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THE TRICKSTER-FUNCTION IN  
THE THEATRE OF GARCÍA LORCA

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE TRICKSTER-FUNCTION IN THE THEATRE OF GARCÍA LORCA

Recent years have witnessed an explosion of interest in the life and works of Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca (1898–1936). The 1998 centenary commemorations in particular, both within Spain and internationally, gave rise to a rich seam of intersections and connections regarding García Lorca's work. Lorca featured in numerous stagings and devised productions, related to both high and low culture, from ballet, to opera, dance and song to theatre and film. International conferences discussed Lorca in relation to tradition and modernity, presented the American Lorca and Lorca the Andalusian,<sup>1</sup> and produced a plethora of (often contradictory) readings of biography and texts. Over one hundred years after his birth, García Lorca remains a 'site of struggle' (Smith 1998b: 139), a locus of contested meanings and significations.

It is in part due to the mystery surrounding the circumstances of the death of García Lorca that he has become such a 'seductive' icon.<sup>2</sup> Gibson's fascinating and important biographical work in the mid-1970s substituted detail for enigma, a voice where there had been only silence.<sup>3</sup> Excellent historical and textual research by Anderson and Maurer has since gone a long way to complete the picture we have of the trajectory and detail of Lorca's life and work. Their jointly edited *Epistolario completo* emerged in 1997. But gaps,

<sup>1</sup> *Lorca-América: Contactos y Repercusión* took place in Seville in October 1998; organised by Andrew Anderson it featured connections between Lorca and Cuba, New York, Argentina among other papers (my thanks to Howard Young for supplying me with documentary information). *Lorca: Un clásico moderno*, took place in Granada in May 1998 (both of these conferences received extensive newspaper coverage in the Spanish press). See Paul Julian Smith, 'A Long Way from Andalusia', *Times Literary Supplement* (7 August 1998), for a comparison of the Granada commemoration with events in Newcastle, UK in May–June 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Smith (1998b), drawing on Fernández Cifuentes (1986), writes persuasively of García Lorca's capacity for seduction.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson's first work, *The Death of Lorca* (St Albans: Paladin) appeared in 1974. Marcos Zurinaga's 1996 film *Muerte en Granada* uses the thriller detective genre to recreate the labours of a critic (the film acknowledges a debt to Gibson) at work to discover the circumstances surrounding Lorca's death. With Esaí Morales in the role of researcher/detective and Andy García as the poet.

absences and omissions (the patchy trail of homosexual liaisons partially glimpsed,<sup>4</sup> the pursuit of texts which had been lost, censored or suppressed) create the desire to know more. An extended monograph study of *El público* (The Public) appeared before permission for its publication was finally given in the 1970s,<sup>5</sup> and the work was not to be performed until 1987. Recent years have seen the appearance in published form of a variety of works. Texts which were regarded as incomplete or marginal were published for the first time: the surrealist film script *Viaje a la luna* (Trip to the Moon);<sup>6</sup> the *Sonetos del amor oscuro* (Sonnets of Dark Love), homosexual in theme;<sup>7</sup> juvenilia (the prose, poetry and playlets of Lorca's youth [Maurer 1994; Soria Olmedo 1994; De Paepe 1994]).<sup>8</sup> The recuperation of works which were previously considered marginal or minor (for example, Llafranque's *Teatro inconcluso* in 1987), has in turn meant a shift in emphasis in the way Lorca's work is viewed: no longer merely the author of gypsy ballads and the rural trilogy, Lorca delivers startling surrealist undercurrents, or presents love between men as thematic alongside an interest in strong female characters. The recuperation of fragmentary, minor or incomplete works contributes to the picture we now have of García Lorca's *oeuvre*. The careful cataloguing of texts and critical works has also constituted a welcome addition to the growing field.<sup>9</sup> Space does not allow for commentary on the panoply of critical works that have been published in recent years. But C. Brian Morris's excellent *Son of Andalusia* deserves mention as the most comprehensive study of the Andalusian heritage in Lorca's work (Morris 1997), while Paul Julian Smith's (1998) *The Theatre of García Lorca: Text, Performance,*

<sup>4</sup> A recent contribution by Gibson to the theme is an article, 'Federico García Lorca y el amor imposible' (Gibson 1999: 135–60).

<sup>5</sup> Rafael Martínez Nadal's *El Público. amor, teatro y caballos en la obra de Federico García Lorca*, Madrid: Ediciones Hiperión, 1970, printed in English as *Lorca's "The Public": A Study of His Unfinished Play ("El Público") and of Love and Death in the Work of Federico García Lorca*, London: Calder and Boyars, 1974. A facsimile edition of the play finally appeared in 1976 (Oxford: Dolphin Book Co.). See Fernández Cifuentes, 'El Público de García Lorca versus El Público de Martínez Nadal' (1986: 275–93).

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Monegal (ed.) *Viaje a la luna*, Valencia: Pretextos, 1994. Frederic Amat composed the 72 sequences of Lorca's script into a 20-minute film version in 1998. Sponsored by Ovideo TV, Canal Sur and the Fundación Federico García Lorca.

<sup>7</sup> Javier Ruiz Portella (ed.) *Federico García Lorca: Sonetos del amor oscuro: Poemas de amor y erotismo: Inéditos de madurez*, Barcelona: Altera, 1995, having only very shortly earlier been published in the revised edition of the *Obras completas*.

<sup>8</sup> C. Maurer (ed.) *Federico García Lorca: prosa inédita de juventud*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1994; A. Soria Olmedo (ed.) *Federico García Lorca: teatro inédito de juventud*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1994; C. de Paepe, *Federico García Lorca: poesía inédita de juventud*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> A CD Rom presents an excellent introduction to Lorca's life and work, collects musical pieces (including those Lorca wrote for piano) and includes fascinating glimpses of the poet on film. Published by Christopher Maurer, *Federico García Lorca 1898–1936*, Vanderbilt: Vanderbilt University Press with the Fundación Federico García Lorca, 1998.

*Psychoanalysis*, presents a thorough and often exhilarating reappraisal of García Lorca's life and work through an examination of what he terms the 'cult' surrounding García Lorca and of certain texts with the application of intelligent cultural studies. Lorca studies proliferate in all directions: alongside the historical and textual, the folkloric and testimonial, we now find gay studies, feminist readings and cultural studies.<sup>10</sup> There is an opening out and onto new fields, an exploration of new territories in connection with Lorca scholarship, to find interpretations which, although often contradictory, constitute enriching additions to the field, readings which mean that Lorca 'refuses to be confined to any one side of the paradigm – tradition and modernity, centre and periphery, gay and straight' (Smith 1998b: 143).

It is in the spirit of this opening out of Lorca scholarship, that in this book I attempt textual readings of a series of Lorca's plays. In the first place, continuing the important recent trend, I choose to examine those challenging and complex pieces which have in the past been dismissed as minor or uncompleted works. This is a focus which works constantly to change the way we view Lorca's work as a whole, recuperating those texts which are marginal to the Lorca canon. In the second place, I have chosen to combine close analysis of one motif with wider, more general questions of theatre, sexuality and subjectivity at the margins. In keeping with the notion of a refusal to be confined or pinned down to any one meaning, I choose the image of the trickster as central motif.

The trickster can be found wherever there is a literary or an oral folk tradition and characteristically is the protagonist in a plot involving switches in gender, shape-shifting or the mischievous intermingling of the sacred and the profane, performing miracles or violating taboos. The trickster mocks order and takes pleasure in the confusion of boundaries, standing at the cross roads of paradox and ambiguity. An unpredictable master of deception and artifice, the trickster is the simpleton who is fooled and yet at the same time engineers malicious pranks: trickster tales cause laughter in their transgression of

Christian de Paepe's *Catálogo general de los fondos documentales de la Fundación Federico García Lorca*, Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1995, collects manuscript archive information. The Centre for the Study of the Hispanic Avant-Garde at the University of Aberdeen is compiling an annotated critical bibliographical database of Federico García Lorca compiled by Andrew A. Anderson, Derek Harris and Jacqueline Rattray.

<sup>10</sup> An early gay-reading of Lorca's work was Paul Binding's *Lorca: The Gay Imagination*, London: GMP Publishers, 1985. Later readings are presented by Paul Julian Smith (1998b) and David Johnston's *Outlines: Federico García Lorca*, Bath: Absolute Press, 1998. Feminist studies include Julianne Burton's 'The Greatest Punishment: Female and Male in Lorca's Tragedies', in *Women in Hispanic Literature*, ed. B. Miller, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 259–79. Luís Fernández Cifuentes's excellent *García Lorca en el teatro: La norma y la diferencia*, Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 1986, deconstructs texts by and about Lorca by opening them out on their historical context: an early example of cultural studies. Smith's (1998b) work presents an example of cultural studies applied to Lorca.