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NAMING PRACTICE IN FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA'S  
NEWLY DISCOVERED PLAYS

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While the playwright and poet Federico García Lorca is widely recognized as one of twentieth century Spain's most creative and original writers, no small part of this notoriety is the result of his tragic death at the hands of the Nationalist forces during the early days of the Spanish Civil War. Reaction to his untimely death was manifested in universal condemnation, followed by numerous translations of his best known works into English, French and other languages.<sup>1</sup> There followed myriad memorials, appraisals of his works and critical studies throughout the continent and in the Americas, yet in Spain editions of Lorca's works were impossible to locate; years later, in the mid nineteen fifties, the only readily accessible edition of his writings was the leather bound Complete Works published by Aguilar, a high priced volume well out of the reach of the masses.<sup>2</sup> This collection hardly justified its name, for the reader discovered several plays and poems of a fragmentary nature and the total omission of other compositions, the consequence of his heirs' decision to refrain from submitting for publication many items in manuscript form.

Lorca's brother Francisco, for many years a professor at Columbia University, steadfastly refused permission to publish many works over the years in light of themes and content, and

in some cases because of personal references to friends and  
 colleagues.<sup>3</sup> Since the death of Lorca's brother, a number of  
 these compositions have begun to surface, whether in authorized  
 editions with the family's approval, or in spurious editions  
 privately printed without official sanction.<sup>4</sup>

The newly-discovered works are similar in theme and content  
 to the general corpus of Lorca's production, although certain  
 ideas and themes are more incisively and openly presented. Two  
 works, one almost-complete play and a second comprising a single  
 surviving act, will be examined here. The first is entitled  
El público (The Public), the second, Comedia sin título (Untitled  
 Drama). While the dates of composition of these two plays are  
 believed to be some five years apart (the first having been written  
 in New York and Havana in 1930; the second in the summer to autumn  
 of 1935 in Madrid), there are such striking similarities in theme,  
 technique, viewpoint and even names (generic or specific) that the  
 leading Lorquian scholars have wondered if the fragment was perhaps  
 the missing fourth act of El público, although their ultimate  
 reaction is that the two are really separate compositions.<sup>5</sup>

Both plays present the theme of love in its polymorphic  
 expression, and both relate it to plays by Shakespeare: A  
 Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet. In each, the reader  
 contemplates the setting of theater within theater, as the fine  
 line of the frontier between theatrical illusion and reality is  
 crossed as characters onstage hold discourse with, and react to

or against spectators in the audience. In both works the author communicates an anguished dissatisfaction with the strictures that society imposes upon the individual and the great disparity existing between the monied class and the poor of the world, and offers a prophetic vision of impending social and political revolution. Lastly, in these works Lorca strives to alter the concept that theater is mere diversion, evasion, suspension of external realities that form the spectators' daily existence. Rather, the playwright attempts to "épater le bourgeois," to force the audience to view the chaotic sociopolitical events of the day, and even more, to force these viewers to look within themselves to perceive the same base motives and passions impelling individuals in their course of existence as they struggle against a system of social behavior in which religion and morality, conformity and orthodoxy are the main **pillars.**

Since both of these works are little known even after their publication in 1978, a brief summary will aid in an appreciation of naming practices employed by Lorca. The almost complete El público has five acts extant; act IV is apparently yet missing. In act I we view the Director in his room, greeted by white horses and then three men, who discuss his performance of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. They seem intent on delving into personality, man's social masks and the question of love, while the Director maintains that his theater cannot probe such subjects. Following heated discussion the Director is pushed behind a screen and

emerges as a youth, while Man Num. 2 emerges as a woman in pijama pants. Elena, who appears to be the Director's girlfriend, confronts him with the knowledge of his homosexual tendencies, and then departs angrily with the Servant.

The second act, titled "Roman Ruin," begins with two figures, one adorned with bells, the other with vineleaves, in a dialog of evasive love: "If I became an apple? -I would become a kiss..."<sup>6</sup> forming a long three-part verbal game. Suddenly the Emperor appears, seeking the One, that is, the unity in masculine love. Each of the figures claims to be the one sought, but that of the vineleaves strips down to reveal a plaster nude, recognized by the Emperor to be the object of his desire.

The third act presents Men Num. 1 and 2 discussing the struggle between the Emperor and the nude man, obviously alluding to their sexual encounter. Man Num. 1 fights with the Director over who will kill this corrupter (the Emperor). Suddenly the scene changes and we witness Juliet's tomb in Verona. Three white horses appear before Juliet and seek to mount her in order to attain the resurrection of the species. She refuses, declaring the "word of love to be a deceit, a broken mirror."<sup>7</sup> They continue a discussion about social masks and the ultimate reality of personality. The Director reappears, now as a ballerina, as Juliet falls asleep on her bier.

Act V opens with a nude man on a perpendicular bed, Christ-like in action and word. Students appear and discuss the rebellion on the part of the audience watching the performance of Romeo and

Juliet. We learn from these students that the audience not only discovered that a boy of fifteen was playing the part of Juliet, but that he was truly in love with the thirty-year-old actor playing Romeo, and that the actress supposed to play the heroine was found bound and gagged beneath the stage. The audience has refused to accept this situation and now demands the death of the two actors, but only after they have re-enacted this "love" scene.

The last act constitutes a dialog between the Director and the Magician, here the symbol of death. The former explains why he cast males to play the two lead roles, namely to make the point that love can exist beyond the normal parameters of a male-female relationship. However, the Magician indicates that love in any other form is by its nature unproductive, sterile: that love brings to mind "a desert landscape, a dirty mirror, a day that never dawns."<sup>8</sup> The act concludes with the appearance of the mother of the actor playing Romeo, and her entreaty for the return of his dead body.

The Untitled Drama likewise presents people from the theater as protagonists. Almost as a prolog, the Author appears to declare his intent to present themes and ideas of the real world, no matter how unpleasant. A spectator interrupts, asserting his right to judge a theatrical work. Whereas the latter would prefer illusion and fantasy, the Author avers that he pursues the goal of teaching, awakening the audience to life's circumstances. A Prompter announces that the company is about to rehearse A Midsummer Night's Dream; the Author refuses to attend, explaining what is for him

the profound meaning of this work: love is pure, involuntary casualty and can exist between any two beings, regardless of sex or even species. The scene is interrupted as the leading lady appears in pursuit of the Author, who rejects her advances. Suddenly the actor playing Nick Bottom declares that the revolution has begun. A woman in the audience shrieks that her children are at home, and a stagehand volunteers to bring them to her in the theater. A worker in the balcony stands up to defend the revolutionaries and is shot by the woman's husband. The act ends with a conflagration in the theater.

From the summaries of these two plays, the reader will have observed that very few names were indicated. This occurs because Lorca in these works (as well as in some of his other theatrical works, like When Five Years Pass) eschews specific name assignation for most characters. In these works the playwright offers the spectator a drama of ideas and obsessive passions, rather than one of character and plot development in the traditional sense. Therefore, the individuals populating these plays are conceived more as absolute generics, or even abstractions of impelling human desires. Yet, even so, they pulsate with life in the intensity of their suffering and their intimate truths. If we look at the list of names in the appendix, we find that the vast majority fall in this category of the nameless, a trait already noted by Professor Alvarez-Altman<sup>9</sup> in regard to Lorca's other dramas.

However, there are specific anthroponyms, and these may be placed in two categories: those deriving from characters in

Shakespeare's plays, and those comprising given Spanish names. Those referring to the Bard's characters are a manifestation of Lorca's interest in Shakespeare as a result no doubt of his visit to the United States in 1929-1930, when he came to New York and briefly studied at Columbia University. Though he fared poorly in classes and soon abandoned them, he did become familiar with the key writers of American and British literature through translations<sup>10</sup> by Leon Felipe. To be sure, his interest was limited to a few authors with whom Lorca felt great affinity, perhaps in part because of their known, or generally accepted sexual preferences. Besides Shakespeare, the poet Walt Whitman exerted a significant influence on the poet's personal development and his subsequent artistic creation, specifically his "Ode to Walt Whitman."<sup>11</sup>

The names borrowed from Shakespeare are employed not so much for the "foreignness" of the word itself, but because of the content of the plays in which they appear. More important for Lorca was the play A Midsummer Night's Dream, from which the playwright appropriated the characters of Titania and Nick Bottom to incarnate the primordial concept of love constituting a blind capricious force capable of being shared by any two creatures of nature. Lorca of course recognizes the futility of this "other" love which leads to nothing beyond the satisfaction of the flesh, and in no way does he advocate absolute or anarchical homoerotic or zoomorphic love. On the contrary, there is expressed the idea of a Platonic contemplation of physical beauty, mirrored in the attitude of



Man Num. 1, who fulminates against the effeminate, the perverse and the corruptors of youth.

The choice of the characters of Romeo and Juliet can be related to Lorca's constant equating love with death, as well as to the well-known practice in both Elizabethan England and in Spain of having young boys play the female roles. But here the playwright's intent is to convey the idea that the bodies incarnating the roles of lovers, the skeletons within the costumes, dare to express their mutual physical love, a forbidden love that the audience is unable to accept or condone.

The specific Christian first names employed by Lorca in the main refer to males. What is curious about these is that they are not given in the prefatory list of characters. Rather, these names appear in the dialog, as forms of address spoken by other characters, often in moments of anguish or emotional outburst. These include three saints' names (Enrique=Henry, Lorenzo=Lawrence and Luis=Louis), and one deriving from Germanic, from the time of the Visigothic reign in Spain (Gonzalo). One female name appears: Elena, derived from the Greek noun meaning "light," though she is referred to by another character as Selene, another Greek word signifying "moon." She is a symbol for womanhood, she who can conquer and cancel the type of love represented by the Emperor and practiced in one form or another by the Director and Man Num. 3. As a reference to the moon, her epithet comes to stand for death, which is a constant in Lorquian symbolism.

Why García Lorca chose these particular names cannot be determined for certain, just as while we recognize that many of his metaphors are highly original we come to realize that they are decidedly impenetrable. Yet I would suggest that the male names in particular serve to enshrine the memory of a friend or perhaps even more. This possibility is also suggested by the family's decades-long reticence to permit publication of these works until only recently, when no doubt the persons alluded to had already died. That one name appears in both plays--that of Enrique-- is significant, for given the five years that separate the two plays, the name seems to hold special preference for Lorca, and perhaps represents the onomastic commemoration of an intensely personal experience.

There is one name again not listed, but mentioned by other characters, that is wholly strange to Spanish, that of the stage-hand who offers to fetch the female spectator's children: Bakunin the Mad. The use of this name is a specific reference to an historical figure, the Russian anarchist Mikhael Bakunin (1814-1876), author of the treatise God and State.<sup>12</sup> The presence of his name is wholly in keeping with Lorca's perception of the state of affairs in Spain during the 1930's. For while anarchism as a political movement had long since died in modern European nations, in those industrially backward nations having a large peasant force, like Spain, Russia and Italy, the movement survived well into the 1930's.<sup>13</sup> Lorca's use of the name no doubt stems from

his exasperation with the sociopolitical situation on one hand, as well as a veiled condemnation of the Catholic Church as the perpetrator of those rigid strictures of morality excluding all but the "normal" male-female expression of human love that culminated in the procreation of the species.

Both El público and the Comedia sin título address García Lorca's same preoccupations with the levels of personality, identity and sexuality, the most intimate of interpersonal relationships wherein we bare our innermost self and desires to the "other." While the first play, couched in the surrealist mode of fiercely impenetrable metaphors and free associations, presents the reader with an obstacle course of interpretational difficulties, the second, written at a more mature stage of the author's literary career, comprises a denuded, pared-away exposition of theme, from which the surreal intervention of animals has been discarded.

Naming practice in both works reveals García Lorca's characteristic preference for the generic in depicting characters that are but mere abstractions of the emotional, sentimental and sexual forces at work at the core of human comportment. Specific names drawn from Shakespeare's arsenal of characters are significant because the works in which they appear present similar concerns and views of human identity and the polymorphic nature of love. Spanish Christian names, few in number, reflect, I believe, Lorca's tendency to transmute and thus perpetuate through literature the memory of individuals he knew, admired, and especially loved. For

have not writers over the centuries enshrined in the created work the figure and memory of those whom they have most loved? In the case of García Lorca, it could be the admiring kind of love of a kindred spirit like Walt Whitman, a platonic love of physical beauty, as with the bullfighter Ignacio Sanchez Mejías, or lastly, an actual but ephemeral carnal love, like with the painter Salvador Dalí, who has in print acknowledged this physical relationship. No doubt with further unearthing of Lorca's "underground" works and intimate correspondence, we shall come to discover the real-life sources for many of these specific names and thus come to understand more fully Lorca's process of name assignation.

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## APPENDIX

Cast of Characters in El público (1930)

Criado (Servant)  
 Director = Enrique (Henry)  
 Caballo (Horse)  
 Hombre No. 1 (Man Num. 1) = Gonzalo  
 " No. 2 (Man Num. 2)  
 " No. 3 (Man Num. 3)  
 Elena (Helen) = Selene (Moon)  
 Figura de Cascabeles (Figure with bells)  
 Figura de Pámpanos (Figure with vineleaves)  
 Centurión  
 Julieta (Juliet)  
 Caballo Blanco (White Horse)  
 Caballo Negro (Black Horse)  
 Estudiante No. 1 (Student Num. 1)  
 " No. 2  
 " No. 3  
 " No. 4  
 Desnudo (Nude Man)  
 Enfermero (Male Nurse)  
 Dama No. 1 (Lady Num. 1)  
 " No. 2  
 " No. 3  
 " No. 4  
 Muchacho No. 1 (Boy Num. 1)  
 Los Ladrones (The Thieves)  
 Traspunte (Prompter)  
 Prestidigitador  
 Señora (Lady, mother of Gonzalo)

Cast of Comedia sin título (1935)

Autor (Author) = Lorenzo (Lawrence)  
 Espectador No. 1 (Spectator Num. 1) = Luis (Louis)  
 " No. 2 = Enrique (Henry)  
 Espectadora No. 1 (Lady Spectator Num. 1)  
 " No. 2  
 " No. 3  
 Apuntador (Prompter)  
 Criado (Servant)  
 Actriz (Actress: Titania, then Lady Macbeth)  
 Nik Botton  
 Joven (Youth)  
 Hombre vestido de negro (Man dressed in black)  
 Leñador (Woodcutter)  
 Tramoyista (Stagehand) = Bakunín el Loco (Bakunin the Mad)  
 Obrero (Worker)