

Duende de Lorca Study Guide

Fuente Vaqueros

Federico Garcia Lorca was born in 1898 in Fuente Vaqueros, Spain into a wealthy family. His mother Vicenta was in poor health when he was born, and so he was sent to a wet-nurse which was a suspect cause of his own health problems. His left leg did not develop fully, and he did poorly in sports, which led to his enthusiasm for more artistic endeavors. Already as a child the people who knew him noticed his effeminacy, such as his teachers and schoolmates, who teased and bullied him frequently. His awkwardness became his strength since parents saw him as non-threatening. As a child, Lorca loved singing and storytelling and enjoyed making others smile and laugh, so he was frequently invited to parties by parents to amuse their children.



He wanted very much to study music abroad, but his parents would never support such a plan. Then his music teacher died, tragically affecting Federico and so he turned his artistic energy to poetry. In 1917 Federico was beginning to make a name for himself as a poet and due to his unhappy and unsuccessful romantic attempts with the cold Maria Lisa Gonzalez, had already becoming aware that he was “sexually different”. Immersing himself in his work after this tragic event, Federico convinced his father to foot the bill for the printing of his first book, and his father, a little uncertain, asked some profession at the time, which included Andres Segovia, who all concurred that he should pay for the printing of Lanscapes and Impressions. Unfortunately, the copies did not sell well and sat for years in his father’s attic.

He joined a group of writers, visual artists and musicians that met nightly at the Cafe Alameda, later to be nicknamed “El Rinconcillo” (the little corner) where they would discuss their ideas and share their creative works. Lorca writes: "The duende, then, is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought. I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, 'The duende is not in the throat; the duende climbs up inside you, from the soles of the feet.' Meaning this: it is not a question of ability, but of true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation. All arts are capable of *duende*, but where it finds greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance, and spoken poetry, for these arts require a living body to interpret them, being forms that are born, die, and open their contours against an exact present."

La Residencia

In 1919, when Federico was 26, his parents finally agreed to let him move to Madrid and to pay for his tuition at La Residencia de Estudiantes, an experimental hostel intended to bring intellectuals from different areas of study from humanities and sciences. Noted guests would present lectures, such as H.G. Wells, Albert Einstein and Marie Curie and guest musicians included Segovia and Stravinsky. The Residencia also had a small printing press and published some of the works of the residence and guest authors. Many of the collaborators of the Rinconcillo had moved to Madrid. One of which was Melchor Fernandez Almagro, a distinguished writer of important historical topics. Later he would become

Federico's principal champion and was often the first person that Lorca confided in for literary advice and guidance.

He also met Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel there, two artists that would heavily influence the rest of his artistic career. Dali and Buñuel introduced Lorca to a group of artists practicing surrealism, a style of writing and visual art that would appear abundantly in the young poet's later work. Lorca and Dali especially developed an intense friendship and romance. The two artists challenged each other; Dali even encouraged Lorca to exhibit his drawings.



From left to right: Dali, Lorca, and Buñuel

Mariana Piñeda

Mariana de Piñeda y Muñoz is remembered as a Spanish liberalist heroine, and she was the subject of the renowned play written by Lorca in 1925. Widely known as simply Mariana Piñeda, the heroine was born in 1804 in Granada, Spain. When she was about 14 years old, Mariana met and married Manuel Peralta Valte, a liberal army officer. However, he passed away three years later and left Mariana with their two children. Following the death of her husband, Mariana became heavily involved in liberal causes. She participated in protests against the government of Fernando VII and even helped convicted liberal Captain Alvarez de Sotomayor escape death row in 1828. During a police raid, a flag was found, embroidered with the slogan "Equality, Liberty, and Law." Mariana was arrested for conspiracy and sentenced to death. She refused to give up the names of her accomplices, and was executed in May of 1831, as her flag was burned before her. Lorca's play about Mariana Piñeda was viewed as a liberal attack against the ruling party of Spain and was believed to be one of the causes that led to his assassination.



Un Chien Andalou

Released in 1929, "Un Chien Andalou" was a collaboration between artist Salvador Dali and filmmaker Luis Buñuel. It was based on the dreams of the two artists and their exploration of Freudian uncensored stream of consciousness. It does not feature a conventional plot and Buñuel claimed that nothing in the film symbolized anything. Yet Lorca was convinced that the dog ("le chien") in the film was a representation of himself. Buñuel insisted that he did not realize that Lorca was gay until other fellows of the Residencia told him, even though the filmmaker was homophobic and had his fun beating up gay men. Despite Lorca's objections, the film was received well by the surrealist community and continues to be iconic in its demonstration of the Freudian pillars of the Spanish surrealist movement.



New York

When his relationship with Dali ended in 1928, Lorca sought new inspiration and an escape from Madrid. Having found national success after publishing the poetry collection entitled *Romancero Gitano*, Lorca took off to New York City to continue developing his writing. In New York, Lorca was able to explore his identity more freely as a gay man than he was in Spain. New York City had a thriving LGBTQ+ culture and community, which the poet took full advantage of. In the United States, Lorca was also able to travel to Vermont to reconnect with his lover, Philip Cummings, who had been studying abroad in Madrid when they first met. There, on long summer excursions through the woods, Cummings introduced him to the work of Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892), who had become known in poetry circles as the “father of free verse”. His work was controversial in its time, particularly his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*, which was described as obscene for its overt sensuality. Lorca drew inspiration from Whitman in writing about his own sexuality and even dedicated a poem to Whitman, called “Ode to Walt Whitman ” paying homage to the American poet.

During his time in New York, Lorca witnessed the great stock market crash of 1929. The urban decay of the city and despair caused by the crash inspired much of Lorca’s later work. Following his time in Vermont, he traveled to Cuba, where he worked on a play entitled *El publico* (“The Audience”) exploring his sexuality through expressionist motifs. Then, in 1931, he returned to Spain and became the director of a Spanish traveling theatre group called La Barraca, funded by the new progressive Republican government. The group performed both Spanish classics and Lorca’s original works, which they toured throughout Spain. Through La Barraca, Lorca was able to write and produce a number of successful plays.

Spanish Politics

When Lorca returned to Spain, Francisco Franco was slowly rising to power, and became the leader of the **CEDA**, the Confederation of the Spanish Republic. Franco’s Spain was strongly rooted in the church and national tradition. Not only were Catholic values taught in public schools across the nation but maintaining the church’s values was also of the highest priority regarding new national policies. Franco sought to create a unitary national identity for Spain by repressing cultural differences and silencing opposition with violence to any individuals or groups that disagreed to his agenda, which included communist and anarchist organizations, liberal democrats, and Basque and Catalan separatists.



Part of Franco’s fascist crusade was criminalizing LGBTQ+ identities in Spain. Regardless of whether or not there was actually “evidence”, accusations of homosexual behavior were used to punish thousands of people throughout the Francoist dictatorship. LGBTQ+ people were incarcerated in camps, mental institutions, and prisons because of their sexual orientation. Franco even established special prisons called “galerias de invertidos” (“galleries of inverts”) designed to hold LGBTQ+ people.

In opposition to the conservative rule was the Falange, founded in 1933 as Falange Española by José António Primo de Rivera, son of a former Spanish dictator. Lorca’s alignment with the progressive

Falange Republicans and unashamed expression of his sexuality and leftist views made him a target for the CEDA. Lorca was arrested by nationalist soldiers in Granada and on August 18, 1936, he was taken to a remote location with Francisco Galadi Melgar and Joaquín Arcollas, both bullfighters and anarchists, and Dióscoro Galindo, a schoolteacher. They were all executed on the road to Alfacar, and efforts to exhume all the bodies for proper burials continue today.

Ian Gibson, Lorca's biographer, notes that Lorca's sexuality was not widely acknowledged or accepted until nearly 45 years after his death. Prior to that time, the Spanish government censured many of his poems that were overtly sexual. Gibson says, "Spain couldn't accept that the greatest Spanish poet of all time was homosexual." Yet despite these efforts, Lorca's legacy thrives in both Spain and around the world.

Sources and Further Reading

Dali and Bunuel. "Un Chien Andalou": <https://tubitv.com/movies/574791/un-chien-andalou>

Content warning: nudity, blood, other disturbing imagery.

Billingsley, Patricia. "Lorca in Vermont: The Untold Story" *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, 2019.

<https://glreview.org/article/lorca-in-vermont%E2%80%88the-untold-story/>

A description of Lorca's trip to Vermont and his relationship with Philip Cummings.

Imatz, Arnaud. "The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca: Propaganda and History." *The Postil*,

2020. <https://www.thepostil.com/the-assassination-of-federico-garcia-lorca-propaganda-and-history/>

A description of the politics during the Spanish Civil War that led to Lorca's assassination.

Raghavan, Sudarsan. "Civil War wounds are far from healed." *Washington Post*, 2009.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/28/AR2009102804654.html>

A description of efforts to exhume mass graves from Spain's Civil War under General Francisco Franco.

Sarabia, Nydia. "Lorca in his Cuban Period." *Granma*, 2006.

<http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2006/08/20/nacional/artic01.html>

A Cuban news report, translated by Ana Portela.

Shulman, Aaron. "Dictators Kill Poets: On Federico García Lorca's Last Days." *LitHub*, 2019.

<https://lithub.com/dictators-kill-poets-on-federico-garcia-lorcas-last-days/>.

A creative description of the rise of Francisco Franco, the final days of Lorca's life, and his execution.

Smith, Dinitia. "Poetic Love Affair With New York; For Garcia Lorca, the City Was a Spiritual

Metaphor." *The New York Times*, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/04/books/poetic-love-affair-with-new-york-for-garcia-lorca-city-was-spiritual-metaphor.html>.

A description of Lorca's trip to New York and its influence on his work.

Stainton, Leslie Anne. "Federico Garcia Lorca." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2021.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Federico-Garcia-Lorca>.

A biography of Lorca.