

‘My father was a farmer, a rich man, and a good horse-man,’ he once said to an interviewer, ‘and my mother came from a distinguished family.’ He was the eldest of a family of two brothers and two sisters. The first years of his life were spent on the family farm. Owing to a serious illness soon after his birth, he was unable to walk until he was four. He was left with a slight limp hardly noticeable when he was grown-up. But, as his friend R. M. Nadal has pointed out, this physical handicap considerably influenced the formation of his character (without, however, spoiling his natural gaiety). Inability to join in other children’s games increased his powers of imagination and perception, and he expressed himself in make-believe – theatres, marionettes, processions, and dressing-up the old family servants and his younger brothers, thus drawing the family circle round him. With his first savings he bought a toy-theatre in Granada. The fact that there were no printed plays included in the purchase did not deter young Federico, who proceeded to write his own. From then on he never lost his interest in the theatre, which was to become an integral part of his work.

There were no spectacular intellectual achievements in his early years. His mother – once a teacher – taught him his first letters. Life was peaceful and happy on the family farm; there he lived in close contact with the countryside and the life of the village, rich in Andalusian tradition. He could hum popular airs even before he learned to speak, and from the old servants he learned folk-tales and popular *romances* or ballads. Much of what he was absorbing now would later be assimilated into his poetry. It was, as he later acknowledged, an initiation into poetic experience. The following cradle song, of which he was very fond:

*A la nana, nana, nana,  
a la nanito de aquel*