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Pre-texts and Con-texts: *Poeta en Nueva York, Viaje a la luna* and the Theatre of Federico García Lorca

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On June 6, 1929, *Un chien andalou* premiered at the Studio des Ursulines in Paris. On that same day, Federico García Lorca wrote a letter to Carlos Morla Lynch about his forthcoming trip abroad. With an ambivalence that seems to characterize his world, the poet comments, "New York me parece horrible pero por eso mismo me voy allí. Creo que lo pasaré muy bien" (*OC* 1673). For Lorca, the trip is a godsend (paid for, in fact, by his father); he had been depressed for a period of time, and his parents thought that some fresh air would do him good. Lorca concurred, for he writes to Morla Lynch that the trip "me conviene y es importante en mi vida" (*OC* 1673).

The poet's depression seems to have both personal and artistic causes. On the one hand, Lorca's relationship with Emilio Aladrén had been interrupted by the latter's involvement with his future wife, Eleanor Dove. Ian Gibson points out, too, that Aladrén "was a born womanizer, just the sort of person to cause misery to a sensitive homosexual admirer. And it seems beyond any doubt that at this time he was having exactly such an effect on Lorca" (231). Similarly, the poet's relationship with Salvador Dalí had come to a standstill due in large part to the painter's growing collaboration with Luis Buñuel. When in April Dalí left Spain for France to help Buñuel with *Un chien andalou*, Lorca must have felt completely forsaken (Gibson 231-32).

The artistic causes for Lorca's depression may also be linked, if only coincidentally, to Buñuel. Although the two artists were well acquainted since their days at the Residencia de Estudiantes, they were not necessarily the closest of friends. In fact, the surrealist cineaste severely criticized Lorca's initial works, including *Romancero gitano*, for their traditionalism and considered the poet's more avant-garde experiments (such as "La degollación de los inocentes" and the "Oda al Santísimo Sacramento del altar") wholly unconvincing. Buñuel's disapproval surely hurt Lorca, who expressed his emotion with respect to *Un chien andalou* by commenting: "Buñuel ha hecho una mierdesita [sic] así de pequeña que se llama *Un pe-*

rro andaluz y el perro andaluz soy yo" (Sánchez Vidal 128). Although Buñuel denied any direct relationship between Lorca and the title of the film, there is little doubt that there was some correlation; in the Residencia, several students, including Buñuel and Dalí, referred to their counterparts from the south as "perros andaluces" (Aranda 65n1).

In addition to the sting of Buñuel's criticism, Lorca must certainly have felt a sense of frustration under the regime of Primo de Rivera, which in February had banned the production of *El amor de don Perlimplín* (Gibson 228-30). Spain, then, must have seemed to Lorca a place where he could not work, and the trip to America presented him with the opportunity to escape and to start over; as he wrote to Morla Lynch, "Me encuentro muy bien y con una *nueva* inquietud por el mundo y por mi porvenir. Este viaje me será utilísimo" (*OC* 1673; emphasis added).

We can undoubtedly confirm Lorca's prediction about his trip to the United States. The eight months of his visit were extremely productive, but many of the works written, or at least begun, there were not collected or published until after his death. Let us recall that *Poeta en Nueva York* did not appear until 1940 (and that there are still questions about the contents of Lorca's intended book by this title and their relationship to another book, *Tierra y luna*, which was never realized) or *El Público* until 1978. Another work from this period, and one which has received modest attention in comparison to those mentioned above, is a short script for silent film titled *Viaje a la luna*, written between December 1929 and February 1930 (Laffranque 74).[1] This unfinished work exhibits obvious thematic and stylistic affinities not only with its contemporaries mentioned above (the "con-texts" of my title) but also with Lorca's earlier experiments (the "pre-texts") with Surrealism. In the present study, I propose to demonstrate the importance of this little-known screenplay within the poet's artistic development.

That Lorca was interested in film is no surprise. While at the Residencia de Estudiantes, he was likely to see a variety of films, including the slapstick comedies of Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton (Gibson 150); the influence of Keaton, in particular, led Lorca early on to introduce film techniques into his theatre as early as 1928, in *El paseo de Buster Keaton* (Higginbotham, *Comic* 52-53). A few years later, Lorca was a frequent participant in the Cine Club Español where Buñuel, fresh from France, introduced such avant-garde works as Man Ray's and Robert Desnos's *L'Étoile de mer* and René Clair's *Entr'acte*, described by Gibson as "a vertiginous succession of disturbing and, at times, hilarious sequences achieved by a virtuoso assemblage of gags, metamorphoses, superimpositions and scenes shot in slow motion . . ." (234). Another influence on Lorca's brief film career was the Mexican artist Emilio Amero, whom the poet

met in New York. Amero had recently made a film about adding machine titled *777*, which Lorca saw first hand. The two artists also discussed *chien andalou*. Although it is highly improbable that Lorca had seen th film before his arrival in New York, we do know, as evidenced above, th he was familiar with it; according to Gibson, Lorca "must have read" th review of *Un chien andalou* in *La Gaceta Literaria* or else he had receive thanks to his prior relationship to Buñuel and Dalí, a copy of the scri (275). With so many examples around him, not to mention Lorca's own i terest in visual art, it is little wonder that Lorca decided to try his hand film (or rather at scriptwriting, for the film has never been realized).[2]

Viaje a la luna is an overtly surrealist project, and as such, it repr sents a rebellion against (if not, as in *Un chien andalou*, an outright attac on) the constraints of traditional art. This attitude is expressed by the r jection of diegesis in favor of poesis; that is to say, telling is made secon ary to doing (showing). More precisely, the filmscript is comprised of 78 s quences whose signification does not reside in the syntagmatic develop ment of a story but rather in the paradigmatic relationship between th images. Although the title itself induces the reader/spectator to expe some progression from beginning to end, this desire is frustrated sinc there is no apparent voyage.[3] If, however, the trip to the moon is under stood within the context of Lorca's symbolism, then we can identify th destination of the excursion to be death. Moreover, we can deduce that th vehicle which carries the central character of the filmscript to this end i his own sexuality. Consequently, I would argue that the images create for *Viaje a la luna* express Lorca's perception of the relationship betwee these two issues.

The filmscript begins with the image of a white bed upon which "apa rece una danza de números, 13 y 22" [1]; next "una mano invisible" pull back the cover [2] and large feet in long black and white socks are seen running away [3].[4] This sequence is apparently designed to express the impossibility of heterosexual desire; masculine and feminine are repre sented as odd and even numbers, each indivisible by the other. This scene recalls one of Lorca's prose poems, "Suicidio en Alejandría," originally published in *L'Amic de les Arts* (September, 1928). This brief text begins with the numbers 13 and 22 and proceeds to zero as it relates the story of two lovers who throw themselves into the ocean. Although much more playful (and much less surrealist) in tone, "Suicidio en Alejandría" is clear ly a precursor to *Viaje a la luna*.[5] The relationship between these texts is further evidenced in the theme. Both seem to suggest be that the man-woman relationship is somehow marked for death. Vito Galeota argues that this idea is conveyed by the number 13, pointing out that in the tarot this card depicts death as the skeletal reaper; the illustration includes the

"crowned head of a man . . . fallen under the point of the scythe, and behind it . . . the head of a woman with flowing hair parted in the middle" (365; translation mine).[6] In the same place, Galeota notes that the number 22 is represented by the buffoon , which, I would suggest, may be interpreted here as a reference to the foolishness of heterosexual desire.

Lorca's ambivalence toward heterosexuality is expressed in a similar manner in other works of this period. In *Poeta en Nueva York*, "Pequeño poema infinito" reads: "Equivocar el camino/es llegar a la mujer . . ." and later: "Pero el dos no ha sido nunca un número/porque es una angustia y su sombra,/porque es la guitarra donde el amor se desespera,/porque es la demostración de otro infinito que no es suyo . . ." (*Libro* 143-44). And in the "Cuadro segundo" of *El Público*, we find this discussion:

> EMPERADOR. Uno es uno y siempre uno. He degollado más de cuarenta muchachos que no lo quisieron decir.
> CENTURIÓN. (Escupiendo.) Uno es uno y nada más que uno.
> EMPERADOR. Y no hay dos. (69)

Thus, in Lorca's universe the feminine represents a threat to the masculine and must be repressed. This is reinforced in *Viaje a la luna* by the image of a "cabeza asustada" which turns into "una cabeza hecha de alambre con un fondo de agua" [4] as well as that of "Cartas diciendo ¡Socorro! ¡Socorro! y cayendo, en sobreimposición con las partes sexuales de mujer" [5]. Antonio Monegal comments that the image of water in this sequence "confirma, dado el simbolismo común del agua, la carga erótica del texto" and concludes that the erotic is here treated "como un enfrentamiento conflictivo con la sexualidad femenina" (246).

The hazard of the heterosexuality is repeated throughout the filmscript by different variants of the masculine-feminine contrast. For the most part, these can be reduced to two types: elongated (phallic) versus round (uterine) forms. Consider the following sequences:

> [14] Al final un enorme dibujo de un ojo sobre la doble imagen de un pez, que funde en lo siguiente:
> [15] Por la ventana, la rápida caída de la doble imagen de cartas azules: ¡SOCORRO! ¡SOCORRO!
> [16] Cada signo de ¡SOCORRO! ¡SOCORRO! se funde en una huella de pie.
> [17] Y cada huella de pie en gusanos de seda sobre una hoja, contra un fondo blanco.
> [18] De los gusanos de seda emerge una gran calavera y de la calavera un cielo con luna.

> [19] La luna se parte y aparece el dibujo de una cabeza que vomita abre y cierra los ojos. . . .

In this scene, the eye and the leaf represent the feminine while the fis and silkworms are masculine images, and their coexistence is depicted a a repulsive condition, *contra natura* perhaps, by the vomiting head.[7] A the same time, this sequence serves to reinforce the idea that the feminin threatens the masculine. If at first the superimposition of eye and fish pro duce a cry for help, we next see that the union of silkworms and leaf pro duces two images of death: a skull and the moon. There is no doubt tha the moon is a feminine image, not only because it conforms to Lorca' round symbolism but also because of its classical embodiment in the god dess Selene.

The psychological reasons behind such an aggressive depiction of th feminine become clearer in the next sequence of images. In [24] we are in troduced to a young boy wearing a black and white swimming suit, whic in [25] is shown "en sobreimpresión con la doble imagen de un pez." Th fish is clearly a symbol of the phallus, as are its paradigmatic substitutes from [27], snakes and crabs (which finally turn back into fish). In [28] w see "un pez vivo sostenido en la mano de una persona, que lo estruja has ta que muere . . .," which evolves into two and then one hundred fish "en agonía" [29-30]. Here we have a graphic depiction of castration anxiety and although the sex of the castrator is not indicated, I would argue based on the previous sequences (and on the gramatical gender of the word "mano"), that the hand is associated with the feminine. This image is repeated in [49], where the second of three figures (who also appear in "Fábula y rueda de los tres amigos," from *Poeta en Nueva York*, and *El Público*) looks at the moon and then twists the neck of a bird (yet another transformation of the fish/phallus image) "hasta que muere frente al objetivo." Along the same lines, consider the following verses from "Pequeño poema infinito": "Equivocar el camino/es llegar a la mujer/ . . . /la mujer que mata dos gallos en un segundo . . ." (*Libro* 143-44). The cock is, of course, an ancient symbol for the phallus (Walker 397), but the density of this image is compounded by the fact that "gallo" is also a kind of fish (the dory).

If Lorca depicts heterosexuality as an unnatural state because the feminine will destroy the masculine, that is not to say that the masculine is a mere victim; in many cases, he becomes an accomplice in his own demise by denying his real (homosexual) desires. This idea is expressed early in *Viaje a la luna* when in [26] a man in a robe offers the swimming-suited boy a harlequin costume; he rejects it, but the man attacks him and forces the costume into the boy's mouth. For Lorca, the harlequin represents the mask behind which one hides his true identity; compare, for example,

the "Cuadro tercero" of *El Público*, where the Director, dressed in a white harlequin costume, tells Hombre 1 (also called Gonzalo), who is in love with the Director, "No hay más que máscara" (105).[8] It would follow, then, that the swimming-suited boy refuses to hide his sexuality whereas the robed man feels compelled to silence violently the truth.

The harlequin costume reappears being dragged by a naked young man "cuya cabeza es como un mapa anatómico. Los músculos, venas y tendones se ven destacados sobre la figura desnuda" [46]. Later, however, we see the harlequin, now alive, dancing with "una joven casi desnuda" [54]. Shortly thereafter, the young woman and the harlequin are in an elevator where they embrace and kiss, but the scene is far from romantic. The harlequin bites the woman on the neck and pulls her hair [65], then the strings of a guitar are cut with scissors [66]. Although the woman struggles against the harlequin, he kisses her violently and seems to attempt to poke out her eyes [67]. She screams, and the harlequin removes his jacket and wig, revealing underneath "el hombre de las venas" [68]. The woman turns into a plaster bust, which the man kisses passionately, leaving the imprints of his hands and mouth [69-70]. The words "Elena, Helena, elhena, el HeNa" appear on the screen and then change into faucets "que echan agua de una manera violenta," which then dissolve into an image of "el hombre de las venas, muerto sobre periódicos y arenques" [71-73].[9]

In this sequence we are witnesses to the conflict between the inner truth and the outer expression of one person's desire. We may conclude that the "hombre de las venas" is the robed man from [26] trying again to mask his homosexuality. He goes so far as to assault sexually (symbolized by the guitar and scissors) a woman in hopes of proving his manhood. The woman is associated with Helen, the classical idealization of femininity, who for Lorca embodies the impossibility of heterosexual desire. Helen is a vamp, an unattainable seductress, who responds all too coldly to her lover's advances. The true identity of this Helen is more explicit in *El Público*, as three students discuss the rhetoric professor's wife:

> ESTUDIANTE 2. ¿Se llama?
> ESTUDIANTE 3. Se llama Elena.
> ESTUDIANTE 1. (Aparte.) Selene. (125)

She is the godess of the moon, and any relationship with her will result in death. Such is the case of the veined man in *Viaje a la luna*; his erotic encounter with the feminine (symbolized here, as at the beginning, by water) is his last. However, the fact that his body is covered with herring reminds us of the sexuality that he had denied.

Viaje a la luna concludes with the appearance of two new characters, "un personaje de bata con guantes de goma y una joven vestida de negro" who paint a moustache on the dead man [75]. They are then seen beside a grave kissing, which Lorca describes as "un beso cursi de cine" [76-77]. The filmscript ends with a "paisaje con luna y árboles mecidos por el viento" [78]. These two characters not only reiterate the image of the mask by painting a moustache on the dead man, they also seem to scoff at his inability to express his sexuality. The conclusion is quite ironic, however, since the two characters do not represent any kind of viable alternative. Their relationship is ambivalent, as indicated by the asceptical garb of the male personnage. In the final analysis, Lorca's depiction of human sexuality is far from the romantic one usually found in cinema (illustrated by the "beso cursi de cine"). In *Viaje a la luna* it is presented as an erotic game of desire, violence, repression and frustration whose inevitable outcome is death. This pessimism is clearly represented in the final image of the filmscript, the moon.

In conclusion, let me suggest what importance *Viaje a la luna* can have within the Lorca canon. Along with *Poeta en Nueva York* and *El Público*, the filmscript arises out of a culminating point in the poet's career. In New York, Lorca seems to come to terms with his *duende* and draws on this encounter to express explicitly his most personal visions of the world. For this reason, I would argue that *Viaje a la luna* represents a bridge between Lorca's poetry and his theatre (compare Londré, "Posthumous" 103). In the former, Lorca creates plastic images with the "spoken" word in order to express his concerns, whereas the filmscript, devoid of sound, relies on purely visual elements to communicate the desires and fears of the writer; in theatre, Lorca carefully combines the visual and the verbal into an expressive whole. I am not speaking solely of *Poeta en Nueva York* and *El Público*, for Lorca's later works (such as, *Así que pasen cinco años*, *Bodas de sangre*, *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, and *Diván del Tamarit*) draw repeatedly on the symbolism worked out in his New York period. Thus, I do not believe that any future discussions of Lorca's corpus will be complete without serious consideration of *Viaje a la luna*.[10]

• NOTES

[1] The filmscript has had a complicated publication history. It first appeared in English: "Trip to the Moon. A Filmscript," transl. Bernice Duncan, *New Directions* 18 (1964): 33-41. The first Spanish version, edited by Laffranque, was published in France. I am using the version published in Utrera. To my knowledge, the original manuscript, which has been kept by Amero, has never been published.

[2] The script itself is unfinished in that it lacks specific directions for camera work. These facts complicate somewhat any discussion of the work, for as Antonio Monegal comments, we are dealing here with a hybrid text "anclado en tierra de nadie, a mitad de camino entre el cine y la literatura" (243; compare Galeota). I maintain, however, that the indefinition of this text contribute to its significance, for it allows us to see (in the mind's eye) Lorca's efforts to translate his verbal imagery into visual discourse.

[3] We should recall that there is another silent film by this title, Méliès's *Voyage dans la lune* (1902), which does depict such an excursion.

[4] Due to the different editions of *Viaje a la luna*, I will cite the sequences as numbered in Utrera.

[5] Lorca denied any surrealist influence in his prose poems; rather, he considered them a part of his new spiritualist manner. Writing to Sebastián Gasch, he commented that the poems are "emoción pura descarnada, desligada del control lógico, pero ¡ojo!, ¡ojo!, con una tremenda lógica poética. No es surrealismo, ¡ojo!, la conciencia más clara los ilumina" (*OC* 1654). Nevertheless, it would seem that the "lógica poética" to which Lorca refers is not that far from the surrealist mode of his later works.

[6] I would like to express my appreciation to my colleague, Prof. Joseph F. Renahan, for his assistance in translating Galeota's article.

[7] It is interesting to compare Lorca's own drawing "Máscara y cara" (1935) with this cinematic image (see Hernández 228).

[8] The mask appears in a different context in "Danza de la muerte" from *Poeta en Nueva York*.

[9] Here I am following Antonio Monegal's correction of the script. The texts of *Viaje a la luna* have "gritos" instead of "grifos." Monegal substitutes faucets here, noting: "Me parece más lógica esta otra lectura y, no habiendo podido cotejar el manuscrito, suponer una errata quizás del propio Lorca" (257n30).

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