About the Author:
Federico García Lorca (1898-1936)
The poetry of the Spanish author Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) is marked by brilliance, originality, and dramatic flair. His plays are among the best examples of 20th-century poetic drama.

Lorca was a member of the Generation of 1927, largely a group of outstanding poets (Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, and Rafael Alberti, among others). Lorca's generation, which followed Unamuno's famous Generation of 1898, dominated Spanish letters during the decade prior to the Spanish Civil War.

Federico García Lorca was born in Fuente Vaqueros, a village near Granada, on June 5, 1898. His father, Don Federico García, was a respected and prosperous landowner; his mother was Vicenta Lorca, from whom the poet said he received his intelligence and artistic inclinations. (Thus by Spanish custom he should be called by his patronym, García, but he himself preferred to be called Lorca.) The family moved to Granada in 1909, and Lorca attended the schools there, graduating from secondary school in 1914.

After attending the University of Granada for a time, Lorca went to Madrid in 1919 and entered the famous Residencia de Estudiantes to continue his university work. The Residencia, or living quarters, was a center of liberal activity in generally conservative Spain. Young Lorca was much more in his element in metropolitan Madrid than in provincial Granada, and he soon joined the radical young groups of students, exploring novel ideas and spending much time in the cafés. He stayed in the Residencia (except for summers) until 1928, without ever choosing a course of study.

In the Residencia about 1921 Lorca met the painter Salvador Dali, then also a student, and the two formed a personal and artistic attachment. Dali later emphasized the strong physical presence of Lorca's personality, his dominance, charm, and magnetism. Dali's sister, on the contrary, found Lorca short, swarthy, and somewhat ungainly—almost homely. The attachment to Dali proved to be a
crucial personal problem for Lorca, and it was not settled until Lorca left Spain in 1929.

Lorca's first publication was Impresiones y paisajes, a description of an Andalusian trip in 1918. In 1920, after meeting Gregorio Martínez Sierra in Madrid, he staged an insignificant dramatic piece. His first poetic publication was Libro de poemas (1921), influenced by Juan Ramón Jiménez, Rubén Darío, and others. During the early 1920s Lorca wrote the poems for his first important book, Canciones, which was published in 1927. Canciones reveals the two strong influences on Lorca's poetic formation: the traditional and the vanguard. Of the traditional he utilized the ballad and other popular forms and the Andalusian themes; of the vanguard (called ultraism in Spain) he developed the tendency toward novel and surprising metaphor and a syntax without normal connecting and relating words.

In 1928, during his years of intense personal crisis and feverish literary activity, Lorca published his Romancero gitano (Gypsy Ballads), the book which gave him his international reputation. The Gypsy Ballads is concerned with the omnipresence of the sexual instincts, forever threatened by repression but breaking out and often leading to death. Lorca chose the gypsy as a character because the gypsy represents the natural man, whose instincts and vital passions are not repressed by moral and cultural training. Lorca's gypsies are therefore usually in conflict with their society, which seems to be persecuting them. In Spain the Gypsy Ballads was viewed as a daring book, for most of the 18 ballads explore the total range of sexuality, normal and abnormal. The most popular ballad graphically describes a normal sexual experience, but others concern incest, homosexuality, and the sexual awakening in a nun.

In form the Gypsy Ballads comprises traditional ballads, characterized by the swinging rhythms associated with this form. Lorca develops many of them in a dramatic context, with an interplay of character and situation, at times even including himself. Above all, Lorca reveals in this book his extraordinary talent for creating striking and memorable metaphors. Although only a few literary men understood the poet's artistic intent, great numbers of people read the book and
memorized the most striking stanzas. This book in fact made Lorca something of a celebrity as well as a recognized poet.

In 1929 Lorca, still suffering from serious emotional problems, arrived in New York and settled in a dormitory at Columbia University. During his year in New York and nearby Vermont, Lorca wrote the powerful Poeta en Nueva York (Poet in New York), a book of poems so revolutionary he did not dare to publish it during his lifetime. Poet in New York has a double theme: the poet's personal struggles with himself and his general struggle with the great city and its masses. On the streets of New York and in rural Vermont, the poet battles with his homosexuality, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies, finally recovering his equilibrium. He depicts the depersonalizing effects of mass living in the city. His resolution of the two themes is contained in two odes. His "Ode to Rome" challenges the Christian Church to reform itself and reach out to the masses; his "Ode to Walt Whitman" is the poet's ringing demand for absolute personal freedom.

During the 1920s Lorca dedicated himself to poetry, but in the 1930s he devoted his energies to the drama. Soon after he returned to Spain in 1930, the Second Republic was created, ushering in a period of intense cultural activity. Lorca himself became one of the directors of La Barraca, a traveling theatrical group responsible for presenting plays (usually of earlier periods) in the provincial towns. At the same time Lorca developed his own plays. While in New York he had written Así que pasen cinco años, a surrealist piece; in 1930 he had a successful premiere of La zapatera prodigiosa, a sparkling play of traditional Andalusian theme.

Lorca's first resounding dramatic success was Bodas de sangre (Blood Wedding), premiered in 1933, a powerful poetic drama in which the vital passions ride roughshod over established social conventions. In 1934 his Yerma, another poetic drama, which explores the thwarting of the maternal instinct, enjoyed a long run in Madrid. In 1935 he saw the premiere of Doña Rosita la soltera, a tender play which traces the fading of a passionate young woman into the barrenness of spinsterhood. Finally in 1936 he wrote La casa de Bernarda Alba (The House of
Bernarda Alba), a realistic drama of social protest, not staged until 1945. Of these plays, Bodas de sangre, Yerma, and La casa de Bernarda Alba are still living dramas, staged especially by college theaters.

In the 1930s Lorca's poetic production was diminished but distinguished by high quality. His Diván del Tamarit, written about 1931 but not published until 1936, presents the poet's desperate state of loneliness because of a lost love. His long poem Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías (Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter), carefully orchestrated in four sections, describes the bullfighter killed in the ring as a modern existential hero. His last poems, Sonetos del amor oscuro, were published only partially, because of their overt homosexual theme.

In 1936, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Lorca went home to Granada. He was taken into custody by the Nationalist forces controlling the town, perhaps because of his personal connections, perhaps because of his known sympathies for the Republican cause. In the terrible confusion reigning, even his friends in the Falange failed to save him, and he was shot on the morning of Aug. 19, 1936. The complete circumstances surrounding his death remain a mystery.