Poems by Papusza

(Bronisława Wajs)

### ****Untitled****

#### By Papusza

I love the fire as my own heart.

Winds fierce and small

rocked the Gypsy girl

and drove her far into the world.

The rains washed away her tears,

the sun – the golden Gypsy father

warmed her tears

and wonderfully seared her heart

Oh land, mine and afforested,

I am she, your daughter.

The woodlands and plains are singing.

The river and I combine our notes

into one Gypsy hymn.

I will go into the mountains

In a beautiful swinging skirt

made of flower petals.

I shall cry out with all my strength…

My land, you were in tears,

you were pierced with pain,

my land, you cried in your sleep

like a small Gypsy child

hidden in the moss.

Forgive me, my land,

for my poor song

for its Gypsy strains.

Place your body against mine, my land.

When al lis over, you will receive me.

(Extracted from an article by J. Ficowski in Interpress Publishing

### ****Gypsy Song Taken From Papusza's Head****

In the forest I grew like a shrub of gold,  
born in a Gypsy tent,  
akin to a boletus.  
I love fire like my own heart.  
The winds lesser and greater  
cradled the little Gypsy  
and blew her far away into the world...

The rains washed away my tears,  
The sun my golden, Gypsy father,  
kept me warm  
and beautifully tanned my heart.

From a blue stream I didn't take strength  
only washed my eyes...  
The bear wanders the forests  
like a silver moon,  
the wolf fears the fire,  
he won't bite a Gypsy.

[..] Oh, how beautifully by the tent,  
sings the girl,  
the fire burns!  
Oh, how beautifully, people, from afar  
to hear the Easter songs of birds,  
the whimpers of children, and the song, and the dance  
of boys and girls.

[…] Oh, how beautifully the forest rustles for us-  
sings me songs.  
How beautifully the rivers flow,  
they fill my heart with joy.  
How delightful to behold the water deep  
and to tell her everything.  
Because no one can understand me,  
only the forests and streams.  
What I'm telling here it has all long passed  
and took everything, everything with it-  
and my younger years.'

[**Gypsy Song Taken From Papusza's Head** / **Gili romani Papuszakre szerestyr utchody**,1950/1951]

### ****WATER THAT ALWAYS WANDERS****

Long gone are the times

When Gypsies wandered around,

But I still see them.

They are like running water

Always running away.

You can only guess

What she would like to say.

Poor water has no speech

With which she could talk or sing,

Only sometimes she whispers

A silver splash like a heartbeat.

A heartbeat of speaking water.

Only a horse on a meadow

Not far the stables

Hears her and understands.

Water looks not at the horse,

Always running away.

No eyes could ever pin down

Water that always wanders.

Translated by W.F.

**The water that wanders**

The time of the wandering Gypsies  
Has long passed.  
But I see them,  
They are bright,  
Strong and clear like water.  
You can hear it  
Wandering when it wishes to speak.  
But poor thing, it has no speech  
Apart from silver splashing and sighing.  
Only the horse, grazing the grass,  
Listens and understands that sighing.  
But the water does not look behind.  
It flees, runs away further,  
Where the eyes will not see her,  
The water that wanders.

(Qtd. in Ficowski J. *The Gypsies in Poland: History and Customs*. Trans. Eileen Healey. Warsaw: Interpress, 1990.)

### ****Earrings of Leaves****

The poor forest girls  
Beautiful as bilberries  
Wanted to wear   
Golden earrings.

Old Gypsy women and young girls  
Went wood-gathering in the forest.  
They lit a huge fire by the river  
And sang a beautiful song about  
Gypsy earrings: O my beautiful earring,  
You give me beauty,  
You break everyone's heart!

The wind [had] already blown out the flames,  
The river heard the song  
And carried it far into the world.  
They didn't know how or whence  
An oak leaf with oak apples  
Fell into the girl's lap . . .We'll make them wonderful  
Gypsy earrings!  
How beautiful you are,   
Earrings of leaves!  
The oak apples that you bear  
Like precious stones!

(Qtd. in Ficowski J. *The Gypsies in Poland: History and Customs*. Trans. Eileen Healey. Warsaw: Interpress, 1990.)

### Untitled

I no longer have a mother  
Or a black-haired father.  
I have been left alone   
Like a fallen tree.

But that tree  
Is not quite alone:  
The cold wind blows  
And touches its branches.

(Qtd. in Ficowski J. *The Gypsies in Poland: History and Customs*. Trans. Eileen Healey. Warsaw: Interpress, 1990)