

Hilario Ascasubi (1807–1875, Argentina)

Though he later identified with the countryside, Ascasubi lived his early years between the cities of Buenos Aires and Córdoba. In 1824, he founded the *Revista de Saña*. Using his poetry to speak out against Juan Manuel de Rosas, he spent many years exiled in Montevideo. His poetry, written in the first person using the language of the gaucho, is witty and humorous. His poetry represents a serious attempt to write using a vernacular language that before him was not seen as "literary." Ascasubi enjoyed the support of wealthy, educated intellectuals but also of indigenous groups, the poor, and, of course, the gauchos themselves. He died in Buenos Aires. **PRINCIPAL WORKS:** *La refalosa* (1872), *Trovas y lamentos de Donato Jurado, soldado argentino a la muerte de la infeliz Doña Camila O'Corran* (1848), *Santos Vega, o Los mellizos de la Flor* (1872)

The Slippery One / La refalosa

Molly Weigel, trans.

Taunt of a mazorquero and throat-cutter, one of the number besieging the plaza of Montevideo, to the gaucho Jacinto Cielo, gazetteer and soldier of the Argentine Legion, defender of that plaza

Hey, gaucho savage!
I don't lose hope,
and it's no joke,
of getting you to try
ting-a-ling and the slippery one.
I'll tell you how it goes:
listen up and don't be a scaredy—
for you, this little song
is sadder than Good Friday.

Any Unitarist we catch,
We lash down;
or else just leave him standing
while our comrades string him up
from behind
—mazorqueros, of course.
They bind
him with a double tether
so he's elbow to elbow
showing the world his birthday suit.
Savage!

Here's where your ordeal starts.

Later after that, a three-ply leather thong
will hug his feets, like a horse

fastened up to a stake so neat,
and while he's standing there
we have him begging loud;
half-teasing, we let him have
a little jab,
and when he screams, we sing
the slippery one, and ting-a-ling
without a violin.

But we follow the sound
in the brass sheath
when we whet
the knife, and test
the point
on the nape of his neck.
That chicken savage jumps,
which makes us laugh,
and when some start to tear their shirts
and cry,
that's the best of all;
we feel as lucky
as our dear President.
And the cackle of joy
spreads far and wide
when we hear the pretty music
and the fun we're giving
to the savage we've got tied.

At last,
when we think the time is ripe
and we've had our fill
of fun, we decide
to stop his breathing;
and to do it right,
one grabs a lock of hair
while another
holds him by the legs
like a young horse,
so if he moves
it's on all fours.

Meanwhile,
he's begging us in the name of whatever saint
might be up there in the sky,
and to comfort him and ease his fear

we cut across the veins
of his throat,
just a little below the ear,
with a well-sharpened blade
in what's called the mercy stroke.
And how does he say thank you?
—He starts to bleed,
a real treat,
and his eyes roll up in his head
from shock.

Ah, sissies!
We've seen a few
who bite themselves,
make gestures and faces
that'd make the savages scalp themselves,
then stick out their great big tongues—
among ourselves it's no disgrace
to kiss'em
and make'em half-satisfied.

What a high old time!
We laugh so much
we split our sides
to see how it even makes him shiver,
so we unte him
and loosen him up,
then pull him up short
to watch him do the slippery one.
He'll dance in blood
till he has a cramp
and falls down kicking
and shaking all over
—very proud—
till he's stretched out tight.
Inspired by this, we cut off a strip
of his skin that we know how to use
to make a razor strap.

Now we cut his ears,
his beard, sideburns, eyebrows, hair,
and scalped,
we leave him in a heap
to fatten up some hog
or vulture.

So, my Savage,
now you see—
a mere nothing has to happen to you
to make you scream,
“Long Live the Federation!”

Amenaza de un mazorquero y degollador de los sitiadores de Montevideo dirigida al gaucho Jacinto Cielo, gacetero y soldado de la Legión Argentina, defensora de aquella plaza. // Mirá, gaucho salvajon, / que no pierdo la esperanza, / y no es chanza, / de hacerte probar qué cosa / es Tin tin y Refalosa. / Ahora te diré cómo es: / escuchá y no te asustés: / que para veredes es canto / más triste que un viernes santo. // Unitario que agarraros, / lo estriamos: / o paradito nomás, / por atrás, / lo amarran los compañeros, / por supuesto, mazorqueros, / y ligao / con un matorador doblao, / ya queda codo con codo / y desnudito ante todo. / ¡Salvajon! / Aquí empieza su aflicción. // Luego después a los pises / un sobeo en tres dobleses / se le atraca, / y queda como una estaca / lindamente asegurado, / y parao / lo tenemos clamoriando, / y como medio chanciando / lo pinchamos, / y lo que grita, cantamos / la refalosa y tin tin, / sin violín. // Pero seguimos el son / en la vaina del latón, / que asentamos / el cuchillo, y le tantiamos / con las uñas el cogote. // ¡Brinca el salvaje viote / que da risa! / Cuando algunos en camisa / se empiezan a revolcar, / y a llorar, / que es lo que más nos divierte, / de igual suerte / que al Presidente le agrada, / y larga la carcajada / de alegría, / al oír la musiquería / y la broma que le damos / al salvaje que amarramos. // Finalmente: / cuando creemos conveniente, / después que nos divertimos / grandemente, decidimos / que al salvaje / el resuello se le ataje: / y a derechas / lo agarra uno de las mechas, / mientras otro / lo sujeta como a potro / de las patas, / que si se mueve es a gatas. / Entretanto, / nos clama por cuanto santo / tiene el cielo: / pero ahí nomás por consuelo / a su queja: / abajito de la oreja, / con un puñal bien templao / y añlao, / que se llama el quita penas, / le atravesamos las venas / del pescuezo / ¿Y qué se le hace con eso? / larga sangre que es un gusto, / y del susto / entra a revolver los ojos. // ¡Ah, hombres flojos / hemos visto algunos de éstos / que se muerden y hacen gestos, / y visajes / que se pelan los salvajes, / largando tamaña lengua: / y entre nosotros no es mengua / el besarlo, / para medio contentarlo. // ¡Qué jaranal / nos reimos de buena gana / y muy mucho, / de ver que hasta les da chucho: / y entonces lo desatamos / y soltamos: / y lo sabemos parar / para verlo Refalar / ien la sangre! / hasta que le da un calambre / y se cai a patallar, / y a temblar / muy fiere, hasta que se estira / el salvaje: y, lo que espita, / le sacamos / una lonjía que apreciamos / el sobarla, / y de manea gastarla. // De ahí se le cortan orejas, / barba, patilla y cejas: / y pelao / lo dejamos arrumbao, / para que engorde algún chancho, / o carancho. // Con que ya ves, Salvajon: / nadita te ha de pasar / después de hacerte gritar: / ¡Viva la Federación!