DECONSTRUCTING NARRATIVE: LORCA'S *ROMANCERO GITANO* AND THE *ROMANCE SONÁMBULO*

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RESUMEN

Los primeros años del siglo XX fueron testigos de la rebeldía de muchos artistas en todos los ámbitos de la estética en contra de las estructuras del realismo al "deconstruir" las formas tradicionales en sus elementos más básicos. En las artes plásticas, las pinturas cubistas de Picasso reflejaban esta rebelión; en la literaria, el surrealismo proveía a los escritores de medios para cruzar la líneas de la vida cotidiana y llegar a las imágenes fantásticas de los sueños. La colección de baladas de *El romancero gitano* de Federico García Lorca (1928) representa, de muchas maneras, la culminación de esta rebelión en las letras españolas. Aunque usa la forma antigua del romance, el vehículo medieval para contar historias, Lorca se centra más en una imaginería extraordinaria que en la línea narrativa. Este rechazo de la primacía de las convenciones narrativas en favor de la metáfora, representado en el "Romance sonámbulo", significa una reacción crítica a los múltiples cambios sociales y políticos que estaban modelando y cambiaban el mundo de Lorca en los turbulentos años veinte.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Lorca, Romancero Gitano, "Romance sonámbulo", narrativa, teoría de la deconstrucción, romance.

ABSTRACT

The early years of the Twentieth Century saw artists in all fields of aesthetics rebel against the strictures of realism by deconstructing traditional forms into their most basic elements. In the plastic arts, Picasso's cubist paintings reflect this rebellion. In the literary sphere, surrealism offered writers a vehicle for moving past the familiar outlines of everyday forms to the fantastic images of dreamscapes. *El romancero gitano,* Federico García Lorca's 1928 collection of ballads, represents, in many ways, the culmination in Spanish letters of this artistic rebellion. While using the ancient poetic form of the "romance", the medieval world's vehicle for telling stories in poetry, Lorca focuses on startling imagery rather than the story line. This rejection of the primacy of the traditional narrative convention in favor of the startling metaphor, epitomized in the "Romance

sonámbulo", signifies a critical reaction to the multiple social and political changes that were shaping and changing Lorca's world in the turbulent 1920's.
KEY WORDS

Lorca, Romancero Gitano, "Romance sonámbulo", deconstruction theory, narrative, romance.

RÉSUMÉ

Les premières années du xxe siècle ont été témoins de la révolte de nombreux artistes dans tous les domaines de l'esthétique en contre des structures du réalisme en "déconstruisant" les formes traditionnelles dans leurs éléments les plus basiques. Dans les arts plastiques, les peintures cubistes de Picasso refletaient cette révolte; dans la littérature, le surréalisme fournissait aux écrivains les moyens pour croiser les lignes de la quotidienne et arriver aux images fantastiques des rêves. La collection de ballades de *El Romancero gitano* de Federico García Lorca (1928) représente, de nombreuses façons, la culmination de cette révolte des lettres espagnoles. Même s'il utilise la forme ancienne du romance, le véhicule mediéval pour raconter des histoires, Lorca focalise davantage sur une imaginerie extraordinaire que sur la ligne narrative. Ce rejet de la primacie des conventions narratives en faveur de la métaphore, repésenté dans le "Romance sonámbulo", signifie une réaction critique aux multiples changements sociaux et politiques qui étaient en train de modeler et changeaient le monde de Lorca dans les turbulentes années vingt.
MOTS-CLÉS

Lorca, *Romancero Gitano,* "Romance sonámbulo", narrative, théorie de la déconstruction, romance.

The early years of the twentieth century saw artists in all aesthetic fields rebel against the strictures of realism by deconstructing traditional forms into their most basic elements. In the plastic arts, Picasso's cubist paintings epitomize this rebellion. In the literary sphere, surrealism offered writers a vehicle for moving past familiar, everyday forms to the fantastic images of dreamscapes. The *Romancero gitano,* Federico García Lorca's 1928 ballad book, represents, in many ways, the culmination in Spanish letters of this artistic rebellion. While using the *romance,* the medieval world's vehicle for telling stories in poetry, Lorca focuses more on startling imagery than on the story line. The collection's most famous ballad, *Romance sonámbulo* has provoked more critical debates concerning the supposed "story" than any other poem of the collection. Traditional readers giving the most literal interpretations contend that the poem narrates the final hours of a mortally wounded smuggler seeking

refuge in the home of his girlfriend. Such readers insist that the anecdote or story line is decipherable and identifiable. Readers at the other extreme insist that the poem lacks a "complete" story, consisting instead of a series of fractured images that dazzle the reader's imagination. This rejection of the primacy of a traditional narrative convention in favor of a series of surprising metaphors, epitomized in *Romance sonámbulo,* suggests an artistic reaction against Spain's stagnant, deeply conflicted traditional provincial society that lay starkly at odds with the multiple social and political changes that were transforming a post-World War I Europe in the turbulent 1920s.

The decade of the 1920s in Europe marked the blossoming of artistic experimentation, as reflected in the number of *–isms* that appeared. Although many, such as symbolism and surrealism, began in France, they quickly spread through Spain's artistic and intellectual communities. The appeal of such movements lay in their promise of freedom from the strict limits of nineteenth-century realism. As C. B. Morris explains, *In Spain, as elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s, Surrealism's extreme attitudes and actions stimulated extreme responses* (Morris, 1972, p. 4). He continues by commenting that *Surrealism is the explosion of a society beneath the repressive anguish of an antiquated morality* (Morris, 1972, p. 4). Certainly, in Spain, the surrealist artists reacted against what they perceived as the "antiquated morality" of the Catholic Church and the anachronistic and moribund nobility that supported the extant power structure, including the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera. Federico García Lorca's relationship with Salvador Dalí and trips to Cataluña in the 1920s put him in direct contact with the literary and artistic Vanguard in Barcelona, always the most progressive part of Spain (Zuleta, 1971, p. 171).

The surrealistic movement that appeared after World War I brought into question the ability of traditional literary imagery and language to capture the reality of the subconscious, especially as described by Freud, Jung and other psychologist. The surrealistic image in poetry, as literary critic Carlos Bousoño explains, passes through three stages. First, the author has to present a point of departure that at first glance only gives the reader a "bad reading", or rather, that makes no sense on the literal level seeming "illogical and symbolic". At the second stage, the reader experiences a disconnect of logic between the starting point and the poetic meaning that comes from it. Finally, the reader has no conscious recognition of the sign expressing equality between both terms (Bousoño, *El irracionalismo,* pp. 24-31). Thus, to gain any mean-

ing from the apparently illogical image, the reader has to make free associations, giving words new or expanded meanings. Derrida would later describe in his essays on deconstruction that language is arbitrary by nature and denies any fixed meaning (Derrida, 1988, p. 108). The surrealistic image, in similar fashion, decenters logical meaning by its juxtaposition of words lacking any obviously logical connection. Rather, it gains its meaning from the interplay of linguistic elements and the free association among them. By using the techniques of surrealism, Lorca could escape the confines of both realism and traditional logic, as well as fixed meanings in his poetic expressions. The apparent illogicality of surrealism negated the assigning of any definitive meaning or "official reading" to the text.

Cobb characterizes the appeal of surrealism to Lorca and others of his generation stating, *Their central impulse was toward freedom, freedom to throw off all the shackles binding total expression of the personality, including even scatological and sexual taboos* (Cobb, 1967, p. 3). Lorca, like other surrealists, affirmed liberty without limits and rebelled against the confines of conventional reality in all its recognizable forms (López Castro, 1993, p. 63). Thus, as Lorca matured as a poet, he used surrealistic techniques to further his freedom of expression, even as he rebelled against the limits of a conservative, repressive society with its "antiquated morality" as taught by the Catholic Church. Those moral teachings included strictures on all sorts of sexual expression, especially homosexual.

Lorca had great familiarity not only with the newest literary trends, but also possessed a profound knowledge of Spain's own literary tradition. He knew the traditional *romances;* he knew the folklore of his native Andalucía. He also understood how the popular *romance* developed into more lyrical poetry influenced by Lope, Góngora and others in the seventeenth century. As Víctor de la Concha affirms, *la obra lorquiana se arraiga con firmeza en el subsuelo de la tradición* (de la Concha, 1984, p. 357). López Castro echoes this sentiment, stating of Lorca's more mature poetry, *La palabra de la tradición, la voz olvidada o perdida es la que comienza a hablar* (López Castro,1993, p. 60). Devoto and Spitzer summarize the blend of both folk and high culture in Lorca's more popular poetry, stating, *García Lorca encuentra en el folklore literario de su país el módulo y la razón de su estilo propio* (Devoto and Spitzer, 1984, p. 388).

Lorca's poetic career had begun officially with the publication of his first book, *Libro de poemas,* in 1921, followed shortly thereafter with *Canciones* in 1924. These books reflect the influence of Spanish

poets such as Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez, as well as that of the French Symbolist poets. However, these early works also reflect Lorca's extensive reading in traditional Spanish poetry, especially in the rhythm and meter he utilized in the early poems. By the time *Poema del Cante Jondo* appeared, in 1926, Lorca had aided Manuel de Falla with the Cante Jondo competition in Granada and written an essay about the music of his native Andalucía. The *Poema del Cante Jondo* reflected the synthesis of the folkloric and contemporary poetic elements into Lorca' unique poetic style.

The *Romancero gitano,* published in 1927, quickly became Lorca's most popular poetic work. The entire collection uses the traditional *romance* or Spanish ballad, which, Devoto and Spitzer contend, offers the poet the greatest relative freedom among traditional poetic forms (Devoto and Spitzer, 1984, p. 389). The *romance,* derived from the epic, has eight syllable lines, with assonant rhyme in every other line. Furthermore, as both Cobb and Devoto and Spitzer note, the *romance* allows loose rhyme rather than perfect rhyme. Traditionally, the *romance* functioned, as did the epic from which it derived, to narrate historical and contemporary events, and to preserve national values or propagandize even as it entertained. In fact, by the late Middle Ages, the *romance* became recognized as an authoritative text that enunciated national values. Iser notes that the medieval courtly romance served *to remove a threat to the stability of the system* (Iser, 1978, p. 78). Cobb observes that many of the ballads, though historical, exude an *air of mystery, a fascination suspended between reality and fantasy* (Cobb, 1983, p. ix). Nevertheless, they remained associated with the national history, and readers or listeners expected to find a clearly delineated story about an important moment or personage from the past that was consonant with dominant values.

Later poets added lyrical and dramatic elements to the *romance.* In the nineteenth century, the romantic poets, such as Ángel Saavedra, el Duque de Rivas, revived the *romance,* in part, as a way of rebelling against the neo-classical emphasis on Greco-Roman history. The *romance* was a truly Spanish poetic form rather than a foreign verse, either from France or classical antiquity. The romantic poets also prized its dramatic possibilities for narrating national history, even as they shrouded it in an air of mystery, as, for example, readers easily note in Saavedra's *Una antigualla de Sevilla*. In this *romance,* the Duque de Rivas tells the story of Pedro el Cruel, celebrating his ability to place himself above and outside the social laws. Saavedra, like his contemporaries, idealized

figures that rebelled against social mores. Nevertheless, in spite of all its poetic embellishments, the storyline of the *romance* remained intact and easily identifiable. Even as the *romance* served the Romantic poets as a vehicle for social protest, it maintained its function as a narrative form. Poets of the later part of the nineteenth century, though, rejected the *romance* for its excessive exuberance.

The artistic rebellion of the 1920s against the limitations of realism brought this traditional form back to popularity. Whereas, the Romantic poets utilized the *romance* to idealize history and historical figures that embodied rebellion, the twentieth-century poets used primarily the format of the *romance,* evincing their social rebellion by subverting its traditional storytelling function. Lorca, more than any other poet of his generation, utilized the *romance* in this fashion. Thus, as Devoto and Spitzer conclude about Lorca's use of the ballad form, *El romance es la forma métrica más apropiada que se haya creado el individualismo español* (Devoto and Spitzer, 1984, p. 390).

The title, *Romancero gitano,* prepares the reader for Lorca's subversion of a traditional poetic form. As Beltrán has observed, the very title is oxymoronic in that while the *romance* is the form most connected to Spain's national history and culture, the *gitano* or gypsy is by definition nomadic and ahistoric (Beltrán, 1986, p. 3). Furthermore, the utilization of the world of the gypsies, a race marginalized by Spanish society, represented the inversion of the function of the *romance* as the transmitter of Spain's great historical moments and personages. In the *Romancero gitano,* Lorca sidesteps the traditional storytelling function of the *romance* either through protagonizing gypsies and narrating the deeds of these antiheroes, choosing mythical stories in their most primitive forms, or in some cases, completely omitting sequential narrative elements that would produce a cohesive tale. *The romance,* then, gave Lorca the greatest poetic freedom within traditional poetic forms while the dreamscape imagery of surrealism simultaneously allowed him to escape the poem's realistic dimensions by subverting its implied requirement to narrate cohesively. The form of the traditional *romance,* with its deep literary substrata, stands in tension with the poems' experimental surrealistic content. Thus, Lorca reverts to one of Spain's most popular and folkloric poetic form even as he simultaneously undercuts the *romance'* most traditional function as vehicle for narrating national history and immutable cultural values. Clearly the choice of the traditional poetic form gave Lorca the advantage of a type of poetic expression already popular and widely accepted by the

public. Readers loved the rhythm and lyrical nature of the poems, and many could soon quote entire *romances* although most would have been hard pressed to offer any logical explication or even summary of the poem they had just quoted.

Of all the *romances* in the *Romancero gitano,* none has received more critical attention and speculation than *Romance sonámbulo.* Lorca called it his favorite and recited it the most frequently in public readings. He also commented repeatedly about his own inability or refusal to give "the meaning" of the poem. In a 1926 lecture, he declared *nadie sabe lo que pasa ni aun yo* (quoted in Bonaddio, 1995, p. 398) Elsewhere, he declared:

> *El romance típico había sido siempre una narración y era lo narrativo lo que daba encanto a su fisonomía porque, cuando se hacía lírico, sin eco de anécdota, se convertía en canción. Yo quise fundir el romance narrativo con el lírico sin que perdieran ninguna calidad y este esfuerzo se ve conseguido en algunos poemas del* Romancero *como el llamado* Romance sonámbulo (quoted in Bonaddio, 1995, p. 385).

Lorca said of the *Romance sonámbulo, Es un hecho poético puro del fondo andaluz y siempre tendrá luces cambiantes, aun para el hombre que lo ha comunicado, que soy yo* (quoted in Bonaddio, 1995, p. 398). In *Impresiones,* Lorca wrote, *La luz del poeta es la contradicción* (quoted in Zuleta, 1971, p. 187). Certainly, many aspects of the *Romance sonámbulo* seem contradictory. Carlos Bousoño has said, even if a poem does not communicate on the literal, logical level, it communicates at the level of emotions (Bousoño, *Teoría…,* pp. 39-40). The enormous popularity of *Romance sonámbulo* attests to its touching an emotional note deep in its listeners. However, Lorca's refusal to identify a narrative level of the *romance* points to his oblique undercutting of established modes of communicating "official versions" of history, as traditionally embodied in the *romance* and thus, by extension to the authority figures that supported those "official" discourses.

A cursory examination of the poem reveals that it divides into four basic sections. The famous opening lines *Verde, que te quiero verde/ verde viento, verde ramas/ El barco sobre la mar / y el caballo en la montaña* connect with a traditional folk song, as Juan Ramón Jiménez has identified (cited in Beltrán, 1986, p. 50). However, they make no obvious connection with the description of the gypsy girl dreaming on her veranda that follows. Perhaps, this disjointed juxtaposition points to a disjuncture between tradition and the current social situation. Subse-

quent stanzas announce the arrival of the wounded *compadre* asking the resident of the house to allow him to die decently in a bed with linen sheets. The poem then includes the dialogue between the two male characters, who, after a debate of sorts, climb upstairs. Later, the gypsy girl appears above the cistern indicating that her physical position has changed, but the poem offers no explanation of the movement. Finally, the Civil Guards arrive. The poem makes no obvious connection between any of these narrative fragments. The opening line is repeated between the fragment of the gypsy girl on the veranda and the arrival of the wounded *compadre.* The two opening lines appear again between the fragment of the *compadres* climbing the stairs and the gypsy girl above the cistern. The last four lines repeat the opening stanza a fourth time, ending the ballad exactly where it began. The male and female figures never appear together in any of the fragments enumerated above nor does the poem present any interaction between them. The poem has moved in a circle, rather than employing the linear structure associated with narrative. The classic structure of a hero overcoming some obstacles to obtain success and happiness falls apart in Lorca's poem. In fact, the fragments seem to have no identifiable beginning, middle or end or development, climax and resolution, all elements required for a narrative, as critics like Northrup Frye define it. Furthermore, such a classic structure requires movement through time, another element conspicuously absent from Lorca's "dreamlike" poem. Thus, readers expecting a traditional story when they read a *romance* find themselves frantically trying to connect the fragments and never sure that they have succeeded, because the poetic voice offers no help with the process.

The opening lines set the tone for the entire poem. The only verb that appears, "quiero" establishes an undercurrent of desire or love. It then names two green objects –wind and branches. Branches, typically green in the spring, indicate life and fecundity. Wind, however, does not typically bear the adjective green, leading the reader to wonder how it connects to the idea of fecundity or sexuality suggested by the green branches. The final two verses identify objects and their locations –a ship on the sea and a horse on the mountain. Neither verses contains a verb, expressing a static condition. Furthermore, on the most literal level, both express a very traditional locating of these objects, standing in contrast with the opening two lines and their unconventional use of the color green. The poet's brother Francisco, who dedicated an entire essay attempting to explain the color green in this opening stanza, writes, *Hay en el verso una afirmación volativa, precisa, intensificada para la*

reiteración del término objeto de la volición. He continues his attempt to explain the repetition "verde" in the opening lines stating, *En el primer caso el verde inicial es el arranque del proceso, el verde es creativo, la voluntad se somete, se tiñe de matiz amoroso, el verde irradia, vibra, hacia un verde más ligero, más vegetal* (Francisco García Lorca, 1984 pp. 267, 269). By the end of the essay, Francisco García Lorca has come to interpret his brother's verse as defining a creative process, in which the poet is a god creating a universe within the world of dreams of the sleepwalker. As interesting as the reading is, it fails to connect the opening stanza to the subsequent sections of the poem and makes no attempt to explain how all the elements of the poem form a cohesive structure. The verses simply leave the reader with the emotion of desire, creativity, fecundity or sexuality combined with stasis or immobility.

Critics for the last half-century have attempted to interpret *Romance sonámbulo* by basing their readings on different elements of the text. The most literal readers simply focus on trying to put together items mentioned directly in the poem. They identify a dying contraband runner from the port of Cabra who seeks refuge in the home of friends, perhaps his girlfriend and her father. By poem's end, both he and the girl have apparently died and the Guardia Civil appears at the door. Others have read it as the story of a girl with a fatal attraction for the moon. Gustavo Correa claims that the anecdotal base of the whole collection (and by extension, *Romance sonámbulo)* is the life, passion and death of the gypsy, combining with mythic elements to create a new reality (cited in Debicki, 1981, p. 248). Some have seen it as the nightmare of two lovers seeking each other in dreams or delirium. Others offer a philosophical reading: the two *compadres* who climb to the heights represent the hope of escaping from anxieties of the present moment and the knocking of the Guardia Civil at the door represents the unpleasant return to the cares of daily reality. Beltrán identifies the story of a gypsy woman whose man is far away, first *en la montaña* and then bleeding to death, and that their union becomes increasingly unattainable, leading to her suicide (Beltrán, 1986, p. 48). He adds that the patriarchal structure represented by the older man who initially refuses the dying man entrance into his house reinforces the sterility and lack of fulfillment of the female figure (Beltrán, 1986, p. 48).

Rupert Allen, focusing on the *compadre's* vehement denial of the dying man's request to enter his house and die decently in a real bed, suggests that the underlying narrative involves an unfaithful wife, already dead on the veranda, and a husband who has wreaked vengeance on

her. The poem then chronicles the arrival of the dying lover who ironically appears at the door of the wronged husband. Together they climb up to view the deceased wife (Allen, 1968, pp. 340-342). The trail of blood and tears, Allen contends, points to a physical and spiritual catastrophe that leave the lover dead and the husband a *sleepwalker* or perhaps a *dead man walking* (Allen, 1968, p. 344) In each of these readings, critics have attempted to join the isolated sections of the poem that seem to narrate certain actions into a cohesive story, but none of them agree on what that story really is.

Several critics have offered psychological readings, based on myth and Jung's theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Miller contends that the *Romance sonámbulo* is really a miniature play with well-defined parts: a prologue, two acts and an epilogue. He then examines the three main characters: the gypsy girl, the young man and the older man. He concludes that the female represents the *anima* and the older man, the Wise Old Man figure who leads the younger figure upwards, which really represents going down into the unconscious where he can gain psychic unity. Thus, for Miller, the three figures constitute three psychological parts of the same person, the id, the ego, and the superego (Miller, 1986, pp. 17-23). Even without offering a psychological analysis, Zuleta affirms that the only real character in the *Romancero gitano,* and by extension, in the *Romance sonámbulo,* is the pain and frustration that filter through the verses. He contends that all the figures constitute incarnations of psychic states (Zuleta, 1971, p. 38).

Other critics offer even vaguer interpretations of the anecdote. Cobb says that the specific theme of the work is *the omnipresence of the sexual instincts, not love, but merely physical passion, including the normal, the repressed, and the prohibited* (Cobb, 1983, p. 59). López Castro observes the following about the *Romancero gitano's* contents:

> *Lorca pone en escena su propia tragedia; la frustración erótica que el sueño arrastra y que al fin se hace visible. Resistencia de amor vencida sólo a costa de la muerte, que permite vivir. La tragedia del amante lorquiano consiste en completar lo negativo ya que si se aceptan las limitaciones es para superarlas. Lo que subyace en el* Romancero gitano *es la angustia lorquiana de siempre: la libertad amenazada por la convención* (López Castro, 1993, p. 60).

Donahue points out that in Lorca's poetic world green is the color not only of life and death but also of homosexual eroticism and thus she labels the poem a *fantasía erótica* (Donahue, 1974, pp. 257, 260). Similarly, Cobb calls the poem a *phantasm of homosexual attraction*

with the problem of the feminine and of identity intermixing in the shadowy narration (Cobb, 1983, p. 67). Obviously, each of these readings attempts to go past the surface to identify a different type of story being told, a psychic event or a dream sequence, first identified by Freud and Jung. While these critics concur on the sexual content and the psychic dimension of the poem, they still offer contradictory interpretations of the text.

Connected to the efforts of critics to untangle or weave a cohesive narrative thread out of the elements of *Romance sonámbulo* have been their efforts to understand the surrealist imagery that fills the poem. Lorca's brilliant if iconoclastic use of the metaphor has evoked much critical attention. For example, in describing the setting for the arrival of the *compadre,* the poetic voice mentions the hills surrounding the town, presumably a dream version of Granada. The description, *El monte, gato garduño / eriza sus pitas agrias* startles the reader by the brilliance of the comparison of the mountain covered with stiff agave plants silhouetted in the early dawn to a black cat with its back arched and fur on end (García Lorca, 1991, p. 400). As Derrida would observe, the word *monte* juxtaposed with *gato* decenters the traditional meaning of both to evoke the rounded shape of the mountain, black in the predawn hours, that shares the shape but not the size with the arched back of a angry feline. The imagery also conveys emotionally the state of being startled and something vaguely ominous. Lorca's fellow poet Pedro Salinas observes, *La función de estas metáforas no es decorativa, sino significante, reveladora. Son anunciadores de lo desusado, de lo misterioso que este mundo poético tiene en su fondo…* (Salinas, 1984, 383). V. de la Concha refers to what he calls *la trascendencia de la metáfora como procedimiento conector de planos y campos semánticos múltiples…* (de la Concha, 1984, p. 361). Cobb observed that *Lorca's images often depend upon the displacement of the elements of the action itself* (Cobb, 1983, p. 60). The metaphor, part of the surrealistic imagery, thus opens itself to multiple possibilities of interpretation rather than a monolithic reading. Obviously such multiple readings of a single image, much less the entire text of the *Romance sonámbulo* stand in stark variance with the traditional ideas of a single reading of important texts, such as those of national history or of the Church.

The literary critic and theorist Wolfgang Iser observes that *literary texts constitute a reaction of contemporary situations, bringing attention to problems that are conditioned though not resolved by contemporary norms* (Iser, 1978, p. 3). In Spanish society of the 1920, the dominant

institutions of power were the government, traditionally a monarchy, but a dictatorship from 1923 to 1930, and the Catholic Church. These institutions base much of their claims to power on authoritative narratives and "literal" or definitive readings of these texts, which include constitutions, chronicles, and the Bible. The traditional epistemological practice of the nineteenth century affixed a single "correct" reading to authoritative texts. In so doing, the institution that stood behind the reading assumed the power to enforce this reading through social norms and practices, and to punish in some ways any transgression of the norms based on their authoritative readings.

Also concerned with the social criticism of literary texts, critic Mixail Baxtin's studies of novelistic discourse point out the ways that writers of fiction undercut the apparent surface meaning of language by a technique he called "double-voicing" or "double-oriented discourse", usually found in parodic texts (Baxtin, 1988, pp. 286, 295). This use of language expresses authorial intentionality, usually at variance with the obvious meaning of the words used. Such narrative becomes expressive of a *hidden polemic* that communicates disagreement with a prevailing power structure or political or social system (Baxtin, 1988, pp. 286, 295). While Baxtin's observations focused specifically on narrative, they also seem appropriate for narrative poetry, such as the *romance.* When the reader perceives a disjunction between the surface meaning and the other elements of the narrative, or between narrative elements and their emotive content, then one has to look for either parodic or ironic elements or some disagreement with the dominant discourse. Keeping in mind Baxtin's theories, in combination with those of Iser, careful readers of *Romance sonámbulo* conclude that indeed, in this case, Lorca presents a *hidden polemic,* an implied disagreement with the dominant social system.

The surrealistic imagery of Lorca's *romance,* as commented above, made any definitive reading of his texts virtually impossible. Susan Sontag has observed about pop art, but equally applicable to literature, *"Abstract painting is the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is no content, there can be no interpretation*" (quoted in Iser, 1978, p. 11). For example, Dalís abstract or surrealistic painting, *Torero alucinógeno,* seems to be about bullfighting or the *Venus* de *Milo* depending on the angle from which one views the painting, but really is about neither. Rather, since the content has disappeared, in the traditional sense, the painting is about the interplay between the perceived images. Similarly, Lorca's *Romance sonámbulo* lacks the

expected story or content. It seems to be about a girl on a veranda, a bleeding man, a homeowner opening his door, a girl above a cistern, and the Guardia Civil, but turns out to be about none of the above. Like Dalí's painting, Lorca's poem defies a definitive interpretation since it too lacks any content in the traditional sense. Thus, by denying a fixed meaning, or really, any meaning at all to his *romance* outside of its poetic function, Lorca in effect negates the power of institutions standing behind traditional texts and their one-level only readings. In so doing, he was undercutting the conventions and cultural imperatives of these institutions as inscribed in their principle texts.

Critics have detailed extensively the sexual symbolism of the *Romance sonámbulo*. Returning to the opening stanza, as commented above, green, *te quiero verde,* becomes the color of desire, especially homosexual, as well as the color of life and death. The ship, mentioned in the third line, appears frequently as a symbol of the female, especially the womb, and the sea as symbol of both fecundity and death. The horse symbolizes the male libido and the mountain a place of wildness and freedom. In the following sections of the poem, the moon symbolizes both the feminine and the cycle of life and death. The rubbing of the fig tree's branches suggests masturbation. Waters from the moon suggest sexual release. The mention of the knife, the fish, and the cat with hair standing on end all point to phallic imagery, also taken from the world of dreams and the collective unconscious. The Guardia Civil symbolizes the forces of repression, social rules, and conventions that limit individual liberty. Collectively, these images suggest sexuality, frustration, and subliminally erotic content.

All of the confusion over interpreting the anecdotal, narrative level of the *Romance sonámbulo* points to the breakdown of the traditional narrative format of the *romance.* No longer does this *romance* tell an identifiable story whose elements the reader can connect into a cohesive whole. The multiplicity of story lines given above points to the fragmentary nature of the text. In fact, one might argue, based on the enormous variety of interpretations, typified in the listing above, that Lorca has deliberately included no coherent anecdote or narrative. Critics desperately trying to decipher *Romance sonámbulo* on an anecdotal level seem to have overlooked the idea that perhaps their efforts are doomed to failure because there IS no anecdotal level here unlike the storyline they have come to expect in a traditional *romance.* Maybe "the joke is on them". These multiplicity of readings hint that the *romance* contains only pieces, only fragments that may suggest a story, but pieces that

fall short of actually completing a whole, cohesive narrative. All of the critics' efforts to "fill in the blanks" fail to achieve their aims and ultimately lead to confusion rather than clarifying anything. Perhaps, Lorca's poem implies, the poet cannot narrate anything not consonant with the dominant power structure using traditional narrative conventions. Perhaps, the traditional reader expectations no longer make sense logically.

The fragmenting of the narrative line points to the fact that the poem's meaning will not come from any traditional narrative structure. As Bonaddio has aptly commented, the ambiguities of the poem arise from the *text's subversion of the casual logic and referentiality of story telling* (Bonadillo, 1995, p. 98). Obviously, as critics have effectively, if unwittingly, demonstrated through their total failure to identify convincingly the "real history" that Lorca narrates, a single monolithic reading of the text is impossible. No one can "tell the story" of *Romance sonámbulo.* The appeal to the authority associated with the traditional *romance* to transmit a story breaks down and thus, is negated by the multiplicity of versions presented by critics. Reading the poem through symbols and the logic of dreams offers the only possible approach. After all, as Cobb warns, *the reader should realize Lorca's complexity but he should remember that Lorca wrote nothing deliberately incoherent* (Cobb, 1983 p. 3). Furthermore, if, as critics have affirmed, the poem is really about Lorca's own personal tragedy in terms of his self-identity and expression, then *Romance sonámbulo* becomes a ballad of desire and frustration. The poet had to resort to deconstructing the narrative and reconstructing the message on the symbolic and emotional level because his society would not accept the plea for freedom, especially sexual, implicit in the *romance* had it been expressed through a straightforward narrative.

Thus, *Romance sonámbulo* epitomizes a rejection of traditional rules comprised of both literary and social conventions. By breaking down the story line into fragments that refuse to fit into an comprehensive narrative, Lorca clearly rebelled against one of the most fundamental characteristics of the *romance,* the authoritative narrative of the discourse of established power, a discourse established along the lines of the nineteenth century novel in which the narrative equaled truth. The multiplicity of interpretations of "what happens" at the anecdotal level empties Spain's most traditional poetic form of its traditional meaning. Obviously, as the numerous interpretations given above attest, no one seems capable of identifying a single story narrated by the *romance.* The manipulation of the narrative obliquely pointed to a manipulation of the sources of power. Cementing a narrative into a single, "correct"

reading meant cementing one's power. Fragmenting and thereby deconstructing the narrative so that it no longer retained the monosemantical reading meant rebelling against established power structures and their rules. As commented above, poets like Lorca and later, Cesar Vallejo who in *Trilce* would completely abandon any semblance of a coherent anecdote, negate tradition and restrictions. The rules no longer apply to Lorca's new *romance.*

The stunning metaphors that outnumber action verbs open themselves to a variety of sexual, sensual, and psychological symbolic associations, which then allow a reconstruction of the poem's meaning on a symbolic, rather than narrative level. As Bonaddio states, perhaps what Lorca sought rather than clarity was *non-clarity* that enabled him to point to a sexual orientation clearly outside the social norms of his day (Bonadillo, 1995, p. 392). By rejecting traditional narrative structures, as both Iser's and Baktin's theories highlight, Lorca symbolically rejects the authority of society embodied in institutions of power, most notably the government and the Church, which impose traditionally accepted forms of behavior, especially sexual, through appeals to their authoritative texts. The surrealistic imagery gave him freedom to incorporate content totally forbidden by the traditional, historical *romance.* The title and the structure of the *romance* gave him automatic acceptance within a society that had always embraced this poetic form for enunciating national values. Opening the *romance* to interpretations of actions of a sexual nature certainly went against every norm of behavior espoused by the Catholic Church and conservative Spanish society. Thus, as Lorca changed and ultimately deconstructed the story, the narrative structure implicitly expected in the ballad form, he subtly signified his personal protests against Spanish society's repression of individual instincts and a desire to deconstruct the social rules. He also expressed his "dream" of a different type of world in which he could live with freedom of expression in all spheres of his life, not bounded by stultifying social conventions, which left a person truly a *sleepwalker* troubled and unseeing.

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