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AN ONOMASTIC CALENDAR OF SAINTS IN LORCA'S 
ROMANCERO GITANO 

K. M. Sibbald

There are some eighty references to individually named saints in Lorca's collected works. To explain them away by pointing out that Lorca was a Catholic writing in a Catholic country is facile and unconvincing. If Lorca did acknowledge that he was a poet by "the grace of God - or the Devil" he went on immediately to point out that he was also a poet "by the grace of technique, effort and his ability to realise what a poem was." By this he meant his almost instinctive opportunism which made use of a tremendous capacity for assimilating from all possible sources anything that might be of value to his own poetry. Nothing was gratuitous in the creation of the poetic image, every reference made more possible what he called the "equestrian leap of the imagination" (OCI 1008) which unified two disparate worlds. Hagiology provided Lorca with a framework of references or images readily grasped by his readers, with which to construct a
poetic reality totally his own. In passing it should be
made clear that he used gypsy lore, classical mythology,
egro spirituals and even local gossip in much the same way,
that is, as a theorem by which the reader moves from hypothesis
to conclusion without need of an intermediary. 2

Lorca explained the process of image-making in a letter
to his friend the artist, Sebastián Gasch, in 1927, in which
he commented on the elaboration of a series of drawings which
he had just finished:

Unos dibujos salen así, como las metáforas más bellas,
y otros buscándolos en el sitio donde se sabe de seguro
que están. Es una pesca. Unas veces entra el pez solo
en el cestillo y otras se busca la mejor agua y se lanza
al mejor anzuelo a propósito para conseguir. El anzuelo
se llama realidad. Yo he pensado y hecho estos dibujitos
con un criterio poético-plástico o plástico-poético, en
justa unión. Y muchos son metáforas lineales o tópicos
sublimados, como el "San Sebastián". He procurado escoger
los rasgos esenciales de emoción y de forma, o de super­
realidad y super-forma, para hacer de ellos un signo que,
como llave mágica, nos lleve a comprender mejor la reali­
dad que tienen en el mundo (OCII 1223).

There is a clear connexion between these drawings and the
poetry that Lorca was writing in the middle nineteen-twenties.
That connexion is St. Sebastian, the subject of one of the
drawings. In 1926 Lorca had prepared a series of lectures
precisely on the "Myth of Saint Sebastian" and his imagination
had been so fired by his study of the many representations in
Western art of that Saint's martyrdom that St. Sebastian
became for him an image of the writing of poetry. This he described to another friend, the poet Jorge Guillén, as "true poetry is love, effort and renunciation (St. Sebastian)" (OCII 1145).

Since Lorca obviously made no distinction between the making of images in drawing or in poetry, neither should we. The saints' names which occur so frequently in his poetry are signs or magical keys to a reality which Lorca sought to recreate in that poetry.

In this context a Catholic environment certainly provided the common-place from which Lorca would make his lineal metaphors. A devoutly religious family life and an education at the hands of both the Padres Escolapios and the Jesuits ensured that Lorca had easy access to the Roman Missal with its Calendar of Saints' days observed in Spain. All the saints mentioned in his poetry are to be found here or in Father Ribadeneira's work Flos sanctorum or Libro de las vidas de los Santos. The latter, heavily dependent on Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend, had become a classic found in most nineteenth-century middle-class Catholic homes in Spain. It seems a reasonable assumption that Lorca knew the work. A more visual source of saintly inspiration can be found in Lorca's excursions during his undergraduate years to the chief shrines, churches and convents in Castile and Galicia. Thus, the child whose favorite game at five was
to play at saying Mass and giving sermons based on religious
texts and the lives of the saints, grew into a man who described
himself as an enthusiastic liturgist. As such he was receptive
to a less orthodox, but nevertheless important, influence to
poets like Lorca, who use the vernacular and speech patterns
of everyday usage, that is, the relatively common occurrence
of saints' names in Spanish to describe certain natural pheno-
mena or to invoke aid or protection in dealing with them.
From his youth Lorca must have heard the myriad stars in the
Via Lactea compared to the pilgrim route to St. James in
Compostela; he may have collected the white pebbles on the
beach called familiarly the eyes of St. Lucy, he certainly
enjoyed the sweetmeats known as St. Clare's egg-yolks; in his
hearing too, a succession of nursemaids, cooks and servants
might well have crossed themselves and invoked St. Barbara's
protection at the outset of a thunderstorm, or teased one
another on the need for St. Christopher's help in finding a
suitable husband.

The sources of the common-places that are saints' names
are clear enough. What Lorca did was to sublimate the common-
place of the name and by means of his magical keys open to the
reader a world full of super-realities. Nowhere is this more
obvious than in the collection *Romancero gitano*. Here four
saints, James, Joseph, George and Christopher are mentioned by name, another four, Eulalia, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael have whole poems dedicated to them. The reason for this seeming abundance is obvious: his *Romancero gitano* was an exercise in the creation of myth for Lorca. His description of one poem in the collection may safely be applied to the whole book:

...procuro armonizar lo mitológico gitano con lo puramente vulgar de los días presentes, y el resultante es extraño, pero creo que de belleza nueva. Quiero conseguir que las imágenes que hago sobre los tipos sean entendidas por éstos, sean visiones del mundo que viven, y de esta manera hacer el romance trabado y sólido como una piedra (OCII 1137).

What better way of creating a new mythology than by using the readily accessible signos or images of the Catholic religion?

In the *Romancero gitano* the heavenly hierarchy is acknowledged in a poetic context. The four saints George, Christopher, James and Eulalia are certainly poetico-plastic images which are "magical keys" to the super-realities of Lorca's poetry. However, it is in the ballads dedicated to the Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, where the naming process best exemplifies Lorca's gift for fusing disparate realities into a poetic unity. In consequence I have considered first the two saints now demoted from the Calendar, St. George and St. Christopher, then those saints of primarily Spanish significance,
St. James and St. Eulalia, and finally, as a unit composed of separate entities, the three Archangels, from which the ballad dedicated to St. Raphael stands out as the best example of how Lorca used saints' names to extend the poetic image.

St. George:

Legends of St. George exist in a great variety of forms in none of which have scholars been able to detect one single reliable detail. Nevertheless, if no historical particular of his life has survived, he continues to enjoy popularity. The thing that everyone knows about St. George, the killing of the dragon to rescue a fair maiden, was a medieval legend popularised by Voragine and thereafter a favourite subject in Western art where St. George the warrior saint was normally represented as a good-looking young man, clad in armour, very ably dealing with the dragon. Lorca certainly knew of such representations of St. George for he first uses this Saint's name not in the Romancero gitano, but in the first complete manuscript edition of 1925 of his play Mariana Pineda in a context which leaves no room for doubt as to the purpose of the image. Mariana, the liberal heroine of Granada, is in danger of her life, deserted by her lover Don Pedro de Sotomayor who has fled to England, she is at the mercy of the wicked Pedrosa. To the end, however, she believes that help will come
and in a final rapture of romantic love, declares:

Don Pedro vendrá a caballo
como loco cuando sepa
que yo estoy encarcelada...
El vendrá como un San Jorge
de diamantes y agua negra,
al aire la deslumbrante
flor de su capa bermeja. (OCI 207)

This is clearly the maiden's cry for deliverance from the dragon. Two years later, in 1927, Lorca published the poem "Muerto de Amor," which forms part of _Romancero gitano_. Here the poet has sublimated the common-place for there are no maidens and no dragons, just a one-line reference to the Saint by name:

Sólo por los corredores
las cuatro luces clamaban
con el furor de San Jorge (OCI 422).

It is a perfect lineal image in Lorquian terms. In a poem on a battle between two warring gypsy factions in which one gypsy dies and others are wounded, the reference to St. George, the warrior-saint and patron of soldiers, translates the ferocity of the battle and the comeliness of its gypsy heros.

St. Christopher:

Much less reputable a saint than George is Christopher and Lorca with a sense of humour unimpaired by religious convictions made St. Christopher the anti-hero of another poem
in *Romancero gitano*, "Preciosa y el aire." Here Lorca identifies the personified wind with a 'great naked St. Christopher'. This is St. Christopher of Lycia, the famous Christ-Bearer of legend who was probably martyred in Asia Minor in the third century. It was a common medieval belief that he who looked on an image of St. Christopher would suffer no harm that day, which led to the painting of large pictures of the saint on church walls. Lorca undoubtedly knew Alonso Berruguete's famous statue of St. Christopher and the Christ-child; he must also have seen the many local Saint Christophers in his native Andalusia, among them the fine fresco of the Saint in the church of Santa Maria in Carmona; and as a Spanish Catholic, he may have revered the relics of the Saint for an arm of St. Christopher is preserved in Compostela and a jaw-bone in Astorga. A visual starting point for the metaphor is consequently not lacking. In Lorca's poem, however, the augmentative form *Cristobalón* is used. Certainly all the legends concerning St. Christopher point to the fact that he was a man of enormous stature. We should remember, nevertheless, that 'Cristobalón' is the popular form of address of the hirsute saint in Andalusia where not spiritual but practical help is invoked, for St. Christopher is one of the heavenly match-makers, the saint who finds a marriage-partner and then keeps the union
happy and fertile. Undoubtedly the popular superstition is due to a puritanical refurbishing of the Saint's image by the Church for, according to Voragine, Christopher, before his conversion was a dissolute impious man named Reprobus who spent most of his time in the company of thieves and harlots. That this less than Christian element was in Lorca's mind is clear from his early poem "Madrigal de verano" where the poet asks the gypsy girl Estrella:

¿Cómo no has preferido a mis lamentos
los muslos sudorosos
de un San Cristobalón campesino, lentos
en el amor y hermosos?

Thus, in 'Preciosa y el aire', it is the Saint's connexion with sex which dominates for the wind-saint figure asks Preciosa:

-Niña, deja que levante
tu vestido para verte.
Abre en mis dedos antiguos
la rosa azul de tu vientre.

and pursues the girl with a burning sword of fire.

In onomastic terms the ballad is perfect. To make his lineal metaphor which recreates the panic experienced on contact with a supernatural force, here the wind, Lorca has paganised the Christian image. The result is a composite creation which takes into account the early Reprobus legend as St. Christopher is metamorphosed, first into a satyr and finally into the great god Pan himself. This named natural force pursues
the girl whose name, Preciosa, is a chimerical name, readily recognisable as the traditional *piropo* or masculine compliment to feminine beauty.

**St. James:**

Coincidentally the rather disreputable St. Christopher shares his name day with another saint, this time one of impeccable odour, the Apostle St. James the Greater. The date is important for St. James is the patron of Spain and 25 July is consequently a national holiday known to all. The first reference to St. James in Lorca's work is characteristically to the day and not to the legend: We are told that the occasional poem dedicated to St. James, "Santiago," was completed on the Saint's feast day, that is: 25 July 1918 (OCI 42). That Lorca's readers know on which day the feast of St. James is celebrated is of primal importance in two ballads in *Romancero gitano*. In one, "Romance del emplazado," the gypsy Amargo is placed under a curse and given two months to live from 25 June. The outcome is inevitable but the anguish of waiting is intensified by the reference to St. James' day that is, 25 July, one month before Amargo is to die: time is passing and the accursed gypsy is growing weaker. St. James the Moorslayer so often portrayed in Spanish churches energetically laying about him, in this poem brandishes an ineffectual sword
of mist whilst the heavens look on in impotent silence. One month later, to the day, Amargo takes to his bed and dies.

Quite different in tone is "La casada infiel" where again the feast day of St. James is mentioned. Here it is a mid-summer festival with revelries likely to lead to sexual adventures such as the one described in the poem. St. James is the patron of Spain and what happens on his night ought to have a particularly Spanish sanction. The Spanish man has a special obligation on this of all nights to live up - or down - to his moral code. Since his manhood has been gulled by the woman's deception, all he can do is choose not to fall in love but to pay for her services, thus treating her as the prostitute he believes her to be:

Fue la noche de Santiago
y casi por compromiso..
Me porte como quien soy.
Como un gitano legítimo.
La regale un costurero
grande, de raso pajizo,
y no quise enamorarme
porque teniendo marido
mi dijo que era mozuela
cuando la llevaba al río (OCI 407)

The gypsy code of honour remains inviolate on his patron's feast.

So far I have been concerned with short references to individual saints in the poems of the Romancero gitano, that is,
the lineal metaphors which intensify the theme or mood of a particular poem. It is time to consider those poems dedicated in their entirety to individual saints where Lorca has sublimated the commonplace signified by the name of a familiar saint so that the whole poem becomes a lineal metaphor for a poetic super-reality.

St. Eulalia:

In this context the poem "El martirio de Santa Olalla," stands apart from the rest because it is, as Lorca pointed out, an historical rather than an imaginative romance (OCI 433). Eulalia was the most celebrated virgin martyr of Spain, a twelve-year old girl of Mérida who, during Maximian's persecution rebuked the local magistrate for his activities against the Christians. He, in turn, tried to induce her to show honour to the gods and on her refusal she was tortured and burnt to death. In Spain she still enjoys a popular cult both in Oviedo where her remains are said to lie, and in Mérida where she is revered as the protector of the city having once delivered it from plague. Visitors are taken to the scene of her martyrdom, a hermitage not far from the city of Mérida, built on the remains of a temple to Mars. Scholars may not give much credence to the legends which surround Eulalia but poets certainly found her worthy of their attention. The
Spanish poet Prudentius wrote a hymn in praise of her beauty, both physical and spiritual, and when describing her martyrdom, added, with poetic licence, that a white dove seemed to fly out of her mouth and a fall of snow cover her body at death. Veneration for the saint spread from Spain to Africa, Gaul, England and Italy. In ninth century Wallonia the Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie was composed and they still remain the earliest examples of Romanesque poetry that we have. In England, St. Bede in his hymn to St. Etheldreda told how "scorched by fierce flame, Eulalia endures." These then are the bases for Lorca's poem: an historical romance with a literary history.10

From literary history if not from fact Lorca has created a lineal metaphor of martyrdom sustained throughout the three parts of the poem. This is no mystical exaltation but an account of the terror and cruelty proper to martyrdom. In addition, Eulalia's virginity and the details of her torture (her hands and breasts were cut off before she was burnt to death) underscore the sense of sexual outrage for the reader. In Part 1, the Panorama of Mérida, the Saint's martyrdom is prefigured in the descriptions of the town and its natural surroundings. Unlike the summer night of St. James elsewhere, that dedicated to St. Eulalia is in December. Thus in the poem it is a cold dark night just before dawn wherein the only
sounds are the future Saint's shrieks of agony and a rooster's crowing announcing, as on another occasion, betrayal and death. The surroundings reflect the impending martyrdom: in nature the trees are barren and the life-force, water, is frozen into immobility, whilst the man-made structures, broken-nosed statues and headless torsos, mirror Eulalia's suffering. Everything traditionally associated with youth and potency is suppressed: the images of bull and horse and the reality of Eulalia's twelve years are lost in the darkness and agony as Mérida is crowned with the traditional images of virgin martyrdom in art, the spikenard and the bramblebush. In Part II the actual martyrdom takes place. As elsewhere, Lorca completes the Christian myth with a pagan reference: Eulalia becomes Flora, the Sabine goddess of the flower of youth and its pleasures. Not for Eulalia, however, the mummery and licentious behaviour normally associated with fertility festivals, for, as her sex trembles like a bird caught in the brambles, inhuman centurions of gray flesh and silver armour, cut off her breasts, supreme image of a woman's sexuality. Part III, Inferno and Glory, is a symphony in black and white: traditionally black for the forces of evil and white for the martyrs. The blackness of the inky darkness, of the burnt and disfigured copses which resemble tailors' dummies, and of the dullness of the
soldiers' nickel pikes, is banished by the whiteness of the snow which reflects both Eulalia's virginity and spiritual purity. Nature, now freed from her immobility, in the form of the dawn chorus, takes up the **Sanctus** as the Saint is received into Heaven. Lorca has started from a commonplace in the Catholic Missal and made a lineal metaphor of the martyrdom. The actual sublimation of the commonplace, however, occurs in another poem in *Romancero gitano*, the "Romance de la Guardia Civil." Both poems were written within a short time of each other and it is clear from Lorca's letter to the poet Guillén at the time of their composition, in which he describes the Civil Guard as Roman centurions and St. Eulalia as the gypsy saint of Mérida, that the super-reality had been realised in his own mind. In the "Romance de la Guardia Civil" the gypsy stronghold of Jerez de la Frontera is looted by the Civil Guard and many barbarous atrocities are committed. One victim is Rosa de los Camborios who "gime sentada en su puerta,/ con sus dos pechos cortados/ puestos en una bandeja." (OCI 429). St. Eulalia is the magical key to this super-reality for by means of a lineal metaphor of martyrdom Lorca transforms Rosa into a gypsy saint and martyr who figures in no Church Calendar: the sack of Jerez is another Massacre of the Innocents in which the Virgin and St. Joseph tend the wounded and the dying, and
the poetic super-reality is the transfiguration of the gypsy as the victim of society.

St. Michael; St. Gabriel; St. Raphael:

Evidently Lorca had his preferences among the heavenly host; friends have testified to his special veneration of St. Michael, St. Gabriel and St. Raphael. That veneration is to be found in the poems dedicated to the three Archangels. In onomastic terms, however, the poems are especially important for they give support to J. B. Rudnyckj's "redende Namen" theory of how relevant the naming process is to place of action, to character and to form in poetry. Furthermore, the same poems exemplify well two of the naming techniques outlined by G. Alvarez-Altman: the mythological and the attributive/diactinic categories. Whilst the clearest manifestation of these principles is to be found in "San Raphael," two general comments applicable to all three poems are in order.

According to Dionysius the Archangels belong to the third Order, that of the Principalities: in this capacity they are the guardians of cities. Lorca's descriptions of the Archangels comply with doctrine for the poems are extended, composite metaphors which recreate in poetry the reality of the Andalusian cities of Granada, Seville and Córdoba. In each case the naming process is relevant to the place of action. For example,
Lorca's St. Michael refers to the image in the hermitage San Miguel el Alto to be found at the top of the steep Cerro del Aceituno which winds up behind Granada's Albaicín. Both the site of the hermitage and the constant repetition in the poem of "pro el monte, monte, monte" (OCI 410) are in harmony with the mythological aspect of the Saint. According to legend St. Michael's various apparitions have always occurred in high places and his name is associated with geographical locations in high terrain, Monte Gargano in Southern Italy, Mount-Saint Michel in France, St. Michael's Mount in England and at the Stranberg near Stuttgart in Germany.

As princes of the celestial hierarchy the Archangels are man's defenders against the devil's snares, particularly those involving carnal desire. It is in character with their names, therefore, that Lorca should neutralise the masculinity of the Archangels. St. Michael is thus a "domesticated" saint with petticoats and lace to cover his beautiful thighs. Bound himself to inaction by his balcony and stained glass windows, he nullifies the sensual temptations of the "manolas" who participate in the "romería" associated with his feast-day. In "San Rafael" the masculine element is also neutralised for the image of the young seminarists bathing at the river stresses their vow of celibacy. Finally, St. Gabriel, despite his
patent-leather shoes and jacket of sequins, is depicted as a handsome boy, "domador de palomillas / enemigo de los sauces" (OCI 415). Unlike the St. Christopher-Preciosa relation which is one based on profane, carnal lust, St. Gabriel and Anunciación de los Reyes act out the scene of the Annunciation, the ultimate manifestation of heavenly love. The naming-pattern Gabriel-Anunciación is attributive, even diactinic. The four episodes in which St. Gabriel is mentioned in the Bible are all connected with the mystery of the Incarnation. Thus Judaeo-Christian mythology provides the signo or key to the poem. In St. Gabriel's visitation of the gypsy girl there is a foreshadowing of the violent death of Anunciación de los Reyes' man-child: in mythological and attributive terms the gypsy is again seen as the victim of society.

Of the three Archangels honoured by the Roman liturgy St. Raphael is a shadowy figure whose story appears only in the apocryphal Book of Tobit (Tob.iii,25; v,5ff;vii,11-17;xii,8-21), in which St. Raphael is credited with the power to cast out devils and, above all, to heal. His name means "God heals" and in the Spanish version of the Missal he is designated as "Medicina de Dios." It is this attribute which explains his connexion with the city of Córdoba, of which he has been patron saint since at least 1278. According to legend St. Raphael
appeared at that time in a vision to Fr. Simón de Sousa and promised to deliver the city from the ravages of plague if a statue of the Saint were set up on the tower of the Cathedral of Córdoba and his feast day observed each year by the inhabitants. On the completion of these instructions the plague ceased and St. Raphael became the sole patron of Córdoba.

In Lorca's ballad St. Raphael is the lineal metaphor used to describe the city which still bears witness to the three civilisations, Roman, Moorish and Christian, which in turn dominated Córdoba. St. Raphael is Córdoba: the naming process is most relevant to the place of action. The scene described is that of the famous Moorish bridge, built on Roman foundations, which spans the Guadalquivir. In the middle of the bridge is a shrine to St. Raphael; at the city end stands a column with a statue of the Saint; behind this is the Cathedral, once a Mosque, on whose tower there is yet another statue of St. Raphael. The general impression is of 'a decayed, rather melancholy city, strongly Christian, devoted to its patron saint, but with many reminders also of the glories of its Roman and Moorish past'.

Yet the lineal metaphor of St. Raphael is not merely a geographical synonym but the key to the understanding of the whole poem; the ballad is a composite creation whose deeper
meaning is concerned with the problems of frustration and repression. In the second part of the poem Lorca describes some boys bathing and fishing in the river. As "aprendices de Tobías" (OCI 413), they are linked inextricably with the legends of St. Raphael. Under the Archangel's surveillance Tobias caught a fish which eventually enabled him to cast out the devil that plagued Sarah and heal his father's blindness. The implication here is that these boys are "fishers of men," seminarists, perhaps from the seminary at the city end of the bridge in question. As seminarists the vow of celibacy as yet rests lightly on them; in consequence they dare the fish, a phallic rather than religious symbol here, to feats of prowess, "flores de vino" and "saltos de media luna." Their vaunted superiority is, however, unfounded: just as the fish alone is master in the water, so man's dual nature, carnal and spiritual, may not be denied. The second reference to St. Raphael confirms this belief in the need for just proportion. Most New Testament commentators have assumed that St. Raphael was the anonymous angel described in St. John's Gospel who "troubled the water" at the Pool of Bethesda so that Christ might heal the sick (John V, 2-9). It is certainly the Gospel of the Day read on the Saint's feast, 24 October. Lorca's interpretation is less reverent, more human: St. Raphael's
real motivation to go down to the water was a desire for gossip and relaxation!

By using both the mythological and the attributive implications of the name of the Archangel Lorca has achieved an important synthesis, the recreation of man's dual nature, at once sensual and spiritual. Under the aegis of St. Raphael we perceive the unnaturalness of the way of life of the seminarists, whose celibacy and exaltation of spirit over body is as negative as the crass materialism and animal brutality of the Guardia Civil. Lorca's Christian Archangel, Raphael, who has been "Arabianised" and who seeks company and diversion, signifies the ideal of reconciliation between the spirit and the flesh, a reconciliation necessary for a full and satisfying life.

In conclusion, therefore, if Lorca was a poet by the grace of God and technique, a further debt, and not a small one, is to that great company of saints and martyrs who sit at the right hand of the Creator. They are the magical keys to the super-reality of his poetry.

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Notes


2 The phrase belongs to Jean Epstein but Lorca acknowledged its aptness in his lecture "La imagen poética de Don Luis de Góngora."

3 P. de Ribadeneira, Flos sanctorum... o nuevo año cristiano (Cadiz, 1863-65). The work was originally entitled Flos sanctorum o libro de las vidas de los santos (1599-1601). It has become known in Spain as El año cristiano as Ribadeneira works through the Calendar, describing the life of each saint on the corresponding day of the month.


5 Ana María Dalí, Salvador Dalí, visto por su hermana (Barcelona: Juventud, 1949), p. 24.

7 For example, Raphael's St. George and the Dragon, National Gallery of Art, the Mellon Collection.


13 St. Gabriel appeared twice to Daniel to explain certain visions relative to the coming of the Messias (Daniel viii, 16-26; ix, 21). He appeared to Zachary to announce that his wife would give birth to the Precursor of the Saviour
(Luke i, 11-20). His third and most famous mission was as angel of the annunciation to Mary (Luke i, 25-38).