Platero is small, he’s shaggy and soft
So soft to the touch, you’d say he was made of cotton
With no bones. Only the jet mirrors
Of his eyes are hard - like two black crystal scarabs.
I turn him loose and off he goes to the meadow
And with his muzzle he barely brushes
The little flowers of pink, and blue, and gold.
I call him softly: “Pla – ter – o?”
And he comes to me at a cheerful little trot
With a jingling of bells that makes it seem
As if he’s laughing. He eats whatever I give him.
Ahh, but he likes mandarin oranges, amber-hued
Muscatel grapes, purple figs tipped with
Crystalline drops of honey.
He is as loving and tender as a child. But inside –
As strong and solid as a rock.
On Sundays. When I ride him along the lanes
In the outskirts of town, slow moving countrymen
Dressed in their Sunday best, watch him a while
And speculate: “He is a plucky one, like steel”
They say. “Like steel”
(Steel, and at the same time – silver – moon silver)
2. FRIENDSHIP

We understand each other well. If he wants to wander I let him, and he always carries me To where I want to go. Platero knows that when we reach the Corona pine I like to get close to its trunk, to touch it And look up at the sky through its massive canopy Of sun-dappled light. He knows that The narrow path that takes us through the grass lawns To the Old Fountain delights me, That it’s like a fiesta for me to watch the river From the pine hill, whose high little grove Reminds me of a classic scene. When I doze off, secure on his back, I always wake To find he’s taken me to one of his favorite views. I treat Platero as if he were a child. If the road is rocky or too hard for him, I get down and make it easier for him. I kiss him and play tricks on him And make him furious! He knows that I love him And bears me no grudge. He is so like me So different from the rest, I have come to believe He dreams my dreams.
The children have gone with Platero
To the brook by the poplars
And now they are bringing him back trotting
In the midst of silly games and helpless laughter,
Laden with yellow flowers.
It rained on them down in the valley,
That fleeting cloud which veiled the green meadow
With its streaks of gold and silver, on which,
Like a weeping lyre, a rainbow shimmered.
And from the drenched coat of the little donkey
The wet bellflowers are still dripping.
Fresh, joyful, sentimental idyll!
Even Platero’s braying sounds tender
Under the sweet rain-drenched load.
From time to time he turns his head
And bites off the flowers his big mouth can reach.
The snowy white and yellow bellflowers hang
For a moment from his greenish white drool
Then disappear into his round cinched belly.
If one could only eat flowers like you, Platero,
And not suffer!
April…..an enigma in the gathering dusk…..
The bright lively eyes of Platero
Reflect this hour of rain and sun….and as it sets
Over the field of San Juan, a cloud blushes
In the brief light and dissolves into rain..
Platero and I were coming down from the mountains, Heavily laden; he with marjoram, I with yellow lilies. It was April dusk. Everything that in the west Had been gold crystal was now pale silver, Smooth and luminous as a lily. Then, the vast sky is a transparent sapphire That dissolves into an emerald. As I returned, a sadness came over me. From the hilltop the village tower, Resplendent with its crown of blue tiles, Acquired a monumental aspect. At that moment, in the distance, It was the Giralda of Seville, And my longing for cities, acute in springtime, Found in the image a melancholy comfort. Return. Where to? From where? What for? Return. Where to? From where? Why? But the lilies I carried with me were more fragrant In the warm freshness of approaching night, Their scent was more powerful and at the same time More elusive, rising from the unseen blossoms As if they had become one enveloping aroma, Intoxicating the body and soul In the solitary darkness...... "Oh soul of mine, a lily in the shadow!“ I said. And suddenly I remembered Platero – There he was, I above, he below – I had forgotten him As though he were part of my body.
5. THE CONSUMPTIVE GIRL

She was sitting up straight in a sad chair,
Her face a dull white – like a withered flower
In the middle of the cold whitewashed room.
The doctor had prescribed walking in the country
To take the sun of that chilly May;
But the poor child could not go.
“When I get to the bridge” she told me, “You see, sir,
just over there – I can’t breathe.”
The childish voice, thin and cracked, would fail her –
As a summer breeze sometimes fails.....
I offered her a little ride on Platero.
Mounted on him - what laughter
From her sharp dead face,
All black eyes and white teeth!
Women gathered in doorways and watched us.
Platero walked slowly as if he sensed he was carrying
A fragile lily made of fine crystal.
The girl in her simple habit of the Virgin of
Montemayor, a scarlet cord at her waist,
Was transfigured with fever and hope....
She looked like an angel passing through the town
On her way to the Southern sky....
How handsome Platero is today!  
It is Carnival Monday, and the children  
Disguised as bullfighters, clowns, and dandies  
Are wearing masks and brightly colored costumes.  
They have dressed up Platero in a Moorish style,  
Lavishly embroidered in red, green, white and yellow  
Ribbons, done up as arabesques.  
Rain sun and cold.  
Colored streamers swirl along the pavement  
In parallel lines in the sharp afternoon wind.  
The masked revelers, stiff with cold, make pockets  
Out of anything that will warm their blue hands.  
When we arrive at the square, women disguised  
As lunatics, in long white robes, their loose black hair  
Garlanded in green leaves, pull Platero into the center  
Of their rowdy circle, and, joining hands,  
Dance merrily around him. Platero, hesitating,  
Pricks up his ears, rears his head, and like a scorpion  
Ringed by fire, tries nervously to make a run for it.  
But as he is so small the “crazy” women are not afraid  
of him and keep circling him, singing and laughing.  
Trapped, Platero starts to bray, which the little children  
Seeing that he’s a prisoner, answer his brays with their own.  
Now the whole square is one concert  
Of brass bands, braying, laughter, of songs, tambourines  
And..a burst of fireworks!  
At last, Platero, taking control of his destiny like a man  
Breaks free of the circle and trots over to me...  
He is whimpering, the rich tapestries slipping off of him  
....He wants nothing to do with Carnivals  
We’re not really suited - for that sort of thing.
The charcoal burner’s little daughter is as pretty
And dirty as a coin, with eyes of burnished black
And firm full lips behind the soot.
She is sitting on a roof tile at the door of a hut,
Rocking her baby brother to sleep.
Vibrant May burns clear with an inner sunlight.
In the intense quiet one can hear a pot boiling
Out in the field, the grunts of stallions
Rutting in the pasture, and the mirth
Of the sea wind in the tangled branches of
The eucalyptus trees.
Feelingly, sweetly, the charcoal burner’s daughter
Sings: “My baby is going to sleep...
In the grace of the shepherdess” there is a pause..
The wind in the treetops.....
“and because my baby falls asleep,
the lullaby singer also falls asleep..”
Again, the wind......
Platero, who is walking meekly among the burnt pines
Approaches little by little...
Then he stretches out on the dark earth,
And, to the mother’s long drawn out song
He falls asleep like a child.
Platero has finished drinking two pails of water
Filled with reflected stars from the well
In the barnyard, and was returning to the stable
Slow and absent-minded amid the tall sunflowers.
I was waiting for him,
Lying on the white-washed door sill,
Wrapped in the warm fragrance of heliotropes.
Humid with the softness of September
The distant field beyond the roof slumbered,
Breathing out the pungent breath of pines.
A huge black cloud, like a gigantic hen
Laying an egg of gold, placed the moon
Upon the hill. I said to the moon:
"There is only this moon in the heavens and no one
has ever seen it fall from the sky, save in a dream.."
Platero stared at it intently, and with a sound
Both harsh and gentle, he shook one ear.
Then he stared at me, and, absorbed in thought,
Shook the other...
9. SUNDAY

The resounding clamor of the little bells, now near,
Now far, ring out this festive morning
As if the vast blue sky was made of crystal.
And the countryside, already pallid,
Seems to gild itself with gorgeous notes
Raining down from the joyful chiming...
Everyone, even the watchman, has gone down
To see the procession. Only Platero and I
Have stayed behind.
What peace! What perfection! What bliss!
I turn Platero loose and leave him in the high meadow,
Then I flop down on the ground
To read Omar Khayyam under a pine filled with birds
who do not bother to fly away.
In the silence between two distant chimes
I become aware of the shape and sound,
The inner pulse of this September morning.
Gold and black colored wasps hover
Above the sagging vine loaded with muscatel grapes,
And the butterflies, which are mistaken for flowers
Until they fly again and seem to renew themselves
In a metamorphosis of bright colors.
The solitude is like a great meditation of light....
Now and then, Platero stops eating and looks at me.
I, now and then, stop reading
And look at Platero...
How pure, Platero, and how lovely
This flower by the wayside.
All the herds pass it by....
The bulls, the goats, the stallions, the men...
Alone, proudly it stands, so tender, so weak
Mauve and delicate on its lonely bank,
Unsullied by any impurity.
You have seen it every day on its green stem
When we take the shortcut at the foot of the hill.
Now there is a bird by its side that flies away
When we draw near – why?
Now it is like a tiny chalice full of clear water
From a summer cloud;
Now it consents to the thievery of a bee,
Or the fickle adornment of a butterfly.
This flower will survive but a few days, Platero,
Although the memory of it may be eternal.
Its life will be like one day of your spring,
Or one spring of my life...
Would that I could exchange Autumn, Platero,
For this divine flower, so that, day by day,
It could be an unending example,
Simply and forever,
Of life,
Our life......
11.  NOVEMBER IDYLL

When at dusk Platero returns from the country
With his tender load of pine branches for the stove,
He almost disappears
Under the vast drooping pile of green.
His step is short, neat,
Like a circus girl on a tightrope, delicate, playful..
He doesn’t seem to walk at all. With his ears upright
He could be a snail underneath his house.
These boughs that once held, in their living green,
The sun, the wind, the moon, ravens – how awful
Platero, that these poor felled things trail
In the white dust of the dry twilight paths.
A cool mauve sweetness hovers like a cloud
Over all things.    And in the countryside
That is now approaching December
The tender humility of the laden donkey
Begins to seem, like the year that has past,
Almost divine...
CONVALESCENCE

In the dim yellow light of my room
Where I am convalescing in the comfort
Of rugs and tapestries,
I hear, as if in a star-dewed dream,
Night sounds from the street:
Light stepping donkeys returning from the fields,
Children playing and shouting....
And in my mind’s eye I can see
The large dark heads of the donkeys,
And the delicate little heads of the children,
Who, among a chorus of brays, sing Christmas carols
In crystal and silver voices.
The town feels as it it’s enveloped in the smoke
Of roasted chestnuts, in the steam from the stables,
In the warmth of homes at peace...
And my soul overflows
As if a torrent of purifying waters was nourishing me,
From a hidden crevice in my heart.
Nightfall and redemption! Intimate hour,
At once both cold and warm, full of infinite clarity!
High above, distant bells peal into the stars.
Platero, caught up in the festive spirit,
Brays in his stall, which, at this moment,
With heaven so near, seems so far away...
In my weakness I weep, moved and lonely
Just like Faust...
There she is, Platero, black and sprightly
In her gray nest on the frame that holds the image
Of the Virgin of Montemayor,
A nest always respected.
The luckless bird is bewildered. She seems to me
To have made the same mistake as the chickens
Who, during an eclipse last week went to roost
At two in the afternoon.
Spring flirted with us by arriving too early this year,
But then, shivering, she was forced to take her tender nakedness back to the cloudy bed of March. It is sad
To see the virgin blossoms of the orange grove shrivel.
The swallows have returned, Platero,
But one can hardly hear them, as in other years when,
On the day of their return
They would greet the whole world and fly about
Chattering tirelessly in their fluty chirping.
They would tell the flowers all they had seen in Africa,
About their two voyages across the sea,
How they would sometimes lie on the water
With one wing as a sail, or on the rigging of ships...
They would tell of other sunsets, other dawns,
Other starry nights. Now, not knowing what to do,
They fly about, mute, bewildered, like ants who scatter
When their trail is trampled by a child.
They don’t dare to go up and down Nueva Street
In habitual straight lines with a little flourish at the end
Nor venture to their nests down in the wells, nor perch
By the white insulators in classic postcard fashion
On the telegraph wires that hum in the north wind....
They will die of cold, Platero
My morning nap is disrupted by a diabolical shrieking
Of children, which puts me in a bad mood.
No hope of getting any more sleep
I hurl myself out of bed in despair.
Then, looking out at the countryside
From my open window, I realize that all the racket
That woke me up was the work of birds.
I go out into the orchard and sing thanks to the God of
the Blue sky for a free and endless concert of beaks.
The swallow is twittering capriciously in the well,
The blackbird whistles on the fallen orange; in a flash
Of fire the oriole chatters from evergreen to evergreen
The green finch laughs its incessant cry
From the top of the eucalyptus tree;
And on the tall pine the sparrows argue furiously.
The sun casts his joyful spell in gold and silver
On the earth; butterflies in myriad colors
Flutter everywhere, among the flowers,
Through the house, now in, now out
To hover above the gurgling spring.
Everywhere the countryside is bursting open
In an explosion of rustling vigorous swarming life.
It is as though we are in a giant honeycomb of light
Which could well be the vibrant center
Of an immense fiery rose.
DEATH

I found Platero on his bed of straw, eyes soft and sad
I went over to him, stroking him, talking to him,
Trying to help him stand. The poor fellow quivered,
Started to rise, kneeling on one foreleg.
He could not get up.
So I straightened his leg on the ground,
Again patting him tenderly, and called the doctor.
Old Darbon, the moment he saw him,
His enormous toothless mouth sank into his neck,
His ruddy head swaying over his chest like a pendulum
"Not good is it?" I don’t know what he answered –
Bad luck, nothing can be done, some poisonous root,
Soil mixed with the grass...

At noon Platero was dead.

His little cotton-like stomach had swollen up
Like a globe, and his rigid discolored legs
Were raised to heaven. His bushy coat
Now looked like the moth-eaten tow hair of old dolls
That crumbles when you touch it
Leaving the hand with a dusty sadness...
Through the silent stable, its translucent wings
Seeming to catch fire each time it caught
The ray of light that beamed through the little window,
Fluttered a beautiful three-colored butterfly...
This afternoon I went with the children to visit Platero’s grave, a low mound in the orchard of La Pina At the foot of a round fatherly pine tree. April had adorned the damp earth With large yellow lilies. The finches were singing above In the green canopy mottled with blue, And their rapid, florid, laughing trill drifted up On the golden air of the balmy evening Like a limpid dream of new love. As soon as we arrived, the children stopped shouting. Quiet and solemn, their bright eyes following mine, They plied me with anxious questions. "Platero, my friend" I said to the earth, "if you are in a heavenly meadow, as I now believe, and carrying angel children on your shaggy back, is it possible you have forgotten me? Tell me, Platero, do you still remember me?" And, as if answering my plea, a Weightless white butterfly I had not noticed until now Fluttered restlessly Like a soul From lily to lily...
Platero, you see us, don’t you? Don’t you see
How the brook flows clear and cold through
The orchard water wheel like laughter?
How, in the last of the light, the industrious bees
Swarm around the green rosemary,
Now mauve, pink, and gold in the sunlight
That sets fire to the distant hill?
Platero, you see us, don’t you?
Platero, you see us, do you not?
Can you not see passing along the red slope
Near the old spring the washerwoman’s little donkeys
Weary lame sad in the immense purity that blends
The earth and sky in a single crystal splendor?
Platero, you see us, don’t you?
Platero, you see us, do you not?
Do you not see the children running playfully
Among the rockroses whose flowers perch on their
Branches like a vague swarm of white butterflies
Speckled with crimson?
Platero, in truth, you do see us.
Platero, is it not true that you see us?
Yes, you see me. Yes, you see me.
And I think I hear – yes, yes, I hear,
In the clear western sky, the whole vine-filled valley
Softening to the sweetness of
Your tender, plaintive, bray...
Dear trotting Platero, my sweet little donkey
Who carried my soul so many times,
Yes, only my soul –
Along the deep roadways of prickly pear,
Mallows and honeysuckle; I dedicate this book to you,
Now that you can understand it.
It flies to your soul now grazing in Paradise
Through the soul of our Moguer landscapes,
Which must have ascended to heaven with yours;
It bears, riding on its paper back, my soul,
Which traveling among the flowering briers,
As it ascends, becomes better, more peaceful,
Purer each day.
Yes, I know – when evening falls, I come
Slowly and thoughtfully among the golden orioles
And the orange blossoms,
Through the solitary orange grove
To the pine tree that whispers a lullaby to your death,
You, Platero, blissful in your meadow
Of eternal roses, will see me pause
Before the yellow lilies
That have sprung from your buried heart.