remote area of the coastal mountains. In what was left of the structure they found a stone fireplace with the words “Juan Jaro de Castro” carved on the rotted mantelpiece and what was left of a child’s cradle. The place haunted Ross and helped further inspire her story. The name on the fireplace would become “Lonjano de Castro, who happened to be the “son of Spanish grandee,” and she would locate the story near the town of Jolon – a small enclave to the south near the Mission San Antonio de Padua – where the poem’s main character rides “forty miles every Friday.” She would place his little homestead about 60 miles south of Monterey, somewhere in the Santa Lucia Mountains, in the area where Ross and her husband found the old house remains. It was an area rich with the culture of the Spanish and from the old Mission era that had lasted in California from the 1760s to the late 1820s. It was a place, after Mexico declared its independence from Spain and established a program of Land Grants in then New Spain’s “Alta” (“upper”) California, which was home to the glorious, yet short-lived time of the Ranchos. A time when a vaquero son might receive land from a Spanish father – as de Castro did in Ross’s story.

The poem, and the country that inspired it, ultimately became the basis for a novel by Lillian Bos Ross in 1941, The Stranger. (It was later titled, The Stranger in Big Sur and was made into a film in the 1960s called Zandy’s Bride.) The same year she finished the novel, Bos Ross copyrighted the words of her original 1926 poem as a song with musician Sam Eskin, who created the melody. The song version was titled, “The Ballad of South Coast.”

By William Reynolds
Horse wreck – he not only lost his wife but the child she was carrying, as Ross' original, last lines tell of his pain:

But the cradle and my heart are empty,
I never can go there again.

The original chorus of the song did not use the words, "South Coast," but rather "Monterey Coast," repeating in the first line, "But the Monterey Coast’s a wild coast and lonely." Ross changed the location to South Coast as well as allowing the editing of some of the original sixteen verses to create the contemporary song’s version. Over the years, performers have added their own stylistic touches to the song including the Kingston Trio, Bud & Travis, Arlo Guthrie, Tom Russell, and Dave Stamey among others. Probably the most renowned interpreter of "South Coast" is Ramblin’ Jack Elliott. His unique rendition and guitar work add a chilling quality to the story of poor Lonjano. Ramblin’ Jack performed the song in Bob Dylan’s 1975 film, Renaldo and Clara, actually taking de Castro’s name for his own character. Years later Elliott won a Grammy for the album South Coast in 1996.

As the story goes, he first heard the song in the early fifties, sung by a friend on the front porch of a house in North Carolina during a lightning and thunderstorm.

Today, Range Radio plays “South Coast” as it continues to be sung and interpreted by a variety of artists who carry on its sense of mystery, hope and desperation, keeping the legacy of Lillian Bos Ross’ timeless poem about a wondrous time in the West alive, written along a well worn trail, somewhere south of Monterey. A place where “the lion still rules the barranca, and a man there is always alone.”
My name is Lonjano de Castro
My father was a Spanish grandee
But I won my wife in a card game
To hell with those lords o’er the sea
In my youth I had a Monterey homestead,
Creeks, valleys and mountains all mine;
Where I built me a snug little shanty
And I roofed it and floored it with pine.
I had a bronco, a buckskin –
Like a bird he flew over the trail;
I rode him out forty miles every Friday
Just to get me some grub and my mail.

CHORUS:
Well the South Coast is wild coast and lonely
You might win in a game at Jolon
But a lion still rules the barranca
And a man there is always alone
I sat in a card game at Jolon
I played there with a half-breed named Juan
And after I'd won his money
He said, "Your homestead 'gainst my daughter Dawn."
I turned up the ace...I had won her
My heart, which was down in my feet,
Jumped up to my throat in a hurry –
Like a young summer's day she was sweet.
He opened the door to the kitchen;
He called the girl out with a curse
"Take her, God damn her, you've won her,
She's yours now for better or worse!"

Her arms had to tighten around me
As we rode up the hills from the south
Not a word did I hear from her that day,
Nor a kiss from her pretty young mouth.
(Chorus)
We got to the cabin at twilight,
The stars twinkled over the coast.
She soon loved the orchard and the valley,
But I knew that she loved me the most.
That was a gay happy winter;
I carved on a cradle of pine
By the fire in that snug little shanty
And I sang with that gay wife of mine.
But then I got hurt in a landslide,
Crushed hip and twice broken bone;
She saddled up Buck like lightning
And rode out through the night to Jolon.
(Chorus)
The lion screamed in the barranca;
Buck bolted and he fell on a slide.
My young wife lay dead in the moonlight
My heart died that night with my bride.
They buried her out in the orchard.
They carried me down to Jolon.
I've lost my chiquita, my nino;
I'm an old broken man, all alone.
The cabin still stands on the hillside,
It's doors open to the wind,
But the cradle and my heart are empty –
I can never go there again.
(Chorus)

Many artists have performed "South Coast" over the years. Each giving it their own touch, but Ramblin' Jack Elliott's unique version helped earn his album, South Coast, a Grammy in 1996.