

Zeitschrift: Colloquium Helveticum : cahiers suisses de littérature générale et comparée = Schweizer Hefte für allgemeine und vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft = quaderni svizzeri di letteratura generale e comparata

Herausgeber: Association suisse de littérature générale et comparée

Band: - (2001)

Heft: 32: Rhythmus

Artikel: Cante Jondo in the work of the poet Federico García Lorca

Autor: Guerrero Ruiz, Pedro / Pérez Gutiérrez, Manuel / Percival, Anthony

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1006515>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 30.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Pedro Guerrero Ruiz
Manuel Pérez Gutiérrez
Anthony Percival

Cante Jondo in the Work of the Poet Federico García Lorca

Three main elements are to be taken into account when we study García Lorca's approach to *cante jondo* in his works. The first one is the "Concurso de Cante Jondo" (*Cante Jondo* Contest) held in the city of Granada in 1922. García Lorca played an exceptionally important part in its organization, although the poet was only twenty-four and had published just one book. With regard to those who maintain that Lorca joined the contest's organization very late, one must assume that the poet was a member of the founding group and always an extremely enthusiastic promoter of the event. The second element: García Lorca's studies on *cante jondo* which, although clearly influenced by Manuel de Falla's theories, constitute indeed an extremely interesting theoretical corpus on the primitive Andalusian *cante*. The third element is his book *Poema del cante jondo* (Poem of the *Cante Jondo*).

All three main elements – contest, studies, poetry – are integrated into a whole, a globality that owes nothing to pure chance. All of this took shape during a time when Federico García Lorca and the painter Manuel Ángeles Ortiz went around the taverns and the cellars where the non-professional *cantaors* (the *cante jondo* singers) Manuel de Falla wanted for the contest could be found; both men also went around the *cortijos* (farms) and the villages through which García Lorca nourished himself on *cante jondo*. This conjunction of events coupled with the poet's musical training would prove to be definitive in shaping his essays as well as his poetry.

No mere chance occurrence either is García Lorca's musical education for it stems from a childhood calling. Music was a constant presence in his family. His great-grandfather, Antonio García Vargas, was a good guitarist who used to accompany *cantes*, and who passed on to his sons Enrique, Federico, Narciso and Baldomero his liking of music by teaching them to play the guitar – his brother Juan de Dios played violin. An uncle of Federico's father, who bore the same name, was a professional musician, a mandola player at the "Café de Chinitas" in Málaga. Federico's father had another uncle, Baldomero, who taught guitar and mandola besides having a good voice for flamenco singing. Among Federico's uncles, we shall single out Luis for his guitar, mandola, flute and outstanding piano playing – Manuel de Falla himself listened to him on many occasions. Federico's aunt, Isabel, who had an exceptional voice, took on young Federico's musical training: she gave him his first guitar and singing lessons. Lorca's father, Federico García Rodríguez, played guitar and used to sing too.

García Lorca was ten years old when he went to study music in Almería. Back in Granada, his training in solfeggio, harmony and piano was taken over by Antonio Segura Mesa. Lorca's musical career was stopped both by the death of Seguras in 1916 and his father's refusal to let him go on studying music in Paris. But several years later, when Lorca was living in the "Residencia de Estudiantes" in Madrid, he used to accompany at the piano in popular Andalusian songs "La Argentinita", one of the great voices of the time. His taste for the musical and popular tradition is well known and he not only harmonized many popular songs but also performed classical music on the piano as a soloist.

This family and personal vocation was soon to lead García Lorca to become acquainted with *cante jondo*. Through his friendship with Manuel de Falla, who wished to set up a *Cante Jondo* contest, García Lorca delved deeper and deeper into that form of popular feeling. It can be said that the 1922 contest became a watershed in the development of *cante jondo* both as popular song and as regards its respectability in the eyes of musicologists. In fact, before the contest, *cante jondo*, in its first phase of development, is restricted to places

of ill-repute (taverns, brothels, etc.) and disparaged by the bourgeoisie. In spite of the strong anti-flamenco and anti-contest opinions that could be then found in the mass media, *cante jondo* was to enter a new phase of intellectual and cultural prestige when on December 31st 1921 Miguel Cerón and Manuel de Falla, together with a group of painters, musicians and writers (Joaquín Turina, Pérez Casas – later to be conductor of the National Orchestra – , Juan Ramón Jiménez, Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Óscar Esplá, Fernández Arbós, Adolfo Salazar, Enrique Díez-Canedo, Rodríguez Acosta, Alfonso Reyes, Giner de los Ríos, Fernando de los Ríos, Miguel Salvador, Manuel Jofré and Federico García Lorca) addressed a petition to the town council of Granada in favour of the Contest.

Apart from the above mentioned group of painters, musicians and writers, many others did their best to ensure the success of the Contest. Among them: Ignacio Zuloaga, Santiago Rusiñol, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Andrés Segovia, Federico Mompou, Felipe Pedrell and also a large group of members of a circle known as the “Rinconcillo” who regularly met at the “Café Alameda”, on the Campillo Bajo Square in Granada, García Lorca was one of the regulars. There was much discussion regarding the organization of the Contest, until, finally, it was agreed to hold it in Los Aljibes Square. An agreement was also reached as to the strategies against the enemies of the Contest, the publicity, the rules and the poster – designed and created by Manuel Ángeles Ortiz.

On April 6th 1922, Falla handed in the rules for the Contest to the Granada Town Council. There were to be three sections and three prizes. In the first section of the Contest, gipsy *siguiriyas* were to be heard; in the second: *polos*, *cañas*, *soleares*; in the third: songs without guitar accompaniment such as *martinetes-carceleras*, *tonás*, *livianas*, *saetas viejas*. Only non-professional singers would be allowed to participate. Falla was set on excluding anything and everything that, to his mind, was not *cante jondo*, pure *cante*. He would not allow any songs not considered *cante jondo*, thus preventing the admission of singers under the category of “*flamencos*”. In this respect his opinion was that there are *fandangos* which are sung as *seguiriyas* and consequently *seguiriyas*, *tonás*,

soleares, *martinetes*, etc., would be allowed but to the exclusion of other *cantes* he thought to be of lesser importance such as *fandangos* and *malagueñas*. Though Manuel de Falla's position was opposed by other organizers of the Contest, it prevailed in the end. García Lorca agreed with Falla from the beginning and years later, in 1931, in an interview published by *La Gaceta Literaria*, he stated: "If I wanted to express something really flamenco, it would be the *soleá* or the gipsy *seguiriya* – the *polo* or the *caña*. That is: the depth, the bareness, the primitive base of what is Andalusian, the song which is more of a shout than a gesture."¹

Before the Contest several events were held that gave it a greater cultural impact. Federico García Lorca lectured on the "Importancia histórica y artística del primitivo cante andaluz, llamado cante jondo" ("The historical and artistical importance of primitive Andalusian song, called *cante jondo*"); Andrés Segovia gave four guitar recitals; Ignacio Zuloaga presented an exhibition of his paintings in the Museum of Antiquities – and was also in charge of the decoration of Los Aljibes Square, where the Contest would be held. On the 7th of June the final event prior to the Contest was celebrated: Gallego Burín read a didactic text concerning *cante jondo* that had been handed out, unsigned, together with the rules of the Contest (the text was based on some of Falla's notes on his research devoted to *cante jondo*); Manuel Jofré played *peteneras* and *siguiriyas*; Andrés Segovia played *soleares*; and García Lorca read some of his *Poema del Cante Jondo* (to judge by our reading of newspapers reports of the time, García Lorca achieved the greatest success of all the participants on that day).

On the evenings of the 13th and 14th of June 1922, the feast day of Corpus Christi, *cante jondo* was finally acknowledged as any other form of art before an audience of 4000, including intellectuals, artists and people interested in recovering and promoting the genuineness of a human group's iden-

1 "De expresar yo algo flamenco, sería la *soleá* o la *seguiriya* gitana – el *polo* o la *caña* –. O sea, lo hondo, lo escueto, el fondo primitivo de lo andaluz, la canción que es más grito que gesto." in *La Gaceta Literaria*, 1931.

tity traits, i.e. this primitive Andalusian song. The prizes of the contest, among them two first prizes of 1000 pesetas, were awarded on the 14th, a day of heavy rain. One of them rescued from oblivion a *cantaor* who had been almost forgotten, called Diego Bermúdez Cala, "El Tenazas", from Morón, who had stopped singing thirty years before, because in a street fight a stabbing had crippled him. He had walked for three long days all the way from Puente Genil – where he lived – to Granada. The second prize brought to notice a twelve-year old boy, a gipsy who would later fill with glory the history of the *cante*: Manuel Ortega, known as Manolo "Caracol", a Sevillian and great-great-grandson of "El Planeta".

On the 16th of June, 1922, a group of people gathered to attend a banquet at the "Casino Palace" in Granada – they were celebrating the *cante jondo* contest's success. Among those attending were José María Rodríguez Acosta, Santiago Rusiñol, Manuel de Falla, Ignacio Zuloaga, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Federico García Lorca, Melchor Fernández Almagro, Ángel Barrios, Constantino Ruiz Carnero, Edgar Neville, Mauricio Legendre, the bullfighter Cagancho, Antonio Gallego Burín and John Brande Trend.

With regard to García Lorca's conception of *cante jondo* we should point out the works presented by the poet at several public performances and lectures on this very special and primitive art form. His rigorous information about the origins of the *cante*, his research on the music and its lyrics, the musical arrangements for many *romances* and popular lyrics, as well as his extensive activities in the field of *cante*, placed him at the forefront of cutting-edge research into the *cante*, in addition to his being a forerunner in the teaching of *cante jondo*. Some of his theories are well known by researchers, as is the case of the lecture he gave in the Centro Artístico of Granada, in 1922, entitled "Arquitectura del cante jondo"² ("The architecture of *cante jondo*"). Later on he repeated this lecture in other places. All García Lorca's informa-

2 "Arquitectura del cante jondo" in Federico García Lorca, *Obras completas*, recopilación y notas de Arturo del Hoyo, Madrid, Aguilar, 1957, pp.1537-1542. From now on we use the abbreviation: OC for *Obras completas*, followed by the page numbers.

tion and studies arose from the deep analytical lecture on *cante jondo*,³ dated the February 19th, 1922.

Among other interesting points, Lorca refers in this study to the work carried out by de Falla in which a large number of elements essential to the *cante jondo* are related to Indian chants.

Accordingly, in Lorca's didactic approach, *cante jondo*, but especially the *siguiriya*, gives us the impression of chanted prose, thus destroying the feeling of a rhythmic meter. Taking his cue from Manuel de Falla's studies, he points out that gypsy melody is rich in ornamental traits, which are used, as in India, at given moments, as an expression of ecstasy stemming from the strength of the text and by the emotion contained in the lyrics of the *cante*, although, according to de Falla, they should be appreciated as broad vocal inflexions, rather than ornamental traits.⁴

From Lorca's approach, it can be deduced that in *cante jondo*, as in other chants from the heart of Asia, the musical range is a consequence of the oral range. Lorca thus agrees with what Hugo Riemann asserted in his *Estética musical*⁵ about the singing of birds coming close to true music, without distinguishing between it and human singing, as both of them are an expression of a particular sensibility. Lorca, the poet from Fuente Vaqueros, remembers Felipe Pedrell, author of the *Cancionero popular español*,⁶ who studied popular folklore and was one of Falla's teachers (he found that the elements of the Byzantine liturgical chants are revealed in the *siguiriya*). He also admitted that the persistence of a variety of popular chants, had its musical origin in musical orientalism but is deeply rooted in Spain through the influence of Byzantine civilisation. The influence of this very ancient civilization was transferred to formulaic rites used in the Church of Spain from the conversion of our country to Christianity up to the

3 "El cante jondo (Primitivo canto andaluz)" in OC 1514-1531.

4 Lorca points out the coincidences signaled by Manuel de Falla between *cante jondo* and some Indian chants in OC 1540.

5 Hugo Riemann quoted by Lorca in OC 1515.

6 Felipe Pedrell's *Cancionero popular español* is quoted by Lorca in OC 1515.

11th Century, at which time Roman liturgy was introduced. Byzantine influence persisted nevertheless and therefore the Andalusian songs, subsequent to the adoption of the Byzantine musical liturgy, have the same properties and at the same time keep the influence of the music that is known in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia as islamized music, which originated in Asia.

In his study on *cante jondo* García Lorca reminds us that Manuel de Falla found in the *siguiriya* certain forms and characters similar to the sacred chants and the music from Islamic Granada. He agrees with the historical version that attributes an Indian origin to the gypsies. According to this version "in the year 1400 AD, the gypsy tribes, pursued by the one hundred thousand knights of the Great Tamerlane, fled from India. Twenty years later, these tribes appeared in different places in Europe and entered Spain with the Saracen armies that, coming from Arabia and Egypt, periodically disembarked on our coasts".⁷ These people arrived in Andalusia and joining their musical roots to ours, gave us a new formula: *cante jondo*. So that we owe this *cante* to the gypsies, as rites belonging to a race whose existence is mentioned and explained by historians and by García Lorca in reference to Manuel de Falla's studies.

These songs took shelter in the taverns or in the brothels because public opinion branded them "music of the rabble, that's what guitar and cante jondo are".⁸ García Lorca shows, along with other previous specialists, that the old *cante jondo* belongs to our most authentic identity traits, from Sierra Nevada to the olive groves of Córdoba, and from the Sierra de Cazorla to the mouth of the Guadalquivir, spreading along the coast and towards the east.

In his lecture on *cante jondo* the poet remembers that, at the Expo held in Paris in 1900, a group of gypsies in the

7 "En el año 1400 de nuestra Era, las tribus gitanas, perseguidas por los cien mil jinetes del Gran Tamerlán, huyeron de la India. Veinte años más tarde, estas tribus aparecen en diferentes pueblos de Europa y entran en España con los ejércitos sarracenos, que desde Arabia y Egipto desembarcaban periódicamente en nuestras costas" OC 1516.

8 "De baja estofa la guitarra y el cante jondo" OC 1516.

Spanish Pavilion were heard by Claude Debussy, later to become one of the greatest composers in the world and in many of whose works the influence of *cante jondo* is felt and evoked, such as in his prelude titled "La puerta del vino". He was an admirer and a connoisseur of our *cante*.

Other remarkable musicians were influenced too, according to Lorca, by *cante jondo*: Isaac Albéniz, Manuel de Falla, Enrique Granados, Felipe Pedrell, Adolfo Salazar, Federico Mompou, Eduardo Barrios. They were enthusiastic about the purity and the renewal of the *cante jondo*, which in the words of the poet from Fuente Vaqueros "Comes from the first tear and from the first kiss."),⁹ "from half-forgotten races, traversing the cemetery of years, and the fronds of exhausted winds".¹⁰

In the lecture on *cante jondo* we are dealing with, García Lorca gives us detailed information about the importance of the lyrics, of the poems, which bring about surprise and wonder, they being anonymous poetry of the people, a poetry that summarizes the complexity of the emotions and feelings of the people. They are popular verse coming down from the mountains to the sea, in love and death songs, in gestures full of true poignancy, a poignancy that dwells on a hope, a hope sometimes worn out by death itself.

He calls our attention to the fact that one of the features of *cante jondo* is the almost total lack of the middle voice, because Andalusians seldom choose the middle of the road when they sing: "The Andalusian either shouts at the stars or kisses the reddish dust of the paths in his land. The middle voice does not exist as far as he is concerned. He overlooks it."¹¹

García Lorca asserts in his studies that many Spanish *cantes* evoke the landscape where they are sung, but not so *cante jondo*: "Cante jondo sings like an eyeless nightingale, sings blind, and therefore its texts, like its ancient melodies, are

9 "Viene del primer llanto y del primer beso." OC 1519.

10 "de razas lejanas, atravesando el cementerio de los años, y las frondas de los vientos marchitos" OC 1519.

11 "El andaluz o grita a las estrellas o besa el polvo rojizo de sus caminos. El medio tono no existe para él. Se lo pasa durmiendo" OC 1521.

performed preferably at night, in the blue of the night of our countryside. But this faculty of visual evocation that many Spanish popular songs have, takes away from them the intimacy and depth that cante jondo is full of.”¹² Because *cante jondo* is the feeling of the people, the moaning and the pain of hidden sorrow, of love and death, of life and destiny, of all the tragedy and all the joy in the heart in which it dwells.

“The true cante jondo poems”, says Lorca, “belong to nobody [...]. They are born because they are, they are one more tree in the landscape, one more spring in the poplar grove. Woman, the heart of the world, and the immortal possessor of the ‘rose, the lyre, and of harmonious science’ fills the endless scope of the poems. In cante jondo woman is called Sorrow”.¹³ And the poet points out how admirable it is that this feeling gradually takes shape and succeeds in manifesting itself in something almost immaterial: as in the case of “la Pena” (“Sorrow”). Sorrow becomes incarnate, it takes on human form, it is a dark woman or a delusion to be lived. All the poems of *cante jondo* are, in the words of Lorca, a magnificent pantheism, which seeks advice in the air, the earth, the sea, the moon. In the texts of the *cante* the wind rises, and in the *seguiriya* the melody weeps as its verses weep, with an unmistakeable popular and melancholic air, of enormous emotional force, in an intimate wail; this is what happens with the old *siguiriya* or *seguidilla*, which the poet studied so much, where the contents of the most ancient oriental songs are found, they are the features of the past closely linked to *cante jondo*.

12 “El cante jondo canta como un ruiseñor sin ojos, canta ciego, y por eso sus textos como sus melodías antiquísimas tienen su mejor escenario en la noche..., en la noche azul de nuestro campo. Pero esta facultad de evocación plástica que tienen muchos cantos populares españoles les quita la intimidad y la hondura de que está henchido el cante jondo” OC 1522.

13 “Los verdaderos poemas del cante jondo – dice Lorca – no son de nadie [...]. Nacen porque sí, son un árbol más en el paisaje, una fuente más en la alameda. La mujer, corazón del mundo y poseedora inmortal de la ‘rosa, la lira y la ciencia armoniosa’ llena los ámbitos sin fin de los poemas. La mujer en el cante jondo se llama Pena” OC 1523.

This lecture of García Lorca's is a kind of illustrated reminder of *cante jondo*. As this art is inexhaustive, it is only possible to decipher it in a wider sense, since the cante also incorporates the influence of the personal feelings of the *cantaor*, the variety of pain in his voice, his hidden grief, his particular cry of pain. All of this can be found in the registers of García Lorca's own poetry, above all in *Poema del cante jondo*, which amounts to telling us: "Es pues, señores, el cante jondo tanto por la melodía como por los poemas una de las creaciones artísticas populares más fuertes del mundo y en vuestras manos está el conservarlo y dignificarlo para honra de Andalucía y sus gentes" (1529) ("*Cante jondo* then, gentlemen, for its melody as well as its poems, is one of the strongest popular artistic creations in the world and it is up to you to conserve it and dignify it in the name of Andalusia and its people").

It should be stated clearly that García Lorca's background in cante jondo is undeniable. His study on *cante jondo* as primitive Andalusian song shows us a detailed analysis of this sort of popular song that is at its richest in Andalusia. Moreover, popular poetry was also of great interest to the poet, who, both by compiling lyrics and musical arrangements, signaled it as one of his main sources of Andalusian identity.

But along with the theoretical and poetic work on *cante jondo*, let us not forget Lorca's appreciation of its artistic dimension. Lorca's poetry not only contains musical elements but also chromatic ones, and that is why it is poetry of an audiovisual register that endows it with lyrical nuances of an exuberant beauty, made all the livelier by the senses of sight and hearing. This audiovisual effects of synesthesia in *Poema del cante jondo*, as we shall see, create the global sense of his poetic aim: to surround us with the activity of various senses, most of all by visual and aural sensations. These reach us through the poet's visual perspective in highly sonorous poetry deeply reminiscent of popular verse and almost always sounding as a bitter guitar. All of this is attained thanks to García Lorca's knowledge and conviction of the musical and plastic riches of painting. It is poetry created by his visual and musical sensuality, through adjectives, images and combina-

tions of sight and sound, which, as if in a dream, create the process that goes under the name of inspiration.

Poema del cante jondo is a book tissued out of García Lorca's life experiences: the gypsies' *seguiriya* among olive groves and shouts, the weeping guitar, deep sorrow, silence, and the echo of shouting from the caves; lights and shadows, a pain that like a wind gives way to *soleá*, bare mountain sights and weather-cocks spinning in the "Andalucía del llanto" ("weeping Andalusia"); street brawling with knives, black cloaks, blood at dawn, mournful *soleás* in the early hours of the morning, rivers of sadness, streetlights and processions, balconies from which *saetas* are sung; *peteneras*, mourning horsemen, the Andalusia of the six strings weeping in her dreams; and Silverio Franconetti, half Italian and half flamenco, a *seguiriyero* (*seguiriya* singer) who jumps from note to note without breaking any of them; and Juan Breva, a sea without light. Such is the Lorca who left, eyeless, a world of light, now in the shadows: candle and blanket on the ground, the Lorca who longs to be buried under the sand with his guitar.

Popular allegory is thus mixed with deeply felt poetry, the *quejío*, i.e. the lament of the *cante* in the poetry of music and art plasticity. And Cordova, Seville, Malaga, and the rivers of Seville, and those of Granada (Dauro and Genil). Oil lamps, ancient castanets, cacti; the *Guardia Civil* on foot and a gypsy beaten up: the whole truth of the Amargo¹⁴ which, like a tunnel through the history of the countryside and its people, remains in poetry. Stories, both seen and heard, the popular side in the poetry of García Lorca, like a fruit that arises from the passion of the people. A book born out of the history of the first Contest of *Cante Jondo*. A vindication and a poem from the "fondo primitivo de lo andaluz" ("primitive base of Andalusia"), in the words of the poet.

Some of the poems in the book *Poema del cante jondo* had been published for the first time in Murcia in April 1927

14 See "Escena del teniente coronel de la Guardia Civil", "Canción del gitano apaleado", "Diálogo del Amargo" and "Canción de la madre del Amargo", the four texts which are at the end of the *Poema del canto jondo*.

by the magazine *Verso y Prosa*, whose editor was Juan Guerrero Ruiz, called by the poet himself “cónsul general de la poesía” (“consul general of poetry”). The history of the subsequent publication of *Poema del cante jondo* is explained by García Montero in his book *La palabra de Ícaro*,¹⁵ alluding to Martínez Nadal’s introduction to García Lorca’s *Autógrafos*.¹⁶ García Montero points out that “Lorca gave the originals from 1921 to Martínez Nadal so that he could type them out; together they made up a selection of fifty poems, to which was added as a prologue the ‘Baladilla de los tres ríos’. Seeing that the book would turn out to be too short, the poet included two final dialogues, written in 1925, and titled ‘Escenas del teniente coronel de la Guardia Civil’ and ‘Diálogo del amargo’. Such is the story of the first edition of the *Poema del cante jondo* (Ulises, Madrid, 1931), as told in great detail by Martínez Nadal”.¹⁷

Poema del cante jondo is the symptom of a poetry composed with deep, serious and firmly rooted Andalusian feeling, although later on García Lorca himself would complain – whenever he referred to the cante jondo and, above all, the gypsies – that “me va molestando un poco mi mito de gitanería” (“the myth relating me to the gypsies is beginning to get on my nerves”). *Poema del cante jondo* is definitely not a “gitanístico” (“merely about the gypsies”) book, but a complex work, “un libro de Andalucía” (“a book about and of Andalusia”), which, according to Allen Josephs and Juan Caballero in their critical edition of *Poema del cante jondo* and *Romancero gitano*: “it manages to convey like nothing ever after the

15 García Montero, Luis, *La palabra de Ícaro*. Estudios literarios sobre García Lorca y Alberti, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 1996.

16 Martínez Nadal, Rafael, *Federico García Lorca, Autógrafos, I: poemas y prosas*, Oxford, The Dolphin Book Company Ltd, 1975.

17 “Lorca le dio los originales de 1921 a Martínez Nadal para que los pasase a máquina; juntos hicieron una selección de cincuenta poemas, a los que se añadió como prólogo la ‘Baladilla de los tres ríos’. Viendo que el libro resultaba pequeño, el poeta incluyó dos diálogos finales, escritos en 1925, titulados ‘Escenas del teniente coronel de la Guardia Civil’ y ‘Diálogo del amargo’. Esta es la historia de la primera edición del Poema del cante jondo (Ulises, Madrid, 1931), contada minuciosamente por Martínez Nadal” in Luis García Montero, *op. cit.* p. 58.

dramatic and personified essentials of the world of *cante jondo* – landscape, atmosphere, objects, songs, dances, people, omens, lamentations, cries, superstitions, echoes, resonance and [...] Death! – , those essentials on the one hand describe that specific world and on the other hint to us everything that is poetic and suggestive in such a world. With paintbrushes often bent on geometry, García Lorca traces out a poetic sketch of all things foreboding, ominous and mortal in that world”,¹⁸ as a didactic approach to *cante*, but with an added pantheism and a poignancy that bear out García Lorca’s personal stamp. In reference to Lorca’s interpretation of the *cante jondo* in *Poema del cante jondo*, Rafael Martínez Nadal says in his book on Federico García Lorca: “Lorca squeezes out the quintessence of the popular. The colourful song and the pathos of popular verse dissolve into another kind of pathos, García Lorca’s kind, the pathos of a dichotomy deprived of any possible rest: reality and fantasy, boy and girl, sun and shade, love and death”.¹⁹

García Posada, in his edition of the *Obras Completas*,²⁰ reminds us that Lorca’s inspiration lies in the “duende” (meaning here: “the magic of something”), in the description the poet gives of the *duende* as something unusual, unable to heal the wound – a wound that never heals – the man-made, invented side in the work of a man; it is wretchedness, the

18 “Logra captar como nadie después las esencias dramáticas y personificadas del mundo del cante jondo – paisajes, ambientes, objetos, cantes, bailes, gentes, augurios, lamentaciones, gritos, supersticiones, ecos, resonancias y [...] ¡la Muerte! – , esencias que por un lado describen ese mundo y por otro lado nos sugieren todo cuanto tiene ese mundo de poético y sugestivo. Con pinceles muchas veces geométricos nos traza un esbozo poético de todo lo que tiene ese mundo de fatídico, de ominoso y de mortal”, Allen Josephs y Juan Caballero, eds., García Lorca, Federico, *Poema del cante jondo. Romancero gitano*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1995, p. 73.

19 “Lorca exprime las últimas esencias de lo popular. El trino colorista y el patetismo de la copla quedan disueltos en este otro patetismo lorquiano de una dicotomía sin posible sosiego: realidad y sueño, muchacho y muchacha, sol y sombra, amor y muerte”, Rafael Martínez Nadal, *op. cit.*, pp. XIX y XX.

20 Miguel García Posada, ed., García Lorca, Federico, *Obras completas I*, Poesía, Barcelona, Círculo de lectores, 1966.

wounding conscience and, adds García Posada, in the poetry of Lorca "there is a sleep-walking, unreal, dreamworldly quality that bathes it and wraps it and fills it with a mysterious fascination".²¹

In García Lorca's *Poema del cante jondo*, his didactic approach to nature in which poetics is both music and plasticity, one can find special memories of the Darro and the Genil: "The two rivers of Granada / flow down from the snow to the wheat",²² displaying in the "Baladilla de los tres ríos" ("Ballad of the three rivers"), a *romance con estribillo*, i.e. a ballad with a refrain, both composed in octosyllables, in which every group of four verses is followed by a refrain, giving it a fragile poetic air which is rhythmically very pleasant. Of the two rivers that flow through his city, one is made of tears and the other of blood. For the poet "el río Guadalquivir/va entre naranjos y olivos" ("the river Guadalquivir / flows between orange trees and olive trees") and "tiene las barbas granates" ("has a garnet beard"), thus distinguishing between Seville, which is open to sailing boats, and the water which passes through Granada, from where "sólo emanan los suspiros" ("only sighs emanate"). The two refrains alternating with the four line stanzas of this poem have a popular origin. The first is:

Oh, love
who went away and never came back.²³

The second refrain goes:
Oh, love
who went away in the air! ²⁴.

The comparison of the rivers, the Guadalquivir, on the one hand, and the Darro and the Genil, on the other, becomes

21 "Hay un clima sonambular, de irrealidad, de sueño, que lo baña y recubre y llena de una misteriosa fascinación", Miguel García Posada, ed., *op. cit.*

22 All the lines quoted in this paragraph are from "Baladilla de los tres ríos", the opening poem of *Poema del cante jondo*, OC p. 223.

23 ¡Ay, amor / que se fue y no vino! OC 223.

24 ¡Ay, amor / que se fue por el aire! OC 223.

symbolic: the Guadalquivir is signaled by “a high tower / and wind in the orange grove”; the other two by “torrecillas/ muertas sobre los estanques” (“little towers / standing dead above the ponds”).

Poema del cante jondo is a song celebrating García Lorca’s Andalusia, its landscape and the symbology of its *cantes*, the guitar, the sorrow of the cry that is heard, life and death as life that is repeated in the agony of her *cante*. A meeting of roads and lamentations that seem to have been predestined, as if by a spell. In the first part “Poema de la siguriya gitana” (“Poem of the gypsy *seguiriya*”), the landscape of a sunken sky and dark rain hovers over the olive grove, in a greylike atmosphere full of wailing, among captive birds, within the scope of absolute somberness. We find the same cry repeated in one of the poems in the book, called precisely “El grito” (The cry):

From the olive groves
there will be a black rainbow
over the blue night.²⁵

A cry of grief in the night, a lament that the poet sees as grey in the blue night, where the only thing left, at times, is the guitar, also wailing (“Arena del sur caliente / que pide camelias blancas”) (“Sand from the hot south / pleading for white camellias”), a wounded heart, through which the *seguiriya* finds its way:

Among the black butterflies,
a dark girl is to be found
next to a white snake made of fog.²⁶

The poet grieves for the pain of the *siguriya*, for the rhythm that never shows up and for the pain within which the *cante* is at home: “dolor de cal y adelfa” (“the pain of whitewash and adelfa”). All of this happens within a very rarefied popular poetry in which Lorca’s intuitive surrealism always

25 Desde los olivos/ será un arco iris negro / sobre la noche azul. OC 226.

26 Entre mariposas negras, / va una muchacha morena / junto a una blanca serpiente de niebla. OC 227.

emerges. The *soleá* and the cry “en la Andalucía del Llanto” (“in the Andalusia of tears”). A knife seems to light up the ravines to reach the heart. The stab and the knife appear more frequently, says Fernández Alonso in his book *Una visión de la muerte en la lírica española, la muerte como amada*. Along with these symbols, certain colours also make up clear signs of death: everything yellow, associated with the gold of the knives, with the yellow towers (where the bells toll), with the flame of the oil lamp (like that of the candle) and also the black in the cloak of “La soleá” (283). And so, in “La soleá” a poem that evokes the image of Virgin of Loneliness, *soleá* and *seguiriya* are two great *cantes*, of true plain-tiviness, where the *cantaor* suffers what he sings as he says it, the poet personifies this *cante*, revealing it, displaying it, like a woman dressed in black cloaks, finishing the poem in a cry of *cante jondo* without a stave:

(Ayayayayayay,
dressed in black robes).²⁷

Of course, in this poetic world where the *cante* arouses in García Lorca an evocation of sorrow, the memory of the cave could not be missing. In “Cueva” (“Cave”), where the gypsies live, the sobbing is heard and the colours indicate to us the superimposed feelings of the poet, in a study of diverse sensations:

From within the cave
come long sobs.)

(The purple
on the red.)

The gypsy evokes
distant lands.

(High towers and
mysterious men).

In his faltering voice

27 (Ayayayayayay, / que vestida de mantos negros) OC 233.

are his eyes.

(The black
on the red)

And the whitewashed cave
trembles in the gold.

(The white
on the red).²⁸

They are certainly curious, these chromatic refrains that Concha Zardoya, in *Poesía española contemporánea*, sees in this poem “Cueva”, “como estudios, juegos y manchas de color semejantes a la pintura contemporánea” (28) (“as studies, games and colour spots similar to those of contemporary painting”). We are talking about audiovisual games – both musical and visual – that García Lorca liked so much. Hernández Valcárcel (*La expresión sensorial*) says that Lorca “nos ha presentado en este poema un perfecto cuadro con fondo rojo y manchas blancas, negras y cárdenas cuya realización pictórica podríamos atribuir a Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky o a tantos otros pintores contemporáneos (incluso coincide casi totalmente en colores con un lienzo de Mark Rothko titulado ‘Rojo, blanco y marrón’ que se encuentra en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Babilonia). Pero en ese cuadro poético cada color tiene un valor simbólico cuya clave está en el resto de los poemas lorquianos” (214) (“has given to us in this poem a perfect picture, that has a red background and white, black and purple colouring, that could be attributed to Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky or to so many other contemporary painters (its colouring is even almost completely coincidental with a work by Mark Rothko titled “Red, white, and brown” that can be viewed in the Art Gallery in Babylon). However, in that poetic picture each colour has a symbolic value the key to which lies in the rest of Lorca’s poetry”).

28 De la cueva salen / largos sollozos. // (Lo cárdeno / sobre lo rojo.) // El gitano evoca / países remotos. // (Torres altas y hombres / misteriosos.) // En la voz entrecortada / van sus ojos. // (Lo negro / sobre lo rojo.) // Y la cueva encalada / tiembla en el oro. // (Lo blanco sobre lo rojo) OC 233.

In his "Poema de la saeta" ("Poem of the *saeta*") the poet recaptures all the traditional elements of the processions in Andalusia, the *saeta* on the balcony as the holy image passes, as dawn is about to come. "Poema de la saeta" is a group of eight short poems on related themes. Seville and the Guadalquivir, always the Guadalquivir, where men always come with grey sombreros. The description of the night: candles, oil lamps, street lamps, glow worms, form a constellation, a world of external light but internal to the *saeta*. Seville is, according to García Lorca, a city of archers, a city lying in wait, whereas Cordova is a city to die in, when the arrow is shot (the actual meaning of the word "saeta"), the arrow that Sevilla's river is ("Sevilla para herir, / Córdoba para morir") ("Seville to wound / Cordova to die"). The procession of dark saetas, and of crystal stars, where the Virgin passes as does a dark Christ. The saeta, in the poem called "Saeta", is heard from the balcony and describes to us a gypsy-like Christ, between the sky and the land of Spain, reflecting the whole philosophy of the tradition of the Easter procession, in the neo-popular vein that so much characterised García Lorca:

A dark Christ
passes
from the Judaeen iris
to the carnation of Spain.

Look where He comes from!

From Spain.
A clean but dark sky,
a scorched land,
where slow waters
flow along river beds.
A dark Christ
with His long hair burnt,
His cheek bones prominent
and the white pupils of His eyes.

Look where He's passing by! ²⁹

29 Cristo moreno / pasa / de lirio de Judea / a clavel de España. // ¡Miradlo por dónde viene! // De España. / Cielo limpio y oscuro, / tierra tostada, / y cauces donde corre / muy lenta el agua. /Cristo moreno,

Lorca shows us, In “Gráfico de la petenera”, the yellow towers where the bells toll, they also toll on the yellow wind (this time not green). One hundred mourning horsemen we do not know where they will go, one hundred mourning horsemen that mingle with the six strings of the guitar, the six strings floating in their black wooden well and in beautiful metaphors where death leads men to damnation in a white house. The personified *petenera* is described with unusual sensuousness: “su falda de moaré tiembla / entre sus muslos de cobre” (“her moiré skirt trembles / between her copper thighs”). It is in the orchard of the *petenera* where tragedy develops, on a stage, where six gypsy women dressed in white dance, crowned with paper roses and small bouquets of jasmine. The *petenera* has died. Sinister people, not decent young ladies, attend her funeral and they keep weeping over her. Then come the hundred lovers, now dead, beneath the dry earth, to be assigned a place in the poetry of García Lorca on long red paths (red for blood), and in the land of Cordova, where among so many olive trees a hundred crosses can be driven into the land. Dramatic is the word that best summarizes García Lorca’s poetry. Thus women have black hair and black eyes, or green, like “La Lola” (“Tiene verdes los ojos / y violeta la voz”) (“Green are her eyes / violet is her voice”); where Juan el Breva sings with his voice like a lightless sea and *café*-chantants with their green mirrors, grieving death, remembering also the spells of the playing cards, amidst the theatricality of a poetry as admirative of *cante jondo* as it is open to its drama. *Cante jondo*, the truly Andalusian *cante* studied in Federico García Lorca’s lectures as well as in the musical and visual dimension of his poetry, producing a deep and rigorous didactic illumination of the *cante*.

/con las guedejas quemadas, / los pómulos salientes / y las pupilas blancas. // ¡Miradlo por dónde va! OC 238.

Bibliography

- Fernández Alonso, María del Rosario, *Una visión de la muerte en la lírica española, la muerte como amada*, Editorial Gredos, Madrid, 1971.
- García Lorca, Federico, *Obras completas*, recopilación y notas de Arturo del Hoyo, prólogo de Jorge Guillén y epílogo de Vicente Aleixandre, Madrid, Aguilar, 1957.
- García Lorca, Federico, *Obras completas I*, Poesía, edición de Miguel García Posada, Barcelona, Círculo de lectores, 1966.
- García Lorca, Federico, *Poema del cante jondo. Romancero gitano*, Edición de Allen Josephs y Juan Caballero, Madrid, Cátedra, 1995.
- García Montero, Luis, *La palabra de Ícaro*. Estudios literarios sobre García Lorca y Alberti, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 1996.
- Grande, Felix, *García Lorca y el flamenco*, Madrid, Editorial Mondatori, 1992.
- Guerrero Ruiz, Pedro, *Federico García Lorca en el espejo del tiempo*, Alicante, Editorial Aguaclara, 1998.
- Guerrero Ruiz, Pedro, *Federico García Lorca, el color de la poesía*, Murcia-Kentucky, Universidad de Murcia y Transylvania University, 1998.
- Hernández Valcárcel, Carmen, *La expresión sensorial en cinco poetas del 27*, Murcia, Universidad de Murcia, 1978,
- Martínez Nadal, Rafael, *Federico García Lorca, Autógrafos, I: poemas y prosas*, Oxford, The Dolphin Book Company Ltd, 1975.
- Molina Fajardo, Eduardo, *Manuel de Falla y el cante jondo*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 1962.
- Zardoya, Concha, *Poesía española contemporánea*, Madrid, Guadarrama, 1961.

Abstract

L'œuvre de Federico García Lorca est intimement liée à son Andalousie natale et tout spécialement à ses traditions musicales, notamment le cante jondo. Lorca, venant d'une famille très musicienne et musicien lui-même, s'est démené pour mieux faire connaître le cante jondo et pour la sauvegarde de sa tradition et de sa pureté. Il a fait siennes les approches théoriques et historiques du grand compositeur andalou Manuel de Falla concernant le développement et la place du cante jondo et des gitans dans l'histoire culturelle de l'Espagne. Tout cela est visible et lisible autant dans ses études que dans son recueil de poèmes *Poema del cante jondo*. Il faut souligner que, pour García Lorca, les gitans et leur culture ne constituent pas un prétexte à l'exotisme, mais une constituante fondamentale de cette Andalousie qui lui tient tant au cœur.

