



FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA: AN INTRODUCTION TO ETERNAL SPAIN

R. RENUKA DEVI

Ph. D. Research Scholar (English),
Sri Sarada College for Women,
Salem-16. Tamil Nadu, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Theatre is one of the finest medium to communicate and educate the people. Federico Garcia Lorca was a highly respected poet, writer and a playwright of the twentieth century Spanish Literature. This paper entitled “Federico Garcia Lorca: An Introduction to Eternal Spain” analyses the author’s genial means of creating theatre, which was totally bound up with the process of creating a better society. It provides reflections and responses to the social, political and economic condition of his country by conveying his experiences through a vehicle that is particularly personal and individual. He points out the existential crisis faced by the fellow human beings and signifies that through this medium they can rectify their follies and can be educated. This study also involved in the view point of discussing the various dramatic works of Lorca, his style and intense interest in his home land, its people and its culture. Literature not only reflects the society but it also portrays what is life and it guides the people in the right path. It not only delights the people but also educates them in a proper way.

INTRODUCTION

We believe we can do our part toward the great ideal of educating the people of our beloved republic by means of restoring to them their own theatre.

_ Federico Garcia Lorca

Federico Garcia Lorca is not only Spain’s most universal writer, but he is also a universally recognized symbol of Spain itself. He gave the theatre of Spain some of its best plays since the Golden Age and was an important part of the renaissance in Spanish literature that took place in the early part of the twentieth century. Stark Young, the noted American critic, says of Lorca: ‘Since the first World War there has been no more beautiful mind in the theatre

than Lorca's. It was a mind at the same time passionate, complex, and natural and, as the theatre, must be contagious and friendly' (Young 78).

Lorca once said that one could judge the health of a nation's culture by looking at the state of its theatre. And for him theatre was a natural extension of poetry: 'a poetry that leaps off the printed page, escapes from between the pages of books and becomes human. It shouts and speaks. It cries and despairs' (THBA xxi).

For Lorca there was nothing precious about poetry; it was simply part of living. He once wrote: 'Poetry is something that just walks along the street' (THBA xxi). Because for him it was a part of living, to be deprived of it was a kind of torment; and to deprive people of the chance of experiencing it was a kind of crime. In an interview he gave to an English journalist, he spoke of his anger at the lack of theatre that was the norm in Spain outside the capital: 'Theatre is almost dead outside Madrid, and the people suffer accordingly, as they would if they had lost eyes or ears or sense or sense of taste' (THBA xxii).

He also said, 'I will always be on the side of those who have nothing' (THBA xxii). He was apolitical writer in the deepest sense, in that the act of writing was part of the struggle for a better world.

'Sometimes, when I think of what is going on in the world, I wonder why am I writing? The answer is that one simply has to work. Work and go on working. Work and help everyone who deserves it. Work even though at times it feels like so much wasted effort. Work as a form of protest. For one's impulse has to be to cry out every day one wakes up and is confronted by misery and injustice of every kind: I protest! I protest! I protest!' (THBA xxii)

Federico Garcia Lorca was born on 5 June 1898. The year was a hugely significant one in Spanish cultural and political history: it gave its name to a whole generation of writers who used the events of the year as a rallying cry in efforts to convince the Spanish people of their country's deplorable state and the desperate need for re-evaluation and change. They were called the 'Generation of '98', and it included Azorin, Baroja and Angel Ganivet.

For Lorca, the art of creating theatre was totally bound up with the process of creating a better society:

'The idea of art for art's sake is something that would be cruel if it weren't, fortunately so ridiculous. No decent person believes any longer in all that nonsense about pure art, art for art's sake. At this dramatic moment in time, the artist should laugh and cry with his people. We must put down the bouquet of lilies and bury ourselves up to the waist in mud to help those who are

looking for lilies. For myself, I have a genuine need to communicate with others. That's why I knocked at the door of the theatre and why I now devote all my talents to it' (THBA vii).

All his concerns about his country and people came together in Lorca's work for La Barraca, (the Hut) the travelling theatre in the early years of the Republic. They would set up a simple stage in the town square and perform the great, and then almost completely neglected, classics of the Spanish theatre, the works of classic writers like Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina and Calderon. His work on this incredibly bold and imaginative precursor of small-scale touring companies had a profound effect on Lorca. Experiencing the impact of these classics made on a mass audience, was his source of strength and inspiration.

This extraordinary pioneering venture made several successful tours of the Spanish countryside, often playing in towns and villages where theatre had not been seen for centuries. Lorca chose the plays, designed the sets, directed and on occasions acted in them.

The success of La Barraca confirmed and strengthened Lorca's passionate belief in theatre's ability to reach out to and communicate with everybody and he did not consider their level of education or social class, and in its capacity profoundly to change those who experienced it. It was also, for him, a training ground in which he perfected all the technical skills he needed for the theatre. This technical command, in its turn, enabled him to master a form and to find his true voice as a poet.

Lorca's was a politics of theatre; he wanted to revolutionize theatre, preoccupied with how it could serve the people, calling it 'one of the most expressive and useful instruments for the edification of a country and the barometer which measures its rise or fall' (Stainton 459). Lorca's foundation of La Barraca, aims to take classic Spanish plays from bourgeois ownership and transport them to the Spanish, working-class provinces: 'to give back to the people what rightfully theirs' (Stainton 459). Within this socialist agenda La Barraca attracted negative response from the right-wing press from the outset and activists attempted to disrupt performances, insulting and threatening to attack performers, and even throwing stones. Lorca's response for the prohibition of performances displays his typical passion: 'we'll perform in caves and create secret theatre' (Stainton 417).

Lorca assigned great importance to the company, calling it his main occupation, the activity that enthused him the most, much more than his literary work. This clear motivation grew from his view of theatre as, 'A school of tears and laughter and an open forum where men can dispute out-dated or mistaken morals and illustrate, with living examples, the eternal truths of the heart and soul of man' (Edwards109).



Lorca's first play, *The Butterfly's Evil Spell*, reveals the influence of symbolism, as well as, the influence of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*. The influence of symbolism can be seen in his second play, *Mariana Pineda*, despite the fact that the subject is historical. Lorca continued to mine the popular Spanish tradition in his plays *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife*, a classic farce, *The Love of Don Perlimplin with Belisa in their Garden in Five plays: Comedies and Tragi-comedies*, a grotesque tragedy partially drawn from 18th century Spanish comic strip. Both plays reveal themes common to Lorca's work: the change of time, the destructive powers of love and death, and the phantoms of identity, art, childhood and sex.

In Cuba Lorca wrote *The Audience* a complex, multifaceted play, expressionist in technique, which brashly explores the nature of homosexual passion. Lorca deemed the work, which reminded unproduced until 1978, on his return to Spain, he completed his second play *Once Five Years pass* and aimed to break the bounds of conventional drama.

In 1933, premiere of first Andalusian tragedy, *Blood Wedding*, an expressionist work that recalls ancient Greek, Renaissance, and Baroque sources, Lorca achieved his first major theatrical success and helped to inaugurate the most brilliant era of Spanish theatre since the Golden Age. In 1933-34 he went to several places to overseas the productions of his play and gave lecture series about his plays.

During the last two years of his life, Lorca premiered *Yerma*, the second of his Andalusian tragedies, and completed the first draft of *The House of Bernard Alba*, his third tragedy. Childhood events and personalities informed in both *Bernarda Alba* and *Dona Rosita the Spinster*. The most Chekhovian of Lorca's play *The Dreams of My Cousin Aurelia*. In 1935 Lorca undertook his most overtly political play, *The Dream of Life*, a technically innovative work based on recent events in Spain. Lorca was at work on *Aurelia* and *Bernarda Alba* in the summer of 1936 when the civil war broke out.

The various influences come together in Lorca's great plays of the 1930s, including the so-called rural trilogy of *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma* and *The House of Bernard Alba*. In one sense the plays subjects, characters and settings are located in the Spanish countryside suggest Naturalism rather than any kind of stylization, but the opposite is in fact true, despite the fact that *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernard Alba* have their origins in real-life events. In the first place, the names which Lorca gives his characters have, for the most part, a generic and archetypal quality: in *Blood Wedding* the Mother, the Father, the Bridegroom, the Bride, the Neighbor; in *Yerma* the Pagan women, the First Girl, the Second Girl. And when there are real names they often have a symbolic resonance: in *Blood Wedding* the two halves of Leonardo's name suggest a burning lion; and in *The House of Bernard Alba* the surname Alba has associations with dawn, while the connections of Angustias with anguish and Martirio with martyrdom are evident enough. In addition, Lorca's constant linking of the characters of these plays to the soil, the trees, the heat, the water, the seasons, in short to the

World of nature, creates a strong sense of their universality. In the final acts of *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma*, moreover, the effect is enhanced and a sense of timelessness created by the appearance of non-human figures: in the former Moon and Death (the Beggar Woman); in the latter the fertility figures of Male and Female. Lorca's use of poetry in both plays, and especially in *Blood Wedding*, also has the effect of universalizing the particular through suggestive metaphor, while his suggestions for staging-stark, stylized settings, dramatic lighting effects, and bold movement, including dance-reveal an intention at the opposite extreme from Naturalism.

The three plays of the rural trilogy can be seen to combine elements of symbolism, expressionism, surrealism, and the puppet tradition, all fused into an anti-naturalistic style of which he increasingly proved to be a master.

Gwynne Edward proposes that Lorca's experience taught him that classic plays 'could only be meaningful for a modern and largely uncultured audience if they were performed in a lively and imaginative manner, unencumbered by...traditional, suffocating realism and heavy-handedness' (104).

Apparently a new style was sought after, and although there is agreement that Lorca's practical theatrical experience 'had taught him...how to write plays' (Stainton 308), both his directing work and play text subscribe to no single style. Critics at the time noted his experimentation; Stainton describes *Blood Wedding's* premiere being reviewed as revolutionary. Similarly, following a performance of *Dona Rosita the Spinster* reviewers were preoccupied with ascertaining the play's genre and style, but 'nearly everyone praised the originality and power of Lorca's script' (Stainton 434).

Lorca can be seen on a 'genuine quest for a new theatrical style' (Stainton 319) embodied within his innovative staging techniques and a typical selection of plays for La Barraca. His ideas have been linked to the idea of total theatre with comparisons drawn to his French contemporary Antonin Artaud and Lorca's staging of classic texts described as 'essentially modern, blending settings, dialogue, dances, songs, costume and movement into an effective and absorbing whole' (Edwards 104). His 1933 production of *Frenteovejuna* was considered innovative for its modern dress represented a stark break with the traditions of Spanish theatre. Further insight to Lorca's stylistic choices comes from Stainton's description of Lorca's direction of *Yerma* which included stylized, rhythmical movement for the chorus of washerwomen. Lorca was afforded opportunities to experiment with a musical influences, critics have noted how he worked on plays musically with enthusiastic focus, timing and the fundamentality of rhythm.

In Lorca one can find a poet-dramatist whose works show an intense interest in his homeland, its people and its culture. He studied its history, folklore and the traditions of its greatest



drama. He brought these elements into his poetry and drama, revitalizing them with his own creative genius.

Lorca's works has become a reference point and model for many contemporary poets and writers in Spain today. One such writer who was influenced by Garcia Lorca was the famous twentieth century American writer Tennessee Williams. The Spanish poet and dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca, an author whom Williams read and admired. For instance, in the postscript to a letter to Margo Jones, written from New Orleans on November 19, 1946, Williams mentions that 'the Lorca play was thrilling to me' (selected Letters 2:77), referring to Lorca's last play *The House of Bernard Alba*. In an article written for the New York Times Magazine on December 7, 1947, R.C. Lewis mentions, based on an interview with Williams, that 'among his favorite writers are Chekhov and the Spanish poet and dramatist Garcia Lorca and it is probable that they, more than any others, have contributed to his own particular style'(Lewis 28). For Williams and Garcia Lorca, theatre is primarily 'about making what is invisible or repressed in society visible on stage' (Johnston 111).

Lorca brings the expression of his plays to its apogee through his immense skill as a painter, as a poet and as a theatre artist of varied talents. He exhibits a thorough knowledge not only of his art but of his people and the traditions.

Federico Garcia Lorca was the bright light on the horizon of the Spanish theatre of the twentieth century, the hope that his tragic characters never possessed and he cast his light not only on the Spanish culture and the Spanish theatre but also on the world library of dramatic literature. His importance in the twentieth century theatre is estimated by Eric Bentley when he classes him as one of the three greatest playwrights in the current century, along with Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello.

The life of Spain's greatest modern dramatist was wiped out perhaps even before he showed the greatness of which he may have been capable. His abilities as a playwright, poet and painter must be judged on his works. He provided the World not only with some great works of poetry and dramatic literature but also with a view of Spain and the Spanish culture. 'For the Spaniards of his generation he was the best introduction to the twentieth century, for us he may be the best introduction to eternal Spain' (Duran 15).

WORKS CITED

- Duran, Manuel, ed. *Lorca: A Collection of critical essays*. USA: Prentice Hall, 1962. Print.
- Edward, Gwynne. *Dramatists in Perspective: Spanish theatre in the twentieth century*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1985. Print.
- Garcia Lorca, Federico. Trans. Jo Clifford. *The House of Bernarda Alba*. London: Mimeo Ltd, 2012. Print.
- Honig, Edwin. *Garcia Lorca*. New York: New Directions, 1961. Print.
- . *The Unknown Federico Garcia Lorca*. Ed. John London, London: Atlas Press, 1996. Print.
- Johnston, David. *Federico Garcia Lorca*. England: Absolute Press, 1998. Print.
- Lewis .R. C. *A Playwright Named Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Albert J. Devlin. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986. Print.
- Stainton. L. *Lorca: A Dream of Life*. London: Bloomsbury, 1998. Print.
- Williams, Tennessee. *Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams*. Vol.2: 1945-1957. Ed. Albert J.
- Devlin and Nancy M. Tischler. New York: New Directions, 2004. Print.
- Young, Stark. *Spanish Play*. New York: Random House, 1935. Print.