

The Lament of Mara the Singer
by Guy Debord¹

I

Although my voice is the most beautiful,
Since what I sing and say
Is always resolutely rebellious,
I am only worth a maravédis.²

I would be worth two, if, like others,
I deigned, under the spotlights,
To play the false apostle
With celebrated singers.
The Stalinists of the “Song of the World”³
Will make their expensive records without me.
It is where anger rumbles
That I sing: “Break your chains!”

II

I go where I am welcomed
To come, for a laughable price:
Among the immigrant workers,
The Leftist with a fantastic plan.
Alone therefore, I have the right to be respected.
Paco, as much for his origins,
As for his success, is suspect.
La Magny⁴ is good for the dykes.

III

It is vile to be an owner,
Without managing one’s possessions.
Let all the people of the Earth

¹ “La Complainte de la Chanteuse Mara.” Signed the Pro-prisoner Committee of Segovia. Included in Debord’s letter to Gérard Lebovici dated 11 March 1981. Published in *Guy Debord Correspondance*, Vol 6: Janvier 1979-Décembre 1987 (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006). Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2007. Footnotes by Alice Debord, except where noted.

² Name of the restaurant (nearby Saint-Étienne-du-Mont) in which Mara first started singing in the 1960s. [*Translator*: in Spain, a *maravédis* is a small copper coin. Thus this line suggests: “I am only worth a penny.” Note that, according to Benito Barja, Debord met Mara Jérez in 1958, at a Parisian cabaret-bistro named La Method.]

³ Who had produced Mara’s record *Chants d’Espagne*, with accompaniment by Paco Ibañez on guitar. [*Translator*: released in 1970 by Le Chant Du Monde.]

⁴ *Translator*: Claude-Edmonde Magny was the pseudonym adopted by Edmonde Vinel (1913-1966), a French literary critic.

Know that I support them!

And now, in my campaign
In favor of the disinherited,
People dare to speak to me of Spain,⁵
And of stupid frivolities.

When I sing of the armed struggle,
People are abreast of it:
And these Plebes have been locked up
For three years. Who speaks of such things?

There is talk of leaving them there
For another twenty years.
Is this enough for me to be pressed
To sing about such prisoners?⁶

We're in a democracy
Under Suárez, and they want better.
Perhaps it is a little stale,
But there is still a little left.

A king⁷ is here, whose person
Spares us, at least, from Tejero.⁸
He only obeys, by telephone,
The calmer generals.

IV

Segovia is a prison
Where only libertarians go.
Mao said better who are
The true lords of the proletariat.

⁵ In particular, of libertarians imprisoned in Spanish jails. See the campaign by Debord and others to free them: "To libertarians," dated 1 September 1980, attributed to The International Friends, and eventually signed by 25,000 people. Published by Editions Champ Libre (November 1980), as part of the volume *Appels de la prison de Ségovie* (Appeals from the prison in Segovia), which was attributed to the "Coordinated autonomous groups of Spain."

⁶ Mara was contacted in late 1980 about contributing to an album of songs in favor of the release of libertarian prisoners held in Segovia and other Spanish prisons. Debord was never crazy about the idea. In his letter of 18 January 1981 to Gérard Lebovici, whose Artmedia group was interested in putting such an album together, he asked, "But what kind of Leftist is she?"

⁷ Juan Carlos I.

⁸ On 23 February 1981, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero led a failed attempt to stage a coup against the government of Spain led by President Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo.

Nobodies write songs
To free their comrades.
And they have approached me! Let's move on.
Why would I want to fix their mess?⁹

V

All my friends would criticize me
For being a star among such
Hoodlums, who, moreover, would pay me
More than the customary rates!

Songs lacking a political meaning,
A dazzling radicalism!
I am faithful to my stock in trade.
I just don't have the time.

The response I had to give
To the one who would deputize me
Is my sincerest refrain:
“*Soy una hija de puta.*”¹⁰

⁹ *Translator*: literally “Why would I sell their salads?” (*Pourquoi vendrais-je leurs salades?*).

¹⁰ “I am the daughter of a whore.”