

Feldytko bida

Excerpts from Alexander Germano prose poem "Feldytko bida" (The Pain of Travelling)

Enough, Roma, I say to stop
your singing of these travelling songs!
Today my heart is full of pain
from all your lazy songs of woe.
They have brought forth my memories
of horror – how it stabs my heart!
So I will now relate to you
what happened many years ago.
Now I have lived long in this world
I've known the pain of travelling
but never in a hundred years
will I be able to forget
the horror. People, listen close...

2

His horse galloped out of the town.
The yearly fair came to an end,
the fair where Roma with horses
looked once again for travelling luck
"You crazy travelling luck, you put
a wreath upon Romani heads.
But how many, how many tears
on this trip did you leave behind?"

3

Right on this trip along the woods
wheels merrily rattle along.
Do you hear how the sleigh bells ring,
how near the collar sleigh bells ring,
how joyfully they ring the way?
Business was good, he could rejoice:
Galun at this fair had success;
he did good business with Gadže,
he sold horses for good prices.

4

"Gee up, gee up, fly, my stallion,
fly quickly home, fly to our camp!"
He cracked his whip over his horse.
Then, drunk, with voice so thick and coarse,
addressed his wife so young and sad:
"Wife, wife, why don't you say a word?
Why don't you tell me you are pleased?
Look, look at all we have – we're rich!"

Vodka, bread, bacon, sausages,
cabbage, sugar, honey for the babes.
Well, wife, sing me a song of joy,
sing how Galun made such good sales!"

5

Paraña sits and does not speak.
She holds her baby in one arm
and with the other hand smooths out
the old rags she has on again.
Her charming Kosja's lost in sleep,
the sleep only a child can know
when cuddled in his mother's warmth.
What more would any young child need?
The other boy, little Banuk,
is lying on his mommy's lap.
He listens to what father said,
and to what else father will say.
His father's always showing off
about the good horse sales he made
and how among the Romanies
his manly fame is growing fast.
He stuffs his pipe with tobacco
and once again urges his wife:
"Sing for me, wife, sing me a song
about my selling horses well."

6

His wife lifted her eyes to him.
In angry tone Paraña said:
"You drunk, what do you want from me?
Why pester me? Don't bother me.
You should have bought for the children
new pants and shirts and also books.
And me? Have you bought me a dress?
I am ashamed among Roma
to go 'round naked, in torn clothes!"
"Enough of this. Don't carry on!
Just wait! I'll buy...I'll buy for you
and for the children everything!
Just tell me what and it is yours.
But now, my wife, sing me a song
about how your Galun made sales."
He looked upon his lovely wife.
His wife in tears then dared to ask
"How much did you drink in the pub?
What did you drink with Romanis?"
Furious, Galun raised his arm
and beat his woman with the whip.

"That's enough. I give orders here.
You stupid head! You viper, you!

8

The sun has set. Fiery frills
fluttered from beyond the mountain
The sky past the horizon glows.
The distant fields await the crows
until the black and cawing flocks
descend on them to have a rest.
Dry wind, the eternal pilgrim,
Spun under the wheels of the cart
And raised up dust behind itself.

16

Paruña listens. In the distance
thunder pounding horses' hoofs.
She stares ahead, afar she sees
appearing in the darkness men.
On horseback they are rushing forth,
on horseback galloping full speed.
Paruña 's tired, frightened eyes
are watching these men coming near.
Her soul is filled with awful dread,
the dread all Gypsy travellers know.

17

One single thought crosses her mind:
Something terrible has happened
if at this time of night she sees
the men escaping on horseback.
They're like a storm, a hurricane...
and Paruña, with all her strength
begins to wake her husband up.
The drunkard sleeps in a deep sleep,
he sleeps and she can't wake him up.
"Get up, wake up, do you not hear
that they bring disaster to us?"
Enraged, his wife cries out to him:
"Wake up, you fiend, open your eyes,
you stinking drunk, you drunkard you!
That schnapps will be the death of you!"
At last Galun begins to stir.
What does this woman want from him?
He shoves Paruña to one side...

19

Suddenly from nearby resounds

the din of hoofs. Out of the dark
emerge the horses racing forth.
Upon their backs are men with clubs,
these Roma unknown to Galun.

20

"Hey! Roma! What is going on?"
asks Galun in a strong, rough voice.
"Where are you rushing from, you men?
Do you hear? Tell me what took place."
One of the riders turns around
and sees he is a Gypsy, too!
And so he calls out to Galun
"Quick, man, run! Hide and save your skin!
The villagers are on our heels,
They're after us like hungry wolves."

21

His guts burning, his head turning
Galun – like Paruňa – understood:
These unknown Gypsies, horse thieves they!
Of course the farmers are enraged!
They're after them, but we are lost
For they'll catch us instead of them.
We are Gypsies, we're all alike
We're thieves and scoundrels, one and all.

If these farmers catch sight of us
They'll kill us. May God be with us!
The horse thieves have long disappeared
Beyond the mountains, left no trace.

22

Galun saw black, fear blinded him.
He jumped down catlike from within.
Immediately he's on his way.
After him Paruňa climbs down
her crying Kosja in her arms.
Banuko has awakened, too...
Like a madman Galun tears off
new sleigh bells from the horse's neck.
He grabs the reins and jerks the horse,
to the side, jerks him off the road.
O'er mud patches he pulls his horse,
to somewhere it will not be seen,
Deep in the woods, a hiding place.
The old carriage wheels squeak and scrape
the old wheels wobble, oh, what fear!

Oh, you great pain of Travellers,
oh, you make life so hard for us.

23

In muddy forest damp and dank
darkness of night surrounds the four.
Exhaustion penetrates them all.
These poor Travellers, they are so cold.
Banuko sobs: "Mommy, I'm scared!"
He jumps down from his mother's lap.
Anguish has made the poor child quake.
"Will you be quiet? I'll beat you!"
Don't cry! Will you give us some peace?"
wheezes Galun in raspy voice
and with his whip he flogs the child.
Poor terrified Banuk looks on,
looks at his father and the whip.
Kosja is inconsolable
He sobs and sobs in mother's arms.
"We're lost!" whispers Galun in fear,
"Give him a drink, calm the boy down,
nurse him, cover him with canvas!"

25

Dashing toward them along the road
farmers like ferocious wolves,
angrily armed with clubs and sticks:
"Catch them! Beat them! Kill them all!"
These words resound in the night air,
"Those pharaohs have all disappeared!
You, search the forest! You, begin
to search near the water! You, here!"
Through the trees one can perceive
the outlines of men running hard..
They run, they rush, they dart, they pounce
Like ferocious, bloodthirsty wolves