



## 1 FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA (HIMSELF)

En mis conferencias he hablado a veces de la Poesía, pero de lo único que no puedo hablar es de mi poesía. Y no porque sea un inconsciente de lo que hago. Al contrario, si es verdad que soy poeta por la gracia de Dios—o del demonio—, también lo es que lo soy por la gracia de la técnica y del esfuerzo, y de darme cuenta en absoluto de lo que es un poema.<sup>1</sup>

[In my lectures I have spoken at times about Poetry, but the only thing I cannot talk about is my poetry. And not because I am unconscious of what I am doing. On the contrary, if it is true that I am a poet by the grace of God—or the devil—it is also true that I am a poet by the grace of technique and effort, and by having an absolute awareness of what a poem is.]

Who, or what, is *Lorca*? The idea that certain distortions and oversimplifications run through his American reception only makes sense in contrast to some presumably more accurate and complete view. Yet there is no way of restoring the author's work to what it was before being subjected to the distorting lens of interpretation. My own biases will come into play in the contention that Lorca is an intellectual, self-aware artist: I resist the uncritical, hagiographical treatment to which he has often been subjected, and am skeptical of approaches that rely too heavily on the romantic ideas of the "genius" or the Lorquian version of that idea: the *duende*.

My own construction of this authorial figure is exactly that: a construction that I have developed as a prelude to the argument of this book. The opposition between my own ideas and the apocryphal Lorca of U.S. poetry does not, however, imply that I think I know who or

what Lorca really is. In fact, my view of the Spanish poet is grounded in a profound sense of bewilderment rather than on any dogmatic certainty. I have been struggling with Lorca's work, on and off, for almost thirty years, without arriving at many firm conclusions. My bedrock sense of Lorca is as a poet whose poetic thought is embodied directly in the poems themselves. His material is the concrete reality of words, images, and rhythms, and he has relatively clearheaded ideas about what he was doing with this material, possessing a pragmatic intelligence rather than an abstract or theoretical mind. Aesthetics, as I define it, is the *perceptual* in its relation to human "structures of feeling." Lorca is a "professor of the five bodily senses," to use his own apt formulation, endowed with an acute eye and ear and an unequalled emotional responsiveness.<sup>2</sup> The rest of this chapter will be devoted to describing what Lorca is *not*; I could develop my own positive view at greater length, of course, but many aspects of Lorca's work do not come into play at all in the American response and are thus largely irrelevant to my project.

Incomplete or misleading views of Lorca have their roots in romantic ideas of poetic genius, and in stereotypes of Andalusian culture left over from European constructions of romantic Spain, often filtered through the popular writings of Ernest Hemingway. The *duende* is a powerful concept because it embodies simultaneously the romantic sublime and the Andalusian image-repertoire. The view of Lorca held by many American readers, in fact, is based primarily on the essay "Play and Theory of the *Duende*" along with some loose and usually unexamined ideas about flamenco, bullfighting, and "Spanish surrealism." The caricature of an *Andalusian Lorca*, a poet both defined and limited by a regional identity, has a long history both in Spain and in the United States. Even some Hispanists continue to perpetuate this caricature, whether by commission or omission.

The problem is not the quite understandable identification of Lorca with Andalusia, Granada, or the Gypsies, but the ideological consequences that flow from this identification. Lorca has traditionally been seen as the poet of the gypsies, the childlike embodiment of Andalu-

sian *gracia*, or else as a poet of the romantic sublime. These are Lorcas of straw that are quite easy to knock down. Or so one might think. What is harder is to do *without* such ideas. The critical construction of a non-Andalusian Lorca would be a serious distortion, since it would ignore the way in which the poet drew upon a particular image repertoire, even while consciously distancing himself from its more stereotypical expressions. It should be pointed out, moreover, that the Andalusian cultural tradition to which Lorca is heir is complex and multifaceted in its own right, including not only the romantic stereotype of the gypsy, but also baroque influences (Góngora, Soto de Rojas), the Moorish and Jewish heritage of the pre-1492 period, and a certain elegant urbanity characteristic of the late nineteenth-century period. Lorca's literary Andalusia is itself a hybrid construction, not a one-dimensional caricature.<sup>3</sup>

Would it even be desirable to construct a Lorca free from romantic ideology, a Lorca without duende? At one point in the development of this project I explained it to myself, and to anyone else who would listen, as an *escape* from the duende, in direct opposition to the seemingly insatiable American appetite for the romantic image. But it turned out to be even harder to escape from the duende than to find it. For better or for worse, this concept holds sway over the American reception of Lorca, although the duende itself is not nearly as prevalent during the earlier stages of this reception. Even my own initial interest in Lorca began with a similar enthusiasm for Spanish culture.

Romantic constructions of Lorca as Andalusian genius have acquired a certain aura of inevitability. They should be exposed to critical scrutiny, but not dismissed out of hand, since they are the source of Lorca's continuing appeal. My current view of Lorca is rooted in the equally romantic concept of "negative capability," defined by John Keats as the capability "of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>4</sup> My working hypothesis is that Lorca is an internally contradictory figure rather than a transparently cohesive one.<sup>5</sup> It is extraordinarily difficult to arrive at a global sense of who he really was, of what his work, taken together, might

signify. Apocryphal Lorcas proliferate because, like Yeats, he was a man of many masks, a protean figure rather than an easily classifiable one. The poet's brother Francisco García Lorca describes his artistic development, in both poetry and drama, as "a continuous metamorphosis" from one work to the next, rather than a process of logical development or maturation.<sup>6</sup> Harold Bloom, although fully in thrall to the ideology of genius, also recognizes Lorca's plurality: "Lorca is many poets at once: the singer of the *Gypsy Ballads*, the tragic dramatist of *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding*, the hyperbolic surrealist of *Poet in New York*, the quasi-Moorish elegist of *The Tamarit Divan*."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Bloom goes on to interpret Lorca's work, in typically North American fashion, through the archetype of the duende: a recognition of Lorca's inchoate multiplicity does not necessarily lead to a suspicion of this unifying idea.<sup>8</sup>

An awareness of the inherent difficulty of defining Lorca's poetic achievement runs through the writings of his savviest readers. Robert H. Russell states the problem succinctly: "For to read Lorca well is to avoid a series of traps and pitfalls, some almost endemic to his personality, others the result of the aura that the poet's times cast upon him."<sup>9</sup> Lorca's charismatic personality, his iconic cultural status, his homosexuality, the circumstances of his premature, tragic death, and the unstable textual history of many of his major works—all these factors set him off from his contemporaries, whose literary work is customarily read with much less attention to biography.<sup>10</sup> The idea that Lorca's life can explain the work, however, implies that we know exactly who Lorca is in the first place. Luis Fernández Cifuentes cites Borges (citing Bloy) to protest against the assumption of *transparency* that he finds—and harshly criticizes—in Ian Gibson's biography of the poet: "No hay en la tierra un ser humano capaz de decir quién es, con certidumbre" [There is no human being on earth capable of saying who he/she is, with certainty].<sup>11</sup> Fernández Cifuentes also denounces an "exasperating reductivism and superficial sociology that would embarrass the most naive doctoral student."<sup>12</sup> Gibson defines himself primarily as a biographer and historian, not as a literary critic; his contribution to

Lorca studies, beginning with his 1972 book investigating the poet's murder in Granada, has been inestimable. Yet the gulf between his understanding of the circumstances of Lorca's life and his literary naiveté is disturbing. Following Fernández Cifuentes, I would contend that Lorca is precisely the type of author who *most* requires a sophisticated critical approach informed by the precepts of modern literary theory. Unfortunately, Lorca is the modern Spanish poet most likely to be subjected to naive readings that fail to distinguish between the biographical subject, the implied author, and the poetic speaker, or that view his symbols as a kind of secret code to be deciphered.

This Keatsian understanding of Lorca as a protean literary figure does not preclude a certain amount of "irritable reaching after fact and reason" in my own attempt to understand his work and the complicated history of its reception. In fact, I would contend that a certain *irritability* is a necessary quality in any good reader of Lorca. Lorca is a much more rewarding poet as a set of critical *problems* than as an object of hagiography. One of the traps in reading Lorca is the assumption that there is a central myth or conflict, a "master-narrative" equally applicable to the early lyrics, the *romances*, the experimental theater, the rural tragedies, and the late poetry. The existence of several competing and contradictory visions of Lorca's work is one indication that none is sufficient in itself. The most rudimentary level of scholarship is sufficient to dismiss the simplistic caricature of Lorca as the poet of the gypsies. Other views, however, are more tenacious. One fairly prevalent view is that Lorca's work can be explained almost entirely in terms of his inner conflict over his sexual identity. This is not so much an erroneous view as an incomplete and reductive one. This problem is indeed a central one in *El público* and *Oda a Walt Whitman*, but it is not necessarily the single interpretative key that will explain every word that he wrote. The assumption that the entire meaning of the literary work of a gay writer is that the author is gay is not only reductive but, in the end, merely tautological. For Foucault, sex has become "the explanation for everything."<sup>13</sup> If sexuality constitutes the inner truth of personality, then biographical explanations will naturally give it pride

of place. I believe, however, that it is naive to assume that the variegated explorations of sexuality in Lorca's work can be traced back to a unitary biographical cause. Are all his dramatic characters and poetic speakers merely projections of the Lorca himself? Are the secrets behind his work more significant than the work itself?

If Lorca's life does not explain his work, his *death* has even less explanatory power. The circumstances of his murder during the initial stage of the Spanish civil war have had a disproportionate effect on his poetic afterlife. The Franco regime was all too happy to accept Jean-Louis Schonberg's hypothesis that the ultimate motive for his killing was homosexual jealousy: that narrative, along with the idea of Lorca as a naive and politically unengaged writer, deflected the blame from the military uprising and the Spanish Falange. Schonberg, not coincidentally, insisted on seeing homosexuality as an interpretative key to all of Lorca's work. Ian Gibson's 1972 book *The Death of Lorca*, in a crucial act of historical revision, correctly reassigned the blame for Lorca's killing on the political repression in Granada. There is an ongoing battle over the exhumation of Lorca's body from its original resting place—a step that Gibson is advocating against the resistance of the Lorca family.<sup>14</sup> This heightened attention to Lorca's historical legacy in the wake of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1998 and the ongoing debate over the "Ley de Memoria Histórica" [Law of Historical Memory], passed by the Spanish Cortes in 2007, is legitimate. My own book, in fact, forms part of the larger effort on the part of many scholars to come to terms with Lorca's ongoing literary, cultural, and historical legacy. My particular interest, however, is not in the value of his body as a political symbol in the debate over Spanish historical memory, but in the ongoing capacity of his poetry to generate new critical readings and textual transformations.

In some sense, the image we construct of Lorca as biographical and authorial subject should not matter: aren't his works the same whether we attribute them to a naive or to a savvy creator? While I tend to reject biography as an explanatory mode, Lorca's life and death do play an undeniable role in his reception both in Spain and internationally.

The "American Lorca" who is the subject of this book is not a corpus of texts, but an authorial construction with pronounced ideological effects. As Foucault argues in his classic essay "What is an Author?," the "author-function" sets a given corpus apart and assigns it to a particular discursive universe:

The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say "this was written by so-and-so" or "so-and-so is its author," shows that this discourse is not everyday ordinary speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.<sup>15</sup>

Foucault goes on to argue that the "plurality of self" (which I have been attributing specifically to Lorca) is a characteristic of "all discourses endowed with the author-function."<sup>16</sup> In other words, the attribution of every poem, play, lecture, manuscript correction, and personal letter written by the same individual to a single function has the effect of lumping together widely divergent enunciatory positions.

In Lorca's case this plurality is especially noteworthy, given the stylistic and generic multiplicity of his work: some examples might be the authorial figure ("el poeta") who addresses the audience in the prologue to a puppet play, the "I" of a short lyric poem like "Casida del llanto," and the biographical subject who writes letters to his family from New York. We also attribute the words spoken by dramatic characters in *Bodas de sangre*, *Así que pasen cinco años*, and *El público* to the same author-function, though not directly to "Lorca" as a speaking subject. To make Lorca a singular rather than a plural subject, to sum him up in a single noun or adjective (*Lorca*, *duende*, *lorquian*, *lorcaesque*), is to commit an astounding ideological reduction.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the "intentional fallacy" is sometimes forgotten in biographical readings of Lorca's work, so too is the idea that the speaker of the poem is not to be identified with the poet as a matter of course. Even in his lyric production, Lorca is primarily a *dramatic* writer, employing

variegated poetic speakers and wearing a mask even, or especially, at his most intimate moments. A stylized, nonindividuated voice, reminiscent of anonymous lyrics of the medieval period, often appears in the *Canciones* and *Suites*. The elegiac voice of "Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" speaks in the first person, but also in a highly stylized voice. In many very direct lyric poems from these books, there are no markers of the first person at all. "Canción del jinete" ["Rider's Song"] and "La casada infiel" ["The Unfaithful Wife"] are dramatic monologues featuring identifiable first person speakers clearly differentiated from the perspective of the implied author.<sup>18</sup> Another modality is the third person narrator of many poems of the *Romancero gitano*, who occasionally jumps through the fictional frame to interpellate his characters directly: Antoñito el Camborio, in his agony, addresses this narrator directly as "Federico García" and asks him to call the Guardia Civil.<sup>19</sup> In the places where Lorca's own autobiographical *self* would appear to be most in evidence, finally, the language often becomes densely metaphorical, as if to compensate for this seeming directness. The hyperbolic autobiographical speaker of many of the poem in *Poeta en Nueva York* is a case in point.

The larger point here is that a poem by Lorca is a work of *fiction*, not a biographical document. The flesh-and-blood Lorca never had a son named "Juan," as the speaker of the "Iglesia Abandonada" did. He never rode to Córdoba on a pony like the speaker of "Canción de jinete"; in fact, he could not ride a horse at all. The multiplicity of enunciatory positions means that there is no typical speaker of a Lorca poem who can be identified unproblematically with the biographical author. Biographically minded criticism does not always require a first person lyric speaker identifiable with the author, but the absence of a clearly defined *self* at the center of Lorca's poetry is, at the very least, a serious complication.

DESPITE THE MASSIVE attention to Lorca's life, the *intellectual* biography of Lorca has yet to be written.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps some have assumed that there would be nothing to write about, that an intellectual biography



of the child genius would be a contradiction in terms. The underestimation of Lorca's intellectual capability and knowledge of literary history remains an obstacle to a fuller understanding of his work. In Spanish-speaking contexts, the idea of Lorca as a childlike innocent has had a long history, as Julián Jiménez Heffernan points out: "Lorca y Vallejo han sido durante demasiado tiempo nuestros poetas tontos, aplastados por dos losas absurdas, el infantilismo y el indigenismo."<sup>21</sup> [Lorca and Vallejo have for too long been our dumb poets, flattened out by two absurd tombstones, infantilism and indigenism.] Unfortunately, however, infantilism is only *one* of the burdens Lorca has had to bear. At various points in his reception in Spain and internationally, Lorca has been cast in the roles of the childlike innocent, the naive neopopularist, the primitive poet of myth, the gypsy singer of the *cante jondo* and the duende, and the surrealist channeler of unconscious urges. He has been the object of condescension among his more scholarly inclined contemporaries, and the posthumous sponsor of anti-intellectual poetics in both the U.S. and in Spain.

A recognition of Lorca's literary intelligence underlies the best critical and bibliographical work currently being done on the Spanish poet and playwright. An examination at his complete career, encompassing everything from his juvenilia to his late experiments, calls into question the myth of the poet as an untutored or naive creator. My own understanding of Lorca's literary and intellectual development is derived from my own rereading of the primary texts in light of the most astute recent Lorca scholarship. I see Lorca, first of all, as a self-aware artist with a deep and nuanced understanding of the Spanish literary tradition. A canny writer rather than a naive one, he was able to create convincingly modern works that draw intertextually on medieval, renaissance, baroque, and nineteenth-century sources. Equally conversant with popular and with learned styles of a thousand-year old tradition, he was also a leading figure in the Spanish avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s. He achieved popularity with works like *Romancero gitano*, but distrusted the sources of his own popularity, coming to distrust and even despise his own popular identification with gypsy

imagery and with *Lorquismo* generally. Writing with great popular success for the stage (after some initial flops), he also wrote avant-garde plays that could not be performed in the theater of his own day.

From a global reading of his poetry, plays, correspondence, and lectures we can surmise that Lorca was, in the first place, an astute reader of Jorge Manrique, Garcilaso de la Vega, Cervantes, Saint John of the Cross, Luis de Góngora, Pedro Soto de Rojas, Lope de Vega, Santa Teresa de Ávila, Calderón de la Barca, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rubén Darío, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, as well as a serious student of traditional poetry in the anonymous tradition. In the theater, he was conversant with the work of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hugo, Ibsen, Galdós, Benavente, Valle-Inclán, Pirandello) and the classic Spanish *comedia* of the early modern period, along with Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians. This is not an exhaustive list: according to his brother Francisco, Federico was a voracious reader who possessed a high degree of general culture, despite being a rather poor student.<sup>22</sup> By the poet's own account, he listened to around a thousand lectures at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid, where he lived during most of his twenties.<sup>23</sup> Despite his identification with primordial Spain, Lorca was, in fact, a cosmopolitan intellectual who came of age during the epoch of the historical avant-garde in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

The scope of Lorca's readings is evident in the stylistic variety of his literary production: in the difference between one play, one book of poetry, and the following one. In his chameleon-like mastery of multiple poetic styles, Lorca might be seen as typical of the poets of his so-called generation. His contemporaries Rafael Alberti and Gerardo Diego were also capable of moving from one style to the next—neopopular, neobaroque, or avant-garde—with virtuosic facility. What differentiates Lorca from these poets, however, is the depth with which he explores these stylistic models. While capable of mimicry and pastiche, Lorca also understood the literary tradition from within, profoundly reinterpreting classic forms. He often worked by combining

elements from two or more periods of literary history in order to create new hybrids. In *Romancero gitano* [Gypsy ballads], for example, Lorca superimposes complex metaphors, reminiscent of seventeenth-century baroque poetry but also of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, on the tradition of the anonymous *romances* [ballads] first transcribed and collected in the fifteenth century. Lorca uses this hybrid genre in the creation of a mythic Andalusia represented by his Gypsy protagonists. This work, then, is not a simple neopopularist pastiche of the traditional Spanish ballad or *romance*. Since this book brought Lorca his initial fame, it is sometimes regarded as a concession to popular taste, yet it also contains some of Lorca's most metaphorically dense and difficult poems.

The sheer quantity of Lorca's writing, along with its scope and variety, is evidence of a strong work ethic and an extraordinary intellectual restlessness. Since he did not live past the age of thirty-eight, his entire literary production took shape in a relatively short span of time. In 1920, at the age of twenty-two, he completed his first published collection of poetry, *Libro de poemas* [Book of poems] and staged his first (unsuccessful) dramatic production with *El maleficio de la mariposa* [The butterfly's curse]. By critical consensus both works are still rather immature in their conception, so we can place Lorca's entire *mature* work within the sixteen-year period between 1921 and 1936. His achievement in lyric poetry during this period would be impressive in itself, even if he were not also one of the major European dramatists of the century. He wrote over a dozen major works of poetry and drama between *Poema del cante jondo* [Poem of the deep song] (written in November 1921 but not published until 1931) and his final play, *La casa de Bernarda Alba* [The house of Bernarda Alba].

If Lorca's contemporary Jorge Guillén had died at the age of thirty-eight, in 1931, he would be remembered only as the author of the 1928 edition of *Cántico*, an impressive but slim collection of lyric poetry. Lorca's more extensive and varied literary production prompts us to divide his career into several distinct phases, but, in an equivalent span of time, Guillén produced only his very *early* work. Walter Benjamin

makes this key observation in his essay "The Storyteller": "A man who dies at the age of thirty-five,' said Moritz Heimann once, 'is at every point in his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.' Nothing is more dubious than this sentence—but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man—so says the truth that was meant here—who died at thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point in his life as a man who died at thirty-five."<sup>25</sup> So it is with Lorca, who died at the age of thirty-eight: our perspective on his career is conditioned by our knowledge of the terminal point in his life and career.

Before producing his mature work Lorca put himself through a literary apprenticeship, beginning at a very young age and extending into his early twenties, during which he imitated and mastered the poetic and theatrical styles available to him. We learn from the redoubtable historian and biographer Ian Gibson that "Lorca inherited all the vigour of a speech that springs from the earth and expresses itself with extraordinary spontaneity."<sup>26</sup> What makes a statement like this worth questioning is that it is typical of a widespread attitude toward the Spanish poet. We might note, in the first place, the romantic ideology implicit in the image of a language that "springs from the earth"—a conception wholly at odds with the lessons of modern linguistics. The idea that the mature style of *Bodas de sangre* [Blood wedding] was merely the poet's natural inheritance also begs the question of why there is only one Lorca: if the stylized dialogue of his plays were simply the result of tape recording the vigorous speech of Andalusian peasants, then the native soil from which Lorca sprang would have produced many other spontaneous geniuses of the same type.

To posit the poet as a native product of his soil is also to ignore the evidence showing that Lorca's "spontaneity" was a hard-earned achievement rather than an effortless birthright: a reading of his juvenilia shows that the very early Lorca, chronologically closer to a state of childhood innocence, was an imitator of the ornate fin-de-siècle style of Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío. Lorca had to fight his way through to his mature style, freeing himself from the cloying preciousness and derivative-ness of his teenage work. A look at his theatrical juvenilia, usefully col-

lected in a critical edition by Andrés Soria Olmedo, reveals a similarly arduous process of literary apprenticeship.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Lorca's very early writings read like juvenilia rather than works of genius is fully to be expected: these writings reveal a diligent young writer systematically teaching himself to write by imitating the prevalent stylistic models of the day, not a feverish poet inspired by daimonic powers. A look at Lorca's typical creative process reveals two methods that are different from each other but not necessarily antithetical: he nurtured and developed some poetic projects over relatively long stretches of time, taking them apart and putting them back together again. *Poeta en Nueva York* [Poet in New York] and *Suites* are good examples of this process.<sup>28</sup> In other cases, he mulled over a project for a relatively long period of time, allowing it to develop in his mind, and then wrote a more or less definitive version in a few days "as though in a fever of creation."<sup>29</sup> While clearly different from each other, neither pattern reveals a purely spontaneous, unreflective approach to literary creation.

The preceding description of Lorca's writing career ought to put to rest the strawman view of Lorca as a kind of *idiot savant* of literature, a creator of pure genius whose level of literary culture was rudimentary.<sup>30</sup> It is hard to imagine, in fact, why Lorca's level of literary erudition was ever doubted. Perhaps an emphasis on book learning is at odds with the ideology of genius: Lorca did not pursue an academic career and appeared to be *relatively* unlearned when compared to the eminent "poet-professors" of his own epoch, like Dámaso Alonso, Jorge Guillén, and Pedro Salinas. At one point Guillén himself encouraged the younger Lorca to pursue such a career—an idea that horrified Lorca's friend Salvador Dalí.<sup>31</sup> As Dalí realized, Lorca did not have an academic or scholarly temperament, despite his assimilation of thousands of pages of literature. His erudition was more of the performative and pragmatic type. Although he toyed briefly with the idea of being a professor like Guillén, he ultimately preferred giving lectures to writing essays, directing golden age plays to editing critical editions of them.

The kind of intuitive and *performative* intelligence that Lorca possessed is often perceived as less intellectual and theoretical than

analytically based modes of scholarship. Although Lorca never positioned himself as an systematic theorist of poetry, his lectures do in fact reveal an astute critical mind and a considerable level of erudition. The well-known lecture on the duende is a case in point: this short prose-piece written for oral performance is allusive to the point of being nearly incomprehensible to the average undergraduate Spanish major in an American university circa 2008. Lorca's multifaceted definition of the duende is not easy to grasp even when the references are explained. This lecture is not, in any case, a straightforward description of Lorca's own creative process that can be taken at face value, but a complexly metaphorical description of a concept that continually changes shape before the eyes of the reader. Is the duende a principle that applies mostly to bullfighting and *cante jondo*, a mostly *performative* principle? Or is it principle of artistic *creation* most comparable to the inspiring *muse* or the *angel*? Is it specific to Spanish culture or is it a principle that could be applied to Nietzsche, Goethe, Socrates, and other names that Lorca cites? Through his allusive and metaphorically dense presentation, Lorca introduces layer upon layer of complication rather than taking us closer to a clear delineation of the concept.

The underestimation of the complexity of Lorca's work takes another, more subtle form in commentators who contrast the facile neopopularist author of works like *Poema del cante jondo*, *Romancero gitano*, and *Bodas de sangre*, to the avant-garde experimenter of *Poeta en Nueva York* and *El público* [The audience]. The first to take a disparaging view of Lorca's neopopularist works were Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, who felt that their friend was not sufficiently avant-garde. The "Andalusian dog" of their film collaboration *Le chien Andalou* is Lorca himself, seen as a hapless neurotic.<sup>32</sup> The young *novísimo* poet Guillermo Carnero, writing in 1976, expresses interest only in *Poeta en Nueva York*, and attributes the popularity of Lorca to political motivations (the circumstances surrounding his death) and to "la musicalidad magistral de la parte menos interesante de su obra" [the magisterial musicality of the least interesting part of his work].<sup>33</sup>

The celebration of the avant-garde Lorca corrects the balance by emphasizing works dismissed or neglected by earlier critics. Yet the dichot-

omy of the neopopularist and the avant-garde Lorca has the unfortunate effect of understating the originality, complexity, and inherent difficulty of his seemingly more conventional works. It is only the existence of the avant-garde Lorca, in other words, that makes the neopopularist works seem transparent by comparison. Carnero himself suggests that Lorca's poetry is stylistically as complex as that of other, similar poets of the same period, who never gained Lorca's level of popularity. The difficulty of these poets was held against them, but an exception was made for Lorca.<sup>34</sup> *Romancero gitano* combines popularity and difficulty in exactly this way. The musicality of Lorca's handling of the *romance* form, the popularity of a few of the simpler poems in this book (like the unfortunate "La casada infiel"), and the sheer familiarity of the book conspire to make this book seem much less challenging than it actually is.<sup>35</sup>

It is an irony of literary history that Lorca was not surrealist enough for Dalí and Buñuel, since after his death he became the model for "Spanish surrealism" in the United States. American admirers of Lorca typically do not distinguish strongly between the neopopular and the avant-garde Lorca in the first place. They tend to see the enigmatic and irrational images of *Poema del cante jondo* as more or less "surrealistic." Perhaps this view is not as erroneous as it might appear: Lorca himself invoked the duende in public readings of *Poeta en Nueva York*, associating the "black sounds" of the *cante* with the more avant-garde phase of his own poetry. While the poet himself felt ambivalent about his own popularity, he himself did not establish a rigid distinction between poetic works in different styles.

The dismissal of certain facets of Lorca's work might also derive from the fallacy of identifying Lorca with the sources of his inspiration or with his dramatic *personae*. Visions of Lorca as a childlike innocent, an untutored folksinger, or a duende-possessed surrealist conflate the artistic creator with the poetic voice. The mistake is identical whether the critic happens to be praising or disparaging these particular aspects of Lorca's poetry. The childlike tone of some of his earlier poetry is the result of a deliberate assumption of a lyrical mask, not of the poet's literally childlike character. In similar fashion, Lorca's exploration of the gypsy myth in *Poema del cante jondo* and *Romancero gitano* is that of

an intellectual poet looking for inspiration in the culture of a marginal group, not that of a gypsy *cantaor*.

Visions of Lorca's poetry, both in Spain and internationally, are often tinged with a certain *orientalism*, but Lorca's own vision of the gypsies is already that of an orientalist. Charnon-Deutsch points out the Lorca occupies the position of an intellectual patron of *Caló* [Gypsy] culture:

Lorca's most famous collection of poems, *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy ballads), written between 1924 and 1927, also capitalized on Spanish fin-de-siècle escapism by sustaining the myth of a mysterious and tragic people living outside the confines of bourgeois society. By exalting the Gypsy as poetic subject, Lorca lent prestige to the community that would have international reverberations, but his relation to the actual Calés otherwise differed little from that of other señoritos whose patronage system was responsible for perpetuating mercenary relations with Caló entertainers.<sup>36</sup>

Charnon-Deutsch goes on to cite a letter from Lorca to Guillén, in which the author of *Romancero gitano* distances himself from the gypsy theme: "Los gitanos son un tema. Y nada más. [...] Además el gitanismo me da un tono de incultura, de falta de educación y de *poeta salvaje* que tú sabes bien no soy."<sup>37</sup> [The gypsies are a theme. And nothing more. Furthermore, this *gitanismo* gives me a tone of unculturedness, of lack of education, and of being a *savage poet*, which you know very well I am not.] Soria Olmedo also quotes from this same letter, along with others written to Bergamín and Melchor Fernández Almagro that express similar sentiments.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that these letters date from 1927, before the actual publication of the book the following year. There is a certain *preemptive* defensiveness, then, in Lorca's attitude toward his own work: he needs to mark his distance from more vulgarly orientalist visions of the gypsies, as well as from the sources of his own incipient popularity. In his own mind, he was not a gypsy poet or even a poet of the gypsies, not a poet of folklore. He despised the lorquian *kitsch* that was already taking shape before the publication of his most famous book.<sup>39</sup>



Lorca published *Poema del cante jondo* in 1931, ten years after its actual composition, and he gave his famous duende lecture in Buenos Aires in 1933. In other words, he continued to exploit the gypsy theme well after the publication of *Romancero gitano*, despite his evident discomfort with the misconstrual of his position that would inevitably ensue.<sup>40</sup> If he had wanted to dissociate himself from gypsy and Andalusian themes during the last phase of his career he could have done so much more emphatically, but the truth is that he remained engaged in the reinterpretation of the Andalusian myth to the end of his life, as is evident in one the last poetic works that he completed before his death, the posthumously published *Diván del Tamarit*.

The championing of the difficult, avant-garde Lorca against the more facile and popular poet, then, overlooks the complexity of the neopopularist work as well as the lack of a clear dividing line between poetic works of different types. Lorca is a paradoxical figure: if we view him as an inspired, duende-possessed poet, then he is equally inspired in *Poema del cante jondo* and in *Poeta en Nueva York*. If, on the other hand, we view him more as a self-aware architect, then we must recognize this quality in both the rural tragedies and the experimental plays. Whether we view Lorca as an intellectual who distrusted the intellect, or as naïf with profoundly intellectual intuitions, the apparent "clarity" of some of Lorca's works only deepens the mystery.

MY AIM HERE has been to suggest that "Lorca" is a complex author-function not susceptible to easy reductions. The best critical work is often that which explicates a single work in detail, or addresses a fairly narrow textual or interpretative problem, rather than attempting to arrive at a totalizing "theory of Lorca" that will reconcile all the conflicting data. It might be objected that what I have provided here is an erudite, artistically self-conscious Lorca that responds to the requirements of my own critical agenda. While I cannot conceal my personal preference for a more ambivalent, self-conscious, and intellectual Lorca, my ultimate argument is for a recognition of a high degree of authorial plurality and complexity. Within this more complex construction of

Lorca, of course, we must also come to terms with Lorca's own exploitation of seemingly simple modes.

The idea of Lorca as a well-read, self-conscious, and astute artist is tacitly assumed in the work of the best scholars and critics in the field, even when they do not feel the need to argue for this view explicitly. Nevertheless, more simplistic views of the poet persist in the popular imagination and around the edges of Lorca scholarship. It is still possible to hear weak presentations at otherwise respectable academic conferences that offer reductive and distorted readings of Lorca, falling back on all of the old clichés. Perhaps because of the legacy of Lorca's problematic reception, a bad paper on Lorca tends to be much worse than the typically mediocre paper on almost any other modern Spanish author. If the Spanish professors giving such papers can fall victim to such pitfalls, so too can English-speaking readers of poetry whose knowledge of Lorca is mediated through American poets and translators. It is not necessarily the case that these American popularizers of Lorca are unsubtle thinkers—although in a few cases they are—but that their reasons for valuing Lorca are specific to the context of U.S. literature and culture. What is sacrificed in the process, logically, is the Spanish cultural context of which Lorca formed a part. Their aim is not the scholarly one of understanding Lorca as he really is, or Lorca in the context of the larger Hispanic literary tradition.

The lack of scholarly rigor in the American reception of Lorca is particularly evident in the widespread view that he is a "surrealist," and, in fact, the best example of the wider phenomenon known as "Spanish surrealism." It might be surprising, to readers of American poetry, that the consensus among contemporary scholars is that Lorca was not a surrealist at all. The idea of a Hispanic or "Spanish surrealism" is a confusing and problematic one in the first place. There were, in fact, Spanish-speaking poets and painters who were directly engaged in the international Surrealist movement, including Mexican poet Octavio Paz and a group of poets from Tenerife clustered around the *Gaceta de Arte*.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, most of the poets commonly cited as "surrealists" in the North American context—Neruda, Lorca, Aleixandre—were not actually affiliated with surrealism in any way. These poets

were, to widely varying degrees, influenced by surrealism or by a certain "surrealist atmosphere" in Spanish-language poetry during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Among these poets, Lorca was probably the least involved with surrealism itself: unlike Aleixandre or Cernuda, he never applied this label to his own work.

It might seem pedantic to insist on this more narrow, *nominalist* definition of surrealism, confining this label to those who actually participated in the international Surrealist movement headed by André Breton.<sup>42</sup> Paul Ilie, in a 1968 book, argued for the existence of a broader "Surrealist Mode" in Spanish literature.<sup>43</sup> The problem with a broader definition, however, is evident in Ilie's choice of texts: if the term *surrealist* is cut loose from its ties to *surrealism* itself, then everything and anything can fit into this category—even the plays of Valle-Inclán. *Surrealism*, the proper name of a particular movement within the avant-garde, becomes synonymous with the avant-garde itself, and thus loses its definitional core. This effect is greatly magnified *in translation*: a poet like César Vallejo, who was actively hostile to surrealism, is still sometimes cited in the U.S. as a part of a wider Hispanic surrealism. The tendency among scholars writing after Ilie, then, has been to insist on more rigorous and historically grounded definitions.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the definitional clarity gained by separating Lorca from Surrealism, there are historical reasons that have made it impossible for me to leave behind this term in the writing of this book. It is easy to see why Lorca would have been seen as a *surrealist* from the U.S. perspective. His association with Salvador Dalí and admiration for Joan Miró, the visual style of his own drawings, and the "irrational" imagery of *Poet en Nueva York*, made this identification all but inevitable. Since surrealism itself did not have a strong presence in American poetry during the modernist period, almost any poetry bearing the slightest resemblance to surrealism was likely to have been viewed as "surrealist" in the broadest sense, even if Lorca was the least surrealist of the poets influenced in broad terms by surrealism itself.

What is more, the scholarly consensus that Lorca was not, in fact, a surrealist had not yet been established during the period when he was most influential in the U.S.: the period from the 1950s through

the 1970s. The debate about whether Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* was directly inspired by surrealism has been going on for many years, with nuanced arguments on either side. Anecdotal influence suggests that those not directly involved in this debate—specialists in other areas of Hispanic literature, for instance—continue to think of Lorca as a surrealist to this day. The misidentification of Lorca and other Spanish-language poets as surrealists is, in some sense, a *fait accompli*. It is undeniably true that the historical Lorca, "Lorca himself," was not a member of the movement, but it is also an historical fact that the term *surrealism* has been used in a looser, *improper* sense in Spain, Latin America, and the English-speaking world for many decades, to refer to many poets influenced by surrealism at one or two removes from André Breton's movement.

A larger point to be made here is that current scholarly views of Lorca are not likely to line up neatly with popular ideas about his work that motivated American *Lorquismo* circa 1957. The belated publication of Lorca's *Sonetos del amor oscuro* in the 1980s provides another example of this temporal gap.<sup>45</sup> These openly homoerotic sonnets were not available to gay poets of the 1950s like Duncan, Spicer, O'Hara, and Ginsberg. This sequence of sonnets is highly significant for anyone wanting to understand Lorca's work, but its late publication prevented it having an impact on the development of American poetry at mid-century.<sup>46</sup>

In any case, the neobaroque formalism of Lorca's late sonnets might not have appealed to the American poets who took up his cause in the 1950s, who were mostly interested in finding alternatives to the metrical verse of the "academic" poets of their own time. For American poets, Lorca represented "deep song" and "Spanish surrealism." It is significant that among poets of the generation that created the American Lorca, only Jerome Rothenberg has returned to a work of Lorca's that was not available to readers during the 1950s and 1960s, in his translation of the *Suites* (see chapter 7).

If American poets have read Lorca in limited or partial ways, it is equally true that my own study reflects the biases inherent in my own

perspective. In particular, I have chosen to focus my attention on a group of poets who came of age during the cold war. While American poets continue to be inspired by Lorca's poetry to the present day, my contention is that the most significant impact on American poetry occurs in the work of the influential poets associated with the New American Poetry. In part, this perspective relies on my assumption that poets like Ginsberg, O'Hara, and Duncan are themselves major poets who left an indelible mark on American poetry and culture of this period.