Where are you? —

In Search of Magicians and Princesses

by **Francis A. Neelon**

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA is a poet. He was also a Spaniard, the net result of which is that practically everything written about Lorca's work is concerned with the poems as they appear in the original Spanish, the English translations being perfunctorily dismissed as falling short of the attainments of the Spanish verse. If however, we look at both the Spanish and English we shall see that in the incredibly difficult business of translation Lorca's poetry fares quite well. Most of the translations, besides remaining faithful to the spirit and the letter of the text, are fine poems in themselves. To be sure, some of the nuances and subtleties of the original are bound to be lost; and allusions and inferences which are quite familiar to a Spanish audience evade an English. For the two languages are exceeding different, and we cannot look to find in the one what we would expect in the other: the two tongues have their own ways of approaching the same end, and if the two roads are different, both are interesting;

and one, at least, is certainly well worth traversing. We shall take the low road, as it were, of the English translations and though we lose some of the euphony of the Spanish and some of the references to Lorca's native literary idiom along the way, we may glimpse a sight of something more important in the poetry, something which transcends language barriers and which gives Lorca more than a tinge of immortality.

LORCA was born in the tiny Granadine village of Fuentevaqueros on June 5, 1899. His parents belonged to a well-to-do Andalusian family, his mother, Doña Vincenta Lorca, being a sensitive and intelligent scholteacher. It was she who encouraged and nurtured the poetic and musical sensibilities of the young Federico; and it was in the Garcia Lorca household that Federico early presented his first attempts at a rhetorical drama. He would produce original puppet shows in theaters of his own design and construction; and displayed youthful piety and considerable histrionic ability as priest in his home-made "masses." In fact his sermons were delivered with such gusto and ardor that one of the servants (and thus a particular favorite of Lorca's) would weep spontaneously and fervently at the orations.

At the age of eighteen Lorca left to study the law at the Universiy of Granada. It was here that Lorca came under the influence of Fernando de los Rios whose encouragement and advice led to Lorca's decision, in 1919, to quit Granada and take up student's quarters at the famed Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid. The best teachers of Spain had already begun to gravitate to Madrid under the influence of Francisco Giner de los Rios, of whom it has been said that there was not one of his Spanish contemporaries who had come under the influence of his teachings.

It was at Madrid that Lorca became intensely interested in his national literary heritage, studying with fervor the writings of his countrymen — Lope de Vega, Calderon de la Barca, Luis de Gongora and the other writers of the Spanish Golden Age (1500-1700). Lorca soon became a prominent member of the *avant-garde* Madrid literary set, and his poems, many of which were composed verbally and delivered spontaneously, were passed from mouth to mouth for want of publication. It was in Madrid likewise that Lorca's musical talents (he played the Spanish guitar and the piano with such skill that the great Manuel de Falla took him under his wing and at one time considered Lorca his most promising pupil)

and his love of the gypsy *cante jondo* (literally, "deep song") began to exert their lyric effect on his poetry. During his nine-year stay at the Residencia he began painting, which endeavor led him into contact and close friendship with Salvador Dali. But his paintings were received without much acclaim, and the visual arts have never been considered one of Lorca's fortes despite a one-man show of his paintings in Barcelona in 1927. It was, however, during this period of the Residencia that Lorca laid the foundations for the development of his deeply personal poetic idiom that subsequently raised him to the pinnacle of modern Spanish poetry.

IF WE ARE to attack that body of Lorquian poetry which we find in English translation it will be necessary, then, to consider the aspect of Lorca's which is the most immediately striking and which is the most perplexing to the uninitiate reader—Lorca's imagery.

The image is a compressed objective index into the subjective; it tells us something we did not know before; it focuses our attention upon some point, some aspect of reality which had previously escaped our notice. The image may give us a genuinely new insight into the comings-in and goings-out of the real world, or it may present us with a new way of looking at familiar things; but one point is of paramount importance and must be kept in mind whenever we are discussing poetry: the valid image deals always with reality. At times the poetic imagery of the so-called "moderns" (an extremely inept terminology, since many contemporary poets write in only the most lucid and simple of styles, while many of their historical predecessors did not) may seem to be so oblique or so surrealistic that there can be only the most tenuous contact with reality. But if an image has *no* relation with the real world it is not an image in the veridical sense, only a private "sign", and the poet has defeated poetry's own purpose. That is not to say that such "poetry" and such "poets" do not exist, but that they are not poets and that Lorca is not one of them.

"I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels," says Dylan Thomas, and so do all poets in the symbolism contrived from their poetic images. For just as images are the stuff out of which poetry is made, so are they the building-blocks of symbols. And symbols (in this case, verbal symbols) may be divided into two broad categories: the traditional and the personal, and these two catego-

ries may be distinguished in all art forms. If an artist emphasizes the traditional we can understand his works with relative ease, for he has used that which is common and familiar, frequently from the treasure trove of racial memory. If on the other hand, the artist's work preponderates in a highly personal symbolism we tend to regard his work as hermetic and abstract, perhaps defying "understanding."

But the two are never completely divorced, for it will be found that the artist can never escape himself; that he is inevitably the victim of the past, of Tradition; as there can be no art without Tradition as T. S. Eliot says, much of the appreciation of the individual artist lies in "the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." To judge we must compare and we can compare artist with artist because, despite differing personal idioms, they have a common meeting ground in tradition. For traditional symbols are the concrete images of the race experience, those contained in the body of world literature and available to all people. They are, in this sense, universal in meaning and significance. Now, some symbols are traditional within the folk culture of a particular race or country; others are the common property of the entire human race, for example, the sea, the wind, or the sun. But even those symbols fundamental to each particular nation's oral traditions—those we might expect to be somewhat esoteric—seem to transcend ethnic barriers, for as Jung points out, his theory of the "collective preconscious" gains weight from the universality and striking similarity of the common mythic symbols of all tribes.

There is, however, a rather more constricted notion of tradition which has come to mean that which has already been done, those ideas which have been used in the past and have gained respectability from their durability, if not always from their own indubitable, intrinsic merit. We are not interested in "tradition" in this sense. Rather, the *traditional* symbols in which we are interested are the sum total of all the thoughts, feelings and emotions of mankind (albeit experienced by individual men acting individually men acting individually) and preserved in such a manner that Everyman can take them up and say: "These are my own."

LORCA IS NATURAL, not cerebral, that is, his works are sensuous, emotional—not primarily intellectual. His poems are born of a deeply personal,

if perhaps only semi-conscious, experience as he himself admits: "The poet who embarks on the creation of a poem... begins with the aimless sensation of a hunter about to embark on a night hunt through the remotest of forests." Yet interwoven with the personal elements are the tradition, the great pity being (as far as the average reader of the translations is concerned, at least) that the traditions are, for the most part, wholly unfamiliar; where they are not peculiarly Spanish they are nevertheless not in the mainstream of European literary and philosophical thought. The Iberian peninsula, separated from greater Europe as it is by the Pyrenees, has continued to go its own way, paying little heed to the artistic trends and developments of the rest of Europe. As a result Spain has produced some wonderfully original artists—Picasso, Dali, Cervantes, de Falla—and mystics—Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross. But the religio-cultural atmosphere that produced these giants (all of whom were familiar to Lorca) is almost entirely alien to non-Spaniards. To one unacquainted with the Spanish mentality, it is difficult to identify those aspects of Lorquian poetry traditional or racial in origin. We may, nevertheless, indicate some of the factors which exerted their influence.

Many of his verbal practices were derived from the body of medieval Arabic-Andalusian folk poetry and ballads; others from the writings of Spain's Golden Age authors, especially the "conceptist" poet, Luis de Gongora; some of his lilt stems from the gypsy are of *cante jondo;* and his complexity from Arabic poets (who, in their turn, were influenced by the neo-Platonism of the Greeks). The Moorish occupation has left an indelible stamp on Spain; and the Arabic poets have duly influenced Lorca who freely adapted their *casida* and *gacela* (short, rhymed, fixed verse forms) to his own system. As Edwin Honig reminds us, the tendency among the Arab poets was to "petrify the image, to treat the metaphor according to definite analogies based on hierarchies found in nature: man compared with animals, animals with flowers, and flowers with precious stones." Lorca follows the pattern:

from SOMNAMBULE BALLAD

Green, how much I want you, green.
Great stars of white frost
come with the fish of darkness
that opens the road of dawn.
The fig tree rubs the wind
with the sandpaper of its branches,
and the mountain, a filching

cat,
bristles its bitter aloes.
But who will come? And
from where?
She lingers on her balcony,
green flesh, hair of green,
dreaming of the bitter sea.

The Arabs also liked to work microscopically; that is they would take some small event, some insignificant happening and discover in the microcosm the wonder of the universe. To do this they attempted to represent an ever-flowing, mutable world in a frozen, crystalline, immutable image—a form ever present in Lorca's poetry:

NIGHT

Candle, lamp,
lantern and firefly.
Constellations
of arrows.
Small windows of gold
are quivering,
and superimposed crosses
trembling in the dawn.
Candle, lamp,
lantern and firefly.

In seeking the traditional in Lorca's poetry we must remember that he was a "popular" poet in the most elemental sense of that world. His themes rose from the deepest experiences of his people, especially the gypsies, and his art frequently employs the Andalusian folk-image. We must remember that in Spain even children's tales are couched in a metaphorical style closely resembling the Lorquian technique. Thus a confection is a "nun's sigh"; a fountain rises up, a "bull of water"; and a cupola is a "half-orange." There is nothing in our traditions of Grimm and Andersen or in our abortive attempts of nursery "rhymes" which can give an inkling of the intense poetic imagery to which even the most illiterate of Spaniards is exposed. And when Lorca says the "keel of the moon breaks purple clouds" or calls "the frogs, muezzins of shadow" he speaks the language of the people. So if Lorca seems abstruse to foreign readers it is in a good measure owing to the fact that he was observing a tradition of the most fundamental nature. The poet's brother, Francisco, is "convinced that he addressed himself to simple persons, or to what there can be simplicity in persons who are not simple."

AND NOW WE are arrived at the crux of our problem. The complexity and variety of Lorca's simple images impress us at first as alien and incomprehensible and, to be sure, some are just that. But diligence and patience can penetrate beyond the facade of obscurity, the rewards of knowing the work of one of the world's greatest modern lyricists being well worth the effort. For the great bulk of Lorca's poetry defies dissection, in the pejora-

tive sense. One must come to see that:

My heart of silk
is filled with lights,
with lost bells,
with lilies and bees.

means *just* that. We may squeeze each metaphor and scan each line, but the key to all of Lorca lies not in the squeezing or in the scansion, but in a realization that in the Lorquian paradigm the metaphor reigns unchallenged as the method of communion between poet and reader. The metaphor out of its context is like the fish out of water; out of its element it cannot function and meaning is lost. The reader must attempt rapport with the poet, he must become familiar enough with the poem to say: "*My* heart of silk is filled with lights." The meaning of the metaphor and, ultimately, the poem become part of the personal experience of the reader. The difficulties presented in the beginning by the strangeness of Lorca's metaphors will resolve themselves upon better acquaintance with Lorca and these very difficulties will come to be one of the stellar qualities of the poetry.

"The poetic image," says Lorca, "is always a transference of meaning." In Lorca's poems this tranference tends to be radical that is, the poet does not describe the real world photographically; "instead he carries the object, the action, or the thing into the darkoom of his brain, from which it issues transformed." We must come to expect this transformation and look closely if we are to see what is being transformed and how. Once we have done that we have begun to understand. Lorca's comments on the poetry of Gongora could be as aptly applied to his own work: "Nothing could be more ill-advised than to read his madrigal to a rose with an actual rose in one's hand. Either the rose or the madrigal should be more than enough." In Lorca's poetry we must expect this divergence from the stereotype:

THE LITTLE MUTE BOY

The little boy was looking
for his voice.
(The king of the crickets had
it).
In a drop of water
the little boy was looking
for his voice.
I do not want it for speaking
with;
I will make a ring of it
so that he may wear my
silence
on his little finger.
In a drop of water
the little boy was looking
for his voice.
(The captive voice, far away,
put on a cricket's clothes.)

It is important to note also

that Lorca reveled in his "five and country" senses:

> For the poet makes himself the mentor of his five bodily senses—the bodily in the following order: sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. To command ideal images he must open the doors of communication between the senses; and frequently he must superimpose his sensations at the expense of disguising his very nature.

If we realize that this was part of Lorca's credo we can begin appreciate the marvelous nuances of some of his images which had hitherto been lost:

THE SPINSTER AT MASS

Under the Moses of the incense
you drowse.
Bull eyes are watching you,
your rosary raining.
In that dress of dark silk
you do not move, Virginia.
Give the black melons of your breasts
to the rumor of the Mass.

Now the alchemy of the images is apparent: one can almost smell the vague, stale incense of some sleepy Spanish chapel. A spinster then, her beads "raining" softly; the very atmosphere is of our patriarch Abraham and the high priest Melchisedech. We *can* see her, her femininity remote in the dress of black silk. In the distance we can *bear* the soft dull murmur of the priest.

We also note that the metaphor is the bridge which links the disparate worlds of Lorca's poetic images. Through the metaphor Lorca can compare the mineral with the vegetable, the human with the forces of nature. (Thus the wind is a "suitor of towers" and the "light shrugged its shoulders like a girl." His "quick" metaphor is a strange new look at our world, assaulting our obtuseness and, in the end, vivifying us:

Because the roses search in the forehead
for a hard landscape of bone
and the hands of man have no other purpose
than to imitate the roots below the earth.
As I lose myself in the heart of certain children,
I have lost myself in the sea many times.
Ignorant of the water I go seeking
a death full of light to consume me.

And magnificent is the scope of Lorca's metaphor with its very limited range of subjects, creating so many poems from variations on that range. Practically all the themes (the false lover, the persecution of the gypsies by the Civil Guard, the madness of the "sane" world, the inescapability of one's des-

tiny) that are developed in the abundance of his later works are found in the slim mustard-seed of his first volume of verse. And here lies the clue to the best method of learning to enjoy Lorca (or poet for that matter)—read all his poetry and then reread it. For by seeing an image or a symbol in context we gain some idea of its *Lorquian* meaning and by seeing the same image in yet another context we gain new insight into its niceties and ramifications. In Lorca's poetry universality is attained by representing concrete situations which must be realized abstractly, then reapplied to the concrete, *personal* experience of the reader before full appreciation is achieved. The reader must come to say *with* Lorca as in the "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias":

But now he sleeps without end.
Now the moss and the grass
open with sure fingers
the flower of his skull.
And now his blood comes out singing;
singing along marshes and meadows,
sliding on frozen horns,
faltering soulless in the mist,
like a long, dark, sad tongue,
to form a pool of agony
close to the starry Guadalquivir.
Oh, white wall of Spain!
Oh, black bull of sorrow!
Oh, hard blood of Ignacio!
Oh, nightingale of his veins!
No.
I will not see it!
No chalice can contain it,
no swallows can drink it,
no frost of light can cool it,
nor song nor deluge of white lilies,
no glass can cover it with silver.
No.
I will not see it!

* * *

Hi and Fi

Hi: "Where are you going?"

Fi: "For a walk around the park."

Hi: "Would you mind wearing my self-winding wrist watch? It needs the exercise."

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