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Paquito, la poeta, siempre es anarquista en el mejor sentido de la palabra

Federico del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús García Lorca is now considered one of the most beloved Spanish poets and the most important Spanish dramatist of the 20th century. In this essay, I investigate the life, career, and lasting impact of Lorca, a man of exquisite talent born in Fuente Vaqueros, Spain at the end of the 19th century. Lorca was a mediocre student, he struggled academically, but even so secured himself a law degree, studied music at an early age and began writing poetry in his teens which he recited at local cafes. Little did he know these would be the very activities to jumpstart his career as a painter, poet, musician and dramatist.

Using both primary and secondary sources, I supply contextual information about major contributors to Spanish culture and literature, while carefully describing how Lorca's work "resurrected and revitalized the most basic strains of Spanish poetry and theatre" in distinct and important ways (Stainton 1). Lorca's collections of poems, which remain some of his most famous works to date, are primary sources as are two of his notable plays: *Blood Wedding* and *The Public*. I analyze these texts for their evidence of Lorca's skill and writing techniques as well as his views on sexuality. Pedro Salinas' *Frederico García Lorca* is a notable secondary source that will provide a more personal view and commentary on Lorca's life from one who worked beside him as a member of the Generation of '27. He discusses Lorca's early life, his rise to fame and his maturation as an artist all the way to his final moments. From this perspective anyone

looking to know more about Spanish culture, dramatic literature, poetry and the Spanish Theatre of the early to mid-20th Century can educate themselves from the view of Lorca's life.

Federico Garcia Lorca was born on June 5, 1898, and grew up in Andalusia, Spain where he “sought throughout his career to juxtapose and meld genres”(Stainton, 2019). As such, the numerous forms of art, music and literature surrounding him in Spain would later contribute to the evolution of his work in the future. At an early age he moved to Grenada with his family where he attended both public and private institutions including the University of Grenada. While enrolled there, he became known more for his exceptional piano skills rather than his academic abilities- and was never quite concerned with whether he would succeed or fail. Consequently, it was after nine years that he completed his bachelor's degree. Due to his level of skill on the piano, it would not be surprising that he planned to be a musician and composer, but that was not the path he eventually sought out. “He turned to writing in his late teens” and in doing so possibly spearheaded the career that we speak about so passionately today (Stainton 2020). He later travelled to Madrid, Spain, where he stayed at the Residencia de Estudiantes, “a prestigious and socially progressive men's residence hall” in Madrid and it became his home for the next ten years (Stainton 2020). Though his friends described him as a “gay, smiling, indifferent individual who loved nothing better than to join in the students’ escapades or to recite his poems to an appropriate audience in the dormitory”, he was a sad “melancholy” person (Pattison, 40). Even though at a young age Lorca was someone who believed in the goodness of people and of life itself, this melancholia seems to eat away at that optimism and that is something that we see surface in his writing (Pattison 2020). Lorca, however, did not pursue

writing until his piano teacher passed away in 1916, publishing his first book, *Impresiones y Viajes*, in 1919 before moving to Madrid.

“.. Lorca lived during an exciting time for Spanish arts. He was a contemporary of other important cultural figures, such as Luis Buñuel behind the cameras and Salvador Dalí with his surrealist brush” (donquijote.org). In the 1920’s through to the 1930’s, in the Residences de Estudiantes, Lorca, joined by the surrealist painter Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel a filmmaker, lived together and formed the new Spanish avant-garde. These three, joined by other notable Spanish poets became known as “La Generación del 27” or less successfully, “Generation of the Republic”, “Generation of 1925” and “Generation of Dictatorship” and met for the first time in Seville in 1927. This group fought against the conservative Romanticism in Spain and as such, inspired by cubist works began to work with surrealist techniques which focused on man's subconscious mind as opposed to their relationship with nature. We see further evidence in Lorca’s play *Blood wedding* which is filled with various symbols which represents surrealist qualities. The old beggar woman is symbolic of death, and the moon seems to have a dialogue with the woman. The moon speaks of how there is no escape for the bridegroom and Leonardo while the beggarwoman calls out to the moon to reappear and reveal the couple. These symbolic examples describe how Lorca, inspired by his colleagues, moves away from Romantic qualities and towards Surrealism and Symbolism

“In his early years, García Lorca's poetry was marked by the Spanish Modernismo style—a style of particularly overwrought, melodramatic Romanticism—as well as by the Surrealism of Spanish artists such as Salvador Dali, with whom he collaborated closely” (New World Encyclopedia). Shortly after, Lorca combined efforts with Manuel de Falla, a composer

and instituted the first “deep song” or *cante jondo* festival in Granada. “His interest in *cante jondo* or *flamenco* was one aspect of a lifelong dedication to popular Spanish art” (Stanton 2020). Spanish Folklore, Andalusian Flamenco and Gypsy Culture, as well as *cante jondos* were often integrated in the creation of his lyrical works while at the same time surveying the themes of romantic love and tragedy (poetryfoundation.org).

Lorca’s “work varies widely between different styles, and as he matured as a poet, he developed more and more innovative and original forms that would revolutionize Spanish-language poetry”. (New World Encyclopedia). Lorca was later introduced to ¹Freud and was impressed by “theories of the subconscious and its role in governing the creative faculties”(DeStephano & O'Neill 2020). He embraced this and the modernist trends of surrealist work and incorporated them into his own. His impact spans the barrier of even language. Ted Hughes is an English poet, a translator and an English writer. He is often ranked as one of the best poets of his generation and one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. This former British Poet Laureate was inspired to translate the works of different men including Lorca and it is Lorca’s “vision of poetry that makes him one of the most important foreign-language influences on Hughes” (Yvonne 681). Hughes even published a translation of Lorca’s masterpiece *Blood wedding* in 1996.

Lorca, in 1933 had published and produced a dramatic trilogy which contains three works including two of his more famous ones, *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de Sangre*) and *Yerma*. *Blood Wedding*, his masterpiece written and performed in 1934, is the first play in the Trilogy and is later made into a movie. It is a folk tragedy that is written in three acts. “*Blood Wedding* was

¹ Sigmund Frued - “Founding father of psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness and also a theory which explains human behavior” (McLeod, 2018)

well-received in Spain and abroad, with an English-language performance in New York only a year after its first production in Spain” (Lind, 2011). It centers around an unnamed bridegroom who runs away from her wedding reception with a married man, Leonardo until “death” seeks them out and leaves all women involved alone to lament their losses. *Yerma*, produced in 1934 and published in 1937 is the second piece in the trilogy and is described as a tragic poem. *Yerma* in Spanish translates to barren. It is fitting as the story revolves around Yerma, the title character who is married to Juan and is unable to get pregnant. *Yerma* depicts common themes we see throughout many of Lorca’s pieces. One such theme includes Death in the figurative sense, death of passion, as well as in the terms of the absence of life. *Yerma* goes through struggles in the play, unable to bear a child and being stuck in a marriage without passion. These themes are not strange to Lorca’s style of writing.

Lorca believed that the theatre served to reach the people. “..²puede contribuir a afirmar su sensibilidad, aclarar sus ideas y elevarse moral e intelectualmente” (Taylor 33). True as this may be, his poetry which was mostly lyrical, is full of sadness. “Pity and sadness for humanity”, which upon his arrival to New York during the depression was only heightened due to the level of poverty and racial discrimination he found” (Taylor 33). It is evident here how Lorca’s work shows evidence of Surrealistic qualities in terms of its lyrical poetic language. The balance between humanitarianism and surrealism comes to light through Lorca’s desire for a utopian society. This desire comes from something very real, discrimination from others. When we pair this with surrealism which deals with the unconventional potential of the unconscious mind, the pity, or sadness for humanity as described before is understandable.

² can help to affirm your sensitivity, clarify your ideas and rise morally and intellectually.

In Richters book, he describes ³El público, where Lorca “gives dramatic form to his preoccupation with homosexuality”(Higginbotham, 2011). This begins to shed a light on the kinds of discrimination Lorca himself would have faced as a homosexual. He states that the “grotesque figure” can be identified multiple times through the constant character transformations, the confusion among gender identity and the ‘deviations in sexual behaviours’ (Richter, 2016). Being homosexual himself, we can see how Lorca’s portrayal of his characters as wanting to seek out an environment where they do not need to conform and can express their desires is reflective of his own desire for a utopian society. Lorca is described by Taylor as a humanitarian who desires a utopian society. She says that this remains so despite his surrealistic style of writing or the fact that he is considered a modern poet.

Romancero Gitano is a book of poems published by Lorca in 1928. The book is made up of 18 ballads focusing mainly on gypsy lifestyle, culture and customs. The ballads highlight the struggles of the gypsies, who are constantly victimized by their higher ups. The *Romancero Gitano* is the most famous book of poems done by Lorca. In 1928, the poetry collection “brought Lorca far-reaching fame; it was reprinted seven times during his lifetime” (Stainton 2020). Most if not all of Lorca’s works contain a specific level of symbolism. We see such symbolism in *Blood Wedding* when a beggar woman reveals that Leonardo and the Bridegroom will be ⁴found, she represents the inevitable death the reader is faced with by the end of the play. *The Public* or *el Público* is one of Lorca’s surrealistic works. In this play the wig, the room divider and the masks are all symbolic of societies need to hide what they consider to be weird, grotesque or hard to understand, which in this case would be the allusions to homosexuality. They work

³ The Public - Play by Federico García Lorca

⁴ They have fled from the wedding reception after the bride claimed to have a headache

against the Romantic qualities in terms of their focus on lyrical or poetic language in order to tell the story of the disruption of social constructions.

The Public, which shines a light on Lorca's views on Romanticism and sexuality in Lorca's perspective offers that "5otra cosa" and due to its lack of narrative proves hard to stage, and was not until after Lorca's death. This surrealistic work offers *something else* due to the fact that it breaks social norms by presenting Masculinity and femininity in a way that wasn't openly accepted. "Breaking down all the doors is the only way in which..drama can justify itself" (Lorca, Bauer, Lorca, & Lorca 1983 45). Though taken out of context it is these very words that describe what Lorca does in *The Public*. He breaks down barriers and doors in order to shine a light on the ignored issues in society. It is significantly provocative in that it deals with the pill that is hard to swallow as well as showing the contradictions themselves in the play. For Example, in the scene with the director and Man 1, the director asks, "What about Morals?", to which Man 1 replies in short that people will always be disturbed by something but nevertheless these things still exist (Garcia Lorca, 1978 6). This is reflective of Lorca's work. His works may not have been well received by everyone, but exist nonetheless for the very purpose of shining light on issues that need to be addressed.

In the years following the 1920's towards the mid 1930's Lorca did his fair share of travelling. In 1930 he toured the country with the theatre group by the name of La Barraca. This group was established by Eduardo Ugarte as well as Lorca himself with assistance from the government of the second republic in hopes of bringing culture to an area plagued with illiteracy. According to Maurer, this experience taught him what it meant to be a stage director as well as

⁵ eng. something else

expose him to a new kind of audience. Lorca had directed 200 plays in his time there before he left. In 1933 he journeyed to Buenos Aires where he produced a play of Lope de Vega and his work as a Spanish dramatist was truly recognized due to his beautiful use of art. He gained much praise in Buenos Aires and his plays were very well received. Argentine writers labelled him as the best envoy of Spanish literature. “He returned to Madrid full of rejoicing, confidence and gratification” (Salinas 173).

As was his custom each year, Lorca went to stay with his parents in Grenada in June of 1936. In July of the same year the Spanish Civil War began. According to Salinas there was no one who was less warlike than Lorca, he, however, proved to be one of the first victims of it. The circumstances surrounding Lorca’s death are quite vague but he was believed to have been ⁶ assassinated after having taken refuge with a fellow friend and follower of ⁷Franco. The work of Federico Garcia Lorca however would and could not be silenced, as his works continue to impact the lives of many around the world. Nevertheless it is safe to say that the world was robbed of a truly remarkable individual and is indeed a crime and in the words of Pedro Salinas “All crime is blind and stupid [and] every assassination...brutal and unjust”.

⁶ Most believed he was shot

⁷ Francisco Franco was a career soldier who rose through the ranks until the mid-1930s. When the social and economic structure of Spain began to crumble, Franco joined the growing right-leaning rebel movement. He soon led an uprising against the leftist Republican government and took control of Spain following the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).