

Federico Garcia Lorca . . . a spanish poet in translation

By JOCELYN W. BARROWES

One of the phenomena of the twentieth-century literary world is Federico Garcia Lorca. In recent years there have been numerous translations of his writings. In less than twenty-five years after his death he has become a legendary figure in modern Spanish literature. There is no doubt that some of his early popularity was due to his untimely and tragic death by a Falangist firing squad during the holocaust that broke out in Spain on July 17, 1936. But the time has passed when his popularity can be based solely on the fact that his death made him an individual symbol of the tragedy of Spain. The quality of his literary production has justified his popularity. Even if we put aside his plays in which he touches greatness, he still stands above most of his contemporaries.

He is no longer a show piece for communism, for if he were, he would have long ago been rejected by the non-communist world. He was a Catholic and a member of a rich family who were land-owners. He came to his audience free of any connection with any political organizations, or peculiar system of opinions. He was a singer of songs deeply fused with the tradition of the people of Andalusia, and he brought to the rich folklore of his native Granada, the intellectual standards of his period. He is the most Spanish and most provincial of contemporary Spanish poets, both in and out of Spain. His universal appeal, therefore, must be traced to the desire of down-to-earth human beings for the simplicity, the real, and the immediate values which are to be found in his poetry. The average reader of Lorca finds that his poetry is from and of the earth, which makes it possible for the significance and mysticism of poetry to be deciphered.

Federico Garcia Lorca was born at Fuente-Vaqueros, Granada, on June 5, 1899. He was disqualified from active participation in the normal equestrian and cattle activities of his

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community by a crippling disease which delayed his development. Because of this, he came under the influence of his mother, a school-teacher, who early developed his artistic and human sensibilities. His first companions were plants, animals, and insects with whom he carried on conversations in moments of loneliness. He developed a love of song, music, dance, and verse. He was exposed from youth to the writing of such literary giants as Plato, Aristotle, Cervantes, San Juan de la Cruz, Santa Teresa, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Gongora and others. Lorca grew up in Granada, the old Moorish capital of Spain, with its wandering gypsies, their songs, the many minute streams among concentric gardens, and in a rich tradition of folklore. He did not have to look for a tradition to write in. It was constantly around him. His experiences during childhood and adolescence were to develop his sensitive literary qualities as a poet. With this background, Lorca left Granada for Madrid and a university career in the spring of 1919.

To fully understand Lorca's poetry we must first have an understanding of the literary tradition of Andalusia, and of the Spanish ballad or romance, which began with the common people and was later developed into an art by ambulatory folk singers and poets. Andalusia has a popular tradition of guitar playing, love of ritual and ceremony, a delight in color and movements, harmony and sound, and most of all, a love of the spoken word, which is developed in the tertulia, or evening party. Andalusian balladeers often move from place to place reciting, singing, and telling tales for a fee. In eleventh-century Andalusia, Arabic poets de-

veloped the *casida*, which is a cross between a lyric and an epigram. In conciseness, freshness, and beauty, the *casida* rivals the epigrams of the Greek Anthology. *Casidas* differ from the classical epigrams, however, in being more daring and fanciful.

The Spanish ballad form developed with the *casida* and is today the richest form to be found in Spanish literature. The composition of ballads has continued from the Middle Age to present day. Most ballads are usually written in the octosyllabic line with a stress on the seventh syllable of each line, the even line assonancing, and the uneven lines being loose or free. Other ballads may incorporate various meters for the sheer novelty of rhythm. The Spanish ballad, like the English border ballads, has lived on the lips of the common people for centuries and has its roots in the epic narrative poems which celebrated the exploits of war, love, celebrations, games, passions, patriotism, and so forth. Much of the appeal of most ballads is derived from their being essentially dramatic.

Underlying most ballads is the lyric element which has brought fame to many ballads as it breaks through narrative objectivity, sometimes with force, without giving any indication that it is a part of the whole. Different methods are used to heighten the emotional experience. One of these methods is the use of repetition which may be twofold or threefold:

Green river, Green river!
Of christians, and of Moors
And your crystalline waves
Between christians and Moors.

.....
Fon-te-frida, fon-te-frida, fon-te-frida
and with love.....

Another device is parallelism which usually involves repetition, but which lays emphasis on some fact or story while working up the reader to a state of emotion.

In Castilla there is a castle,
That they call Rocafrida,
The castle they called Roca
And the fountain they called frida.

A third device may be a refrain which may vary from a meaningless phrase such as "hi-diddle-diddle" to the repetition of feminine names.

Three Moorish girls love me
in Jaen;
Axa, Fatima and Marien.

Three Moorish girls so lovely
went to pick olives
in Jaen;
and found them plucked:
Axa, Fatima and Marien.

And finding them plucked,
in Jaen
they returned and fainted
and lost their reason:
Axa, and Fatima and Marien.

Three Moorish girls so lusty,
three Moorish girls so lusty
went to pick apples
in Jaen:
Axa and Fatima and Marien.

The ballad tradition of Spain serves a twofold purpose. It provides all Spanish poets the means of communicating with the common man and the elite by making possible the fusing of intellectual ideas in the ballad form. It makes it unnecessary for Spanish poets to be always system building. Unlike some other countries, where poetry is easily divorced from the people as the literary pendulum swings from school to school, the ballad tradition in Spain remains as a constant source for new poets.

The main aspects of the Spanish lyric tradition which find a new culmination in Lorca's work are the medieval Arabic-Andalusian outlook of amorous poetry, together with the early popular ballad, or romance, and the broad body

of Andalusian gypsy art known as *Cante Jondo*, or "deep song."

Madrid of 1919 was in a literary ferment. The "ultraista" movement had declared war on the influence of Ruben Dario and his theory of *el arte por el arte* and the "generation of 'ninety-eight'" was advocating pure poetry. Lorca lived at the Student Residence while studying in Madrid. He is remembered by his fellow students, not as a scholar dedicated to his books, but as a lover of developing his artistic qualities, such as playing the piano, writing poems, reciting, and telling stories of provincial life in his home town.

In 1921 he published his first collection of poems called *Libro de poemas*. This book is filled with the freshness and optimism of the young poet before he is embittered by the world. *Libro de poemas* reveals the animal world as seen through the eyes of a child but with the retrospection of an adult. The sentimental tone of adolescence is prominent in most of these early poems. The following are two examples:

POEM

My heart is a butterfly,
good children of the field!
which caught by the grey spider of time
has the fatal pollen of disillusion.

LLUVIA (Rain)

Rainy evening in tired grey,
and progress goes on.
The withered trees,
My room, lonely,
and the old pictures
and the uncut book . . .
Sadness falls around the furniture
and around my soul.

The theme of maternal frustration is developed in *Cancion del naranjo seco*, (Song of the Dry Orange Tree.)

Woodcutter.

Cut away my shadow
Free me from the anguish
of seeing myself without grapefruits.

Why was I born between mirrors?
The day makes me dizzy,
And night copies me
in all its stars

I want to live without seeing myself.
And ants and burrs,
I will dream are my
leaves and my birds.

Woodcutter.
Cut away my shadow.
Free me from the anguish
of seeing myself without grapefruits.

Libro de poemas was a preview of the developing artist. In this book we find many themes. Some are treated with force:

Hospicio (Asylum)

And the poor stars
those that have no light.
What pain
what pain
what pity!
they are abandoned
on a confused blue
What pain
what pain
what pity!

Other themes are treated simply:

TOTAL

The hands of the breeze
caresses the face of space
one time
and another time.
The stars half-open
their blue eyes
one time and another time.

(Please See Page Six)