Identify moments where death, earth/soil, and irrational eruption of emotion seem especially prominent. How do these poems anticipate the rural tragedies of *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, and *The House of Bernarda Alba*?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary texts

García Lorca, Federico. *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy Romances). Various Spanish editions.

García Lorca, Federico. *Poema del cante jondo* (Poem of the Deep Song). Various Spanish editions.

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Secondary and contextual readings

Veach, Dan. Introduction to *Gypsy Romances & Poem of the Deep Song*.

Edwards, Gwynne. *Lorca: The Theatre Beneath the Sand*.

Gibson, Ian. *Federico García Lorca: A Life*.

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Pohren, Donn E. *The Art of Flamenco*.

Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions*: (for comparative work on nation, romance, and popular forms).



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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What traditional poetic form does Lorca adapt in his Gypsy Romances?

- A) Haiku
- B) Sonnet
- C) Romance (Spanish folk ballad)
- D) Villanelle

Correct Answer: C

Which statement best describes Lorca's attitude toward Gypsies, according to the introduction?

- A) He sees them purely as criminals and outsiders.
- B) He sees them as a people closer to nature, music, and authentic feeling, resisting modern materialist society.
- C) He ignores them entirely in his work.
- D) He presents them only as comic relief.

Correct Answer: B

Poem of the Deep Song is structured around which of the following?

- A) Classical Greek odes
- B) Four core flamenco forms (Soleá, Siguiriyá, Petenera, Saeta)
- C) Popular American jazz standards
- D) Medieval Latin hymns

Correct Answer: B

In his lecture on the duende, Lorca claims that poetic inspiration requires all of the following EXCEPT:

- A) A vivid awareness of death
- B) A strong connection to the nation's soil
- C) A realization of the limits of reason
- D) A purely rational, logical approach to composition

Correct Answer: D

Why was Lorca distressed by the success of the Gypsy Romances, according to the introduction?

- A) He disliked the poems and considered them juvenilia.
- B) He wanted to be known only as a playwright, not a poet.
- C) He feared being typecast as a "Gypsy poet" and reduced to a folkloric curiosity, rather than recognized as a broadly cultured modern artist.
- D) The book was a commercial failure.

Correct Answer: C**

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