

**THE SINGER And Others**  
*Flamenco Hay(na)ku*



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### **Notes To Poems**

## BAILAR O MORIR: A POETICS

*En la manana verde  
Queria ser Corazon.  
Corazon \**

**—*Cancioncilla del Primer Deseo*” by Federico Garcia Lorca**

Waves  
roll in  
all the way

from  
Asia and  
slam the shore.

Their  
roar comforts  
for reflecting / echoing

“heels,  
two dozen,  
pounding on wood

floors,  
pulsing to  
a flamenco beat.”

Ocean  
mirrors ocean  
and you surface—

\*

Flamenco contains Ten  
Commandments. First,  
Dame

la verdad. Second,  
do it  
in

time, en compas/s.  
Third, do  
not

reveal the others  
to outsiders.  
But

you can share  
Federico Garcia  
Lorca:

Y en la tarde madura  
Quería ser ruiseñor.  
Ruisenor  
—“**Cancioncilla del Primer Deseo**” by Federico Garcia Lorca

\*

Once, I stepped  
into a  
story

I thought belonged  
to me.  
I

became a character  
in it,  
giving

the story all  
the years  
demanded

from my life.  
But this  
story

began long before  
I entered  
it.

Was I roaring  
flamenco? Was  
I

not whispering, *Poetry?*  
*It was*  
*summer...*

\*

Hard  
history, yes.  
but *it* begins

with  
nothing less  
than sinuous twine

of  
her hands,  
perfectly-calibrated arch of

her  
back, effortless syncopation  
of her feet:

Ocean  
mirrors ocean.  
Ocean mirrors ocean.

Waves  
tap out  
the Morse Code

intricately  
embroidered by  
Carmen Amaya's heels.

\*

Carmen was "Gypsy  
on four  
sides."

Blood is flamenco  
is blood  
is.

Carmen's blood gave  
her life  
and

it also killed  
her. She  
possessed

"infantile kidneys,' unable  
to grow  
larger

than a baby's.  
Carmen lived  
as

long as she  
did only  
from

sweating so much  
when she  
danced.

At the end  
of each  
performance

her costumes were  
drenched. You  
could

pour sweat out  
of her  
shoes.

That was how  
her body  
cleansed

itself: the sweat  
from a  
dance.

*Bailar o morir.*  
Dancing kept  
her

alive. Ocean  
mirrors ocean.  
Poetry

as a way  
of flesh-and-blood  
living.

\*

Documenting  
the last  
year of Carmen

reveals  
the feral  
lines of her

face  
swollen with  
fluid her infantile

kidneys  
could not  
eliminate. She sits

at  
a rickety  
table in a

dusty  
neighborhood, like  
her childhood slum.

She  
taps the  
table. One knock,

two.  
Sufficient for  
announcing the palo.

In  
flamenco's code  
of rhythm, Carmen

rapped  
the symphony  
of a history

bleeding,  
remembering all  
the secrets her

tribe  
kept from  
outsiders. The secrets

translated  
into rhythms  
so bewilderingly beautiful

they  
lured you  
in like Midas-ed

drops  
of nectar.  
But you remained

hungry, could never  
find your  
way

back out again.  
All you  
wanted

was more burrowing  
deep into  
deepening

code. All you  
wanted was  
one

more secret of  
the siren  
*Flamenco!*

I arrived to  
the secretive  
ocean—

to the beach  
house when  
crimson

revealed the sun  
ascending from  
green

rippling glass where  
earth gave  
way.

I railed at  
the light,  
wanting

to break this  
drug, this  
desire

for more darkness  
I could  
golden

into Poetry's most  
ferocious, feral  
flowers.

Ocean  
mirrors ocean.  
Pounding ocean mirrors

nails  
pounding forth  
a flamenco rhythm—

One more sip  
at your  
nectar,

please. Dear Ocean,  
mirror me  
damp

wet  
          drenched  
                  sweating

waves of text  
mirroring my  
hand



pounding a keyboard  
in flamenco's  
most

honeyed, most drugged,  
most bleeding,  
most

truthful and perfect  
-ly timed  
beat..

\*

Afterwards,  
the nightingale  
blossoms to song.

\*

Lorca pounded out:

*In the green morning  
I wanted to be a heart.  
A Heart.*

## SANGRE NEGRA / BLACK BLOOD

How does a  
small tree  
kill

a big tree?  
The way  
Vincent

Romero died onstage  
dancing one  
more

escobilla. Ole! Ayan!  
The way  
cantaores

drown in their  
own blood  
singing

one last letra.  
Ole! How  
does

a small tree  
kill a  
big

tree? His smell  
like the  
first

time: sweat and  
marijuana. Oranges.  
Cloves.

How does a  
small tree  
kill

a big tree?  
Fall of  
blue

-black hair. How  
does a  
small

tree kill? He  
was nicknamed  
"Bullet"

for his bald

head and  
thick

neck, all smooth  
except where  
puckered

a long scar  
documenting the  
flight

of a gunshot.  
How does  
a...?

So moved he  
ripped off  
his

shirt. So moved  
she clawed  
her

cheeks. How does  
a small  
tree

kill a tree  
so big  
its

roots encircle the  
entire planet?  
How...

wither all red  
roses into  
insects?

How? You never  
answer to  
outsiders.

Drape black velvet  
over the  
Sun.

## DAME LA VERDAD

Old and frail,  
a sugar  
sculpture

in a world  
threatened by  
storms.

But the real  
shock was  
her

feet, as misshapen  
as I  
imagine

the bound feet  
of Chinese  
women

might have been.  
My future  
beckoned—

the aborted wings  
long have  
wreaked

memory and desire  
against my  
back.

My poor back,  
its skin  
continuously

gathering to fatten  
the puckering  
nubs

atop each collarbone.  
The claws  
ending

her feet. The  
fists bunched  
on

my back from  
reined-in wings.  
We

are connoisseurs of

secrets, the  
biggest

secret being how  
we lost  
all

rights to pray,  
“Lord, have  
mercy”

once we lost  
desire for  
mercy.

## BAIT THE DARK ANGEL BY

saying "Lizard" or  
avoiding the  
touch

of iron, or  
choosing a  
black

dog. Mama stood  
as straight  
as

only a true  
Flamenca can.  
She

pulled the dress  
over her  
head,

careful not to  
stain it  
with

her blood. In  
the moonlight  
I

saw how my  
mother's bleak  
eyes

had swollen and  
turned purple.  
But

she licked her  
teeth and  
smiled

when her tongue  
discovered none  
missing.

The floor was  
checkered with  
green

and lavender tiles.  
He pointed  
at

Mama's eyes and

joked, "Chop  
up

those plums. The  
sangria needs  
more

fruit." Everyone laughed.  
Mama laughed  
loudest—

a laughter bearing  
the harshness  
of

aborted histories. Then  
all crowded  
around

Mama, repining her  
still blue  
-black

hair, snagging loops  
of oiled  
strands

from either side  
of her  
face

to camouflage her  
bruised eyes,  
giving

her glasses of  
*aguardiente* to  
kill

that which cannot  
be killed.  
Once,

he wondered if  
she'd been  
formed

from molten gold.  
Touched, she  
bore

what can never  
be killed.  
Outside—

perhaps beyond the

scarlet mountain—  
perhaps

just beyond the  
other side  
of

that dirty window—  
a bark  
then

a prolonged howling  
shriveling the  
coward

's lungs. She  
bore what  
cannot

be killed: the  
oversized heart  
of

her dance: Pain.  
Poetry. Blood.  
You.

You. Blood. Poetry.  
Pain. Her  
*Dance.*



## DARK FREEDOM

Oh, this girl!  
This Rosa—  
dark!

Dark as a  
Moor. She  
wore

rags for clothes.  
Hair a  
mat

of knots alive  
with lice.  
Hands

blackened by cinders  
from her  
father's

forge. Feet mirroring  
the dirt  
that

formed the floor  
of her  
family's

home, the sorriest  
of all  
caves.

Sternly, the duke  
forbade Clementina  
from

speaking to Rosa.  
For everyone  
knew

Gypsies are thieves  
and cutthroats.  
Everyone

knew Gypsies steal  
babies, that  
they

conspire with the  
Devil. Worst—  
worst

of all was

their music:  
flamenco,

the music of  
drunkards and  
prostitutes.

But little Clementina  
was so  
lonely

she disobeyed her  
father. In  
secret,

she fed Rosa  
in an  
outdoor

patio, baiting her  
with a  
plate

of *mantecaditos*.  
Rosa, always  
starving,

gorged herself, helpless  
against the  
little

cookies of almonds  
and olive  
oil.

Her hunger forced  
her to  
seek

the young mistress.  
Clementina, barely  
older

than Rosa, took  
the wild  
Gypsy

child under her  
wing. She  
bathed

Rosa until brown  
revealed itself  
beneath

the black. Washed

her until  
water

ran clear in  
the tub,  
until

Rosa's black Gypsy  
hair glinted  
blue

under the sun.  
Clementina fed  
Rosa

candied chestnuts in  
a brandy  
syrup,

perfectly grilled sardines,  
tender, marinated  
octopus.

From her own  
closet, Clementina  
gave

Rosa a pink  
silk party  
frock

embroidered with rosebuds,  
a delicate  
gown

of English lawn  
trimmed with  
Belgian

lace, velvet slippers,  
and a  
mantilla

blessed by the  
Pope. Rosa,  
overwhelmed,

possessed only one  
thing to  
give

in return. Secretly,  
she with  
"blood

from four sides"

shared her  
history

with an outsider.  
To their  
mutual

astonishment, from the  
first clap  
Rosa

released to unveil  
the flamenco,  
Clementina

felt the rhythms  
*intimate*-ly, discovered  
parallels

pulsing within her  
veins, en  
compas.

Clementina had heard  
those rhythms  
before.

They often echoed  
past midnight  
through

her family's lonely  
house. They  
echoed

behind her father's  
locked rooms,  
bewitching

rhythms accompanied by  
other sounds  
she

was forbidden to  
investigate: men's  
hoarse

voices, furious heels  
stamping on  
heraldic

granite, laughter from  
dusk-eyed women  
never

introduced to her.

Clementina didn't  
know

what clashed or  
mated behind  
forbidding

doors, but their  
sounds lanced  
her

heart, made her  
open palms  
toward

the black sky.  
*Perhaps we  
are*

*here only to  
pour milk  
over*

*white marble, pour  
gathered pollen  
over*

*gold statues living  
in gardens  
visible*

*only to third  
eyes. A  
child's*

flamenco pierced her  
to *flame!*  
and

when she danced  
for the  
first

time with Rosa,  
Clementina lost  
her

innocence to feel  
her spirit  
surface.

She felt milk  
and pollen  
mate

to release blood's

torrential flow.  
Finally,

Clementina could identify  
herself, could  
feel

the premonition of  
how someone  
like

her, someday, could  
claw her  
cheeks!

*Could rip a  
silk blouse  
to*

*bare breasts to  
a stranger's  
teeth!*

With a flick  
of her  
wrists

and stamp of  
her feet,  
Clementina

laughed back at  
Rosa, laughed  
at

her Father's black  
brooding windows,  
laughed

at the purpling  
sky as  
Clementina—

oh that girl!  
dark golden  
girl!—

freed herself. She  
laughed at  
her

bruises, both then  
and those  
yet

to come. She

laughed at  
her

emerging scars and,  
en compas,  
she

set herself *free*.

## THE SINGER

When they heard  
him, they  
heard

the whips over  
his ancestors  
as

they were forced  
out from  
India.

They heard a  
man thrown  
into

jail for stealing  
a small  
bunch

of grapes, then  
the ugly  
grunts

of his starving  
wife and  
children.

When they heard  
him, "they  
heard

a shivering woman  
with no  
defense

as the solders  
came to  
do

what they did  
with her  
and

her still too-young  
daughters." They  
heard

the stars fall  
into bleak  
silence.

When they heard



him, they  
heard

his cante come  
from him  
like

a rusty nail  
being pulled  
from

an old board.  
*La voz*  
*afilla—*

sandpaper voice. Good  
Gitano voice:  
Muy

rajo, very rough.  
Do you  
know

the worst thing  
one can  
say

about someone in  
flamenco? No  
me

dice nada. He  
didn't say  
anything

to me. He  
didn't speak  
something

I realized I  
feared but  
needed

to hear. Ay!  
All these  
stanzas

are rough! Or  
worse, too  
gentle.

They fumble. Earnest  
as cows  
and

they fumble. Do

you know  
what

would be the  
worst thing  
said

about my poetry?  
I created  
nothing

that moved you.  
Made you  
cry

as if pain  
was the  
only

proof possible for  
being alive.  
So

who among you  
listening will  
be

the wild dog  
I am  
calling?

Show me your  
snarl. Reveal  
your

fangs. How can  
I sing  
blood

if I don't  
bleed? Show  
me

yourself as the  
one for  
whom

I will rip  
my own  
skin.

Show yourself before  
you bore  
me

with your patient

stalking. Show  
yourself

darkened further by  
my orders.  
My

people trained me.  
There is  
no

shame in begging  
for what  
will

part my lips—  
what will  
trade

caresses with my  
tongue—what  
will

battle my teeth  
and make  
me

sweat. My people  
trained me.  
I

learned knives are  
sharp by  
being

cut. I learned  
fires are  
hot

by being burned.  
I learned  
to

stamp my heels  
to sound  
like

a machine-gun blast  
because...*because*...  
Show

yourself—I have  
a song  
to

turn you into

ice, then  
shatter!

Ole! Verdad! Show  
yourself—do  
you

think I'm begging  
for a  
crust

of bread already  
half-eaten by  
cockroaches?!

## TEATRO OLIMPIA

Ole! They say,  
accenting the  
wrong

syl-LA-able. They  
ask for  
flamenco,

they say, then  
don't complain  
when

they get *La*  
*Pulga*, a  
pesky

dance about a  
pesky girl  
with

a pesky flea  
in her  
clothes.

The theater "liberated"  
by Nationalists  
curdled

from the cigarettes  
of troops  
wearing

blue for the  
Italian Army,  
gray-green

for the German.  
Behind them  
more

soldiers wore red  
berets representing  
Carlists,

dark blue shirts  
with yellow  
arrows

symbolizing the Falangists,  
and red  
fezzes

for Franco's Moors.

Eh! Different  
from

each other yet,  
to Clementina,  
more

of the same.  
Their gaping  
mouths

melded into one  
voracious maw  
poised

to gobble her  
down. They  
watched

with a hungry  
insatiability. But  
never

did they clap.  
Well, one  
man

began clapping on  
everyone's behalf,  
not

because her furious  
footwork was  
better

than it had  
ever been  
but,

because she raised  
her skirt  
just

the tiniest bit.  
She heard  
his

order from offstage  
as a  
blade

hissing past false  
rubies studding  
her

ears, "Higher! Show

more! Do  
you

eat cockroaches?!" Afterwards,  
Senor Vadrine,  
owner

of several companies,  
touring the  
country

in his Espectaculos,  
resplendent that  
night

in his black  
evening cape—  
mustache

waxed to fine  
points—dropped  
a

few centimes into  
Clementina's hand.  
Her

hand fisted over  
the amount  
exact

-ly enough to  
stay alive  
for

one more day  
and arrive  
back

at Teatro Olimpia  
the next  
night

hungry again. Hungry  
again despite  
lace

hemming a red  
velvet skirt.  
Hungry

enough to keep  
returning to  
do

whatever was necessary.

Again. Despite  
lace

trimming red velvet.  
Again and  
again

she is hungry  
enough to  
repeat

this honing of  
furious footwork.  
Furious

shoe tips bearing  
six extra  
nails

drumming into a  
floor she  
imagined

as the naked  
chests of  
soldiers

beneath her, looking  
up flaring  
skirts

while ignorantly dying  
as blood  
spurted

from the nails  
she stamped  
into

their flesh with  
hungry, furious  
footwork.



## AS IF

There was un  
momento, a  
poem

I wrote while  
driving the  
car.

My ego would  
not let  
me

pull over to  
jot it  
down.

"If a poem  
is so  
powerful

it will return,"  
I have  
boasted

for a long  
time to  
other

poets, as if  
I possessed  
some

knowledge they did  
not already  
know.

It feels like  
years and  
yet

that poem has  
not yet  
returned.

What I recall  
is that,  
somehow,

it related to  
perfect timing  
y

flamenco.

## AS IF THE POET LOVES EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE

Dame la verdad.  
And perfect  
timing.

Those are the  
first two  
of

Flamenco's ten commandments.  
To speak  
Truth

en compas -- is  
that not  
how

Poetry also works?  
Flamenco's third  
commandment

is never to  
reveal the  
rest

to outsiders. This  
is the  
point

of divergence between  
Flamenco and  
Poetry.

In Poetry, you  
give all  
even

if you must  
show the  
stained

ripped swathe of  
false silk  
fluttering

beneath your lace-trimmed  
scarlet skirt  
fashioned

from the curtain  
that once  
dressed

a window in

Senora La-Di-Da's  
bedroom.

And the outside  
exists in  
Poetry

only for its  
borders to  
offer

a shimmering blur  
of silver  
hurting

the eyes into  
recognizing it  
into

a false Beauty.  
But, still  
Beauty,

Hence, the Truth—  
thus, I  
contradict

myself. Does Truth  
exist if  
one

must question, "Whose  
Truth?" So  
dance

me a poem.  
Twine your  
hands

around the stolen  
pen to  
release

your interior darkness  
in other  
people's

lives. And don't  
forget to  
behave

as if the  
poet truthfully  
loves

everything and everyone.

Do this  
to

begin what you  
don't know  
yet

as the Truth.  
Don't worry  
about

capitalizing Words because  
You don't  
know

what they mean.  
Just dance  
out

the poem. Y  
escribe en  
compas.

## THE OLIVE TREE

His cante was  
an ancient  
tree.

An olive tree  
that stood  
since

Romans ruled Spain.  
Since Moors  
invaded.

Since ships laden  
with gold  
from

the New World  
sailed upon  
River

Ebro. This gnarled  
tree's roots  
penetrated

farther into Earth  
than any  
other

tree, penetrating as  
far as  
Hell

to draw up  
the demons'  
boiling

water. When my  
father sang,  
no

one pretended to  
be angels  
because

his songs compelled  
demon blood  
to

boil in all  
of our  
veins.

Why must I

be drawn  
to

“dark beauty” instead  
of being  
like

those who hail  
the dumb  
moon

as if nothing  
can cancel  
it—

like sun or,  
worse, eclipse  
which

does not pretend  
the opposite  
is

now reality but  
shows instead  
how

darkness is zero.

## DUENDE

So despairing no  
need for  
translators.

Cancelled stars bubble  
sorrow in  
You

for reading me—  
The One  
who

is as happy  
as a  
cop

with a donut.  
My dangling  
nightstick

as black as  
the Waterman  
I

never write with  
but use  
in

una poema which  
believes nothing  
more

*Holy* than Joy.  
Amen. Ole!  
Joy—

to whose holiness  
the blood  
on

my nightstick attests.  
An obscenely  
fat

baton from the  
French who  
observed

seeing is suffering.

## LA LOCA

*In the green  
morning I  
wanted*

*to be a  
heart. A  
heart.*

*And at evening's  
end, I  
wanted*

*to be my  
voice. A  
nightingale.  
—LO(R)CA*

She fell in  
love. Poor  
Juana.

Fell in love  
with the  
most

handsome man in  
the kingdom.  
How

did the Prince  
requite her  
love?

By betraying her  
with every  
woman

who simpered across  
his path.  
By

lashing a florid  
sky across  
her

skin. By cutting  
her beautiful  
hair.

Poor Juana—always  
looking behind  
her



stooped shoulders. How  
her Prince  
mocked

her, chilling her  
tears into  
multiple

strands of pearls.  
Still, when  
he

died, Juana went  
mad. She  
clawed

her cheeks and  
confused dogs  
into

whimpers, then howls.  
She rode  
throughout

Granada keening over  
her Prince's  
coffin

in a gloomy  
carriage pulled  
by

eight horses. She  
rode and  
rode

with his stench  
becoming hers  
until

they both stunk  
up all  
of

Espana. She refused  
to bury  
him,

begging faces she  
concocted from  
receding

knotholes of trees  
passed by  
their

carriage, begging faces  
she drew  
by

connecting the stars  
pockmarking the  
irritated

night sky, begging  
faces she  
surfaced

from bonfire smokes  
and crumpled  
balls

of sodden handkerchiefs.  
Her plea?  
She

pleaded for his  
resurrection.  
Bah.

She pleaded as  
if he  
would

return to her  
if he  
came

to breathe again.  
Bah. As  
if

he once was  
there for  
her.

As if he  
ever wrote  
Poetry

for her. Now,  
do not  
misunderstand:

We gitanas adore  
Juana The  
"Crazy".

To honor her,  
we cross  
ourselves

and touch our  
hair. We  
honor

her because Juana  
never faltered  
from

living her Truth  
even as  
lies

snuffed the votive  
lights in  
her

eyes. Dame la  
verdad. Poor  
Juana.

*Once, I stepped  
into a  
story...*

I love Juana.  
But I  
loathe

her, too. Once,  
I courted  
madness

for Poetry. But  
I punched  
through

that blur—grew  
back my  
hair.

Does it matter  
that its  
harvest

now elicits snow?  
I punched  
through

that silver, shimmery  
blur. Ole!  
I

grew back my  
hair! So  
what

if Winter has  
become my  
veil?

*I thought the  
story was  
mine...*

I grew back  
my hair.  
I

love my refuge.  
It veils  
me

into believing that  
when I  
write

of Juana The  
Mad, I  
am

still young with  
glossy, blue-black  
hair.

That when I  
write my  
poems

Juana is a  
subject and  
not

the one releasing  
the wind  
that

flares my skirts  
high to  
reveal

absolutely furious footwork  
—en compas—  
conjuring

up the ghosts  
of those  
who

laugh at my  
red eyes—  
dark

angels who taught:  
there is  
no

madness. There is  
only a  
woman

brutishly in love.  
Hear me  
read

me singing to  
You the  
A.

The E. The  
I. The  
O.

The U. The  
You. The  
U.

And the Y.  
Hear me  
and

Juana dance! The  
seduction of  
flowers

blossoming into vowels.  
Hear me  
y

Juana sing the  
machinegun blast  
of

The A, The  
I, The  
E,

The O, The  
U. Hear  
us

die from the  
Song of  
Y,

the Dance of  
*Why?* Listen  
all

you nightingales! Why?  
I curse  
all

you nightingales! Why?  
En compas/s!  
I

thought it was  
only a  
story.

I thought the  
story was  
mine:

a bird caws  
from my  
mirror.

My mirror spits  
out bloodied  
feathers.

I love you  
nightingales! All  
of

you! Why, dear  
nightingales? Why?  
Y

WHY? Y WHY?

## NOTES TO POEMS:

Much of the text in the poems were generated from a combination of “scumbling” and “fish-ing” techniques. The scumbled text was Sarah Bird’s novel, *The Flamenco Academy* (Knopf, New York, 2006). Information about scumbling is available in my book *Dredging For Atlantis* (Otoliths, 2006) and at <http://dredgingforatlantis.blogspot.com>. Information about “fish-ing” is available in Vicente L. Rafael’s *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Duke University Press, 1993).

These poems were written in the form of reverse hay(na)ku sequence. Information about the hay(na)ku is available at <http://www.baymoon.com/~ariadne/form/haynaku.htm>, <http://haynakupoetry.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.meritagepress.com/haynaku.htm>.

