Study material for Semester II ----Compulsory Core English II

( General Course)

SLEEPWALKING BALLAD by Federico Garcia Lorca

*The Sleepwalking Ballad* by Federico Garcia Lorca is a poem about love, hope, crime and death. An air of mystery and eeriness pervade the poem as well as the title. The word ‘sleepwalking’ is suggestive of being in a trance or in a dream , far from reality. The poem progresses in a dream like sequence, with nothing being clearly explained.

The word ‘green’ which recurs in several lines carry different meanings in every line. In the beginning of the poem , ‘green’ implies freshness, youthfulness, hope, together with the beauties of Nature. But when the girl is described as having ‘green flesh’ and ‘ green hair’, it refers to a sharp contrast with life. It suggests a premonition of unpleasant events.

The girl dies after she had waited in frustration, for her lover, who was a smuggler. The poet describes her eyes as ‘cold silver’, like that of a corpse and the moon is called ‘gypsy moon’ , meaning it appeared wild and secretive, concealing the death of the girl. The sea is also referred to as ‘bitter’, because the girl dies in the sea.

The time was the break of dawn and the smuggler was heading speedily to meet his beloved. Stars were shining like frost; the fig trees were swaying in the breeze, while the smuggler was riding on horseback through the mountains. He encounters the second narrator in the poem , who is the father of the girl. The conversation between the two men reflects that the smuggler was severely wounded from his chest to his throat. He was hungry, tired and in pain. He yearned for a comfortable bed, with clean sheets and a warm blanket, for which he would trade his horse, saddle and knife. The ‘three hundred dark roses’ in his white shirt imply the blood stains from his wound. The father says “I am not me any more. My house is not my house” he means his daughter has given away her heart, soul and life for her beloved and therefore his identity is not that of her father.

The two men climb up to the high balcony to look for the girl. The lover asks “where is your bitter girl?” The word ‘bitter’ here implies miserable, suggestive of death. Words like ‘blood’, ‘tears’, ‘wounded’, ‘gall’ reflect the impending tragedy. They finally discover the body of the girl floating in the sea waves as the cold moon shines over it. The girl was waiting with hope, which was abruptly transformed to desperation and ultimately suicide. The poem ends with the arrest of the smuggler by the Civil Guards.

I