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Fable and Round of the Three Cities: Lorca's Divergent Visions of New York

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Estaban los tres helados
Enrique por el mundo de las camas;
Emilio por el mundo de los ojos y las heridas de las manos,
Lorenzo por el mundo de las universidades sin tejados.¹

1 Introduction

An extraordinary amount of critical literature has been devoted to Federico García Lorca's poetic and personal experience of New York City; from the moment he arrived there on 25 June 1929 until the day he finally left the city bound for Cuba on 4 March 1930. Despite this undeniable abundance of academic exegesis of matters ranging from even the most passing of his American friendships to his scholarly record while at Columbia University, this article aims to offer a novel approach and shed some new light on this celebrated literary encounter by considering the poet's representations of New York from three different perspectives. It will compare and contrast, firstly, the rather superficial and suspiciously upbeat version of his experiences in New York that he presents to his family and friends in his letters; secondly, the famously apocalyptic and existentially anguished vision projected in the verses of *Poeta en Nueva York*; and thirdly it will compare these *written* testimonies of Lorca's New York with the stylized representation of his American experience that he portrayed in his

1 Federico García Lorca, 'Fábula y rueda de los tres amigos', in *Poeta en Nueva York Primera edición del original*, ed. fijada y anotada por Andrew A. Anderson (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2013), 167, ll. 4–7.

conference-recital about these poems, which he read for the first time in Madrid on 16 March 1932 and then presented extensively around Spain and South America during the early 1930s. A close reading of these triple presentations of the city reveals quite significant differences between them in terms of the way Lorca presents both himself and his reaction to the city. Specifically, the cheerful *naïveté* and even simplicity of the letters, meant after all to reassure his family and impress his friends, is in stark contrast to the despair and denunciation of the poems, or the controlled and assured presentation of his American experience to be found in the conference-recital.² In this case, he was in some way exerting his personal authority on the subject of New York and the US to his artistic peers, critics and readers, using his Manhattan experience to stake his claim to being a modernist, cosmopolitan author, and thus reinventing himself in order to finally escape from the much-loathed cliché of the neo-popularist ‘gypsy poet’ of the *Romancero Gitano* (1928).

Essentially, this article will attempt to examine the intersections and contradictions between the spontaneous fibs, fabrications and downright exaggerations of the letters, the relentlessly distressed soul-baring poetic persona that Lorca constructs and projects through the poems and the controlled self-projection and occasional fabulations of the conference-recital.³ In these contrasting and often contradictory visions of New York, there is a striking disparity between the attitudes to the city and its people expressed in these three sources, such as the anti-clericalism he expressed openly to his friends and in his verses, as opposed to the frequent exaltation of traditional Spanish Catholicism found in the letters to his family. This cognitive dissonance implicitly reveals the delicate and perhaps even controversial boundaries between what is meant to be read in public and in private, and indeed Lorca specifically requested of both his family and friends that the contents of these letters should remain private or even be destroyed.⁴ In the Introduction to their exhaustive study

2 In a letter to Jorge Guillén dated 20 November 1929, Pedro Salinas wrote that he had received ‘de Federico una carta tipo bachillerato: “todo muy bonito, tengo muchos amigos, ya sé hablar inglés, etc”’ (in *Federico García Lorca en Nueva York y la Habana. Cartas y Recuerdos*, ed. Christopher Maurer & Andrew A. Anderson [Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2013], 66. This parodic version is very similar in tone to a letter that Lorca also wrote to Melchor Fernández Almagro, an old friend from Granada, on 30 September 1929 in which he told him ‘Tengo muchas amigas americanas y muchos amigos y, por tanto, adelanto en el inglés rápidamente’ (65). Further references to this work, which contains the text of Lorca’s conference recital, and a number of letters that will be quoted here, will be given in parentheses and referenced as *Cartas y Recuerdos*.

3 On this last point, according to Leslie Stainton, Lorca’s lecture on New York was ‘more fiction than fact’ (*Lorca: A Dream of Life* [London: Bloomsbury, 1998], 298).

4 He specifically requested that his friend Rafael Martínez Nadal read and then tear up one particularly sensitive missive regarding supposed sexual dalliances in Harlem with

Federico García Lorca en Nueva York y la Habana. Cartas y Recuerdos, Christopher Maurer and Andrew A. Anderson also identified three different ‘relatos’ regarding Lorca’s letters and the conference-recital:

85 Aquí las luces bajo las cuales se ve a Lorca, y las facetas de su
personalidad que se destacan, son inevitablemente múltiples y a veces
disparaes. En la ‘conferencia-recital’, y a cierta distancia de la reacción
90 inmediata que se registra en las cartas a su familia, Lorca describe, casi
siempre con más ‘licencia poética’ y desde otra perspectiva ideológica o
política, algunas de las mismas experiencias que ya había referido en
las cartas. El resultado de todo esto es que a veces disponemos de tres
‘relatos’ diferentes—dos de Lorca y una de otra persona involucrada—,
hecho que hace posible un sutil y sugestivo perspectivismo.
(*Cartas y Recuerdos*, xv)

95 Recognizing the perspicacity of Maurer and Anderson’s observations,
although not coinciding entirely in the concretion of the examples, I also
contend that there are ‘three different stories’ and that Lorca produced a
triple representation of his New York experience, which can be clearly
100 distinguished from three overlapping but ultimately independent sources:
the letters, the poems and the conference-recital. In one of the compositions
included in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ‘Fábula y rueda de los tres amigos’, Lorca
describes three parallel but divergent realities, three friends frozen by
different worlds. In what we might term his ‘trivergent’ vision of the city,
105 which allowed him to construct and project a different, more modernist
version of himself as a public and poetic persona, I argue that we can also
identify a ‘fable and round of the three *cities*’, and these contrasting and
frequently contradictory visions of the city that Lorca presented through
the letters, the poems and the conference-recital, will now be analysed,
110 compared and contrasted in that order.

2 Lorca’s New York Poetry As a Critical Palimpsest

115 In 1940, the first edition of *Poeta en Nueva York* appeared in bilingual format
in New York, translated and edited by the professor and poet Rolfe
Humphries.⁵ The book was published by the Norton Press just a few weeks

120 African-American men in 1929. Martínez Nadal clearly did not follow Lorca’s instructions, as
he showed this letter to Luis Antonio de Villena in 1981. See Luis Antonio de Villena, ‘Lecturas
homoeróticas de García Lorca’, in *Lorca: Viajero por América. Actas del Encuentro
Internacional*, coord. M^a Ángeles Vázquez (Centro Virtual Cervantes/La Mirada Malva,
2013), n.p., <https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/lorca_america/lorca_lecturas.htm> (accessed
11 April 2023).

⁵ Humphries was certainly not an admirer of these poems and, in a series of letters to
his friend Louise Bogan (of 17 September, 4 October and 2 November 1938), he would complain

before the publication in Mexico City of the first Spanish version, edited by the custodian of the manuscript, José Bergamín. To fully understand the subsequent reception of the book, it is important to bear in mind that during the period of composition of the poems Lorca was reading with great enthusiasm his friend Ángel Flores' 1930 translation of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which was then being translated by another New York-based friend and poet, León Felipe.⁶ In this respect, in his Introduction to Ben Belitt's 1955 translation of *Poeta en Nueva York*, Ángel del Río expressly referred to Lorca's knowledge of *The Waste Land*, 'which he undoubtedly read in the Spanish translation, *Tierra Baldía*, of Ángel Flores' and, with regard to the notable parallels between the two works, stated that 'there is not only a similarity in mood and in the main theme of death, destruction and the end in nothingness of modern civilization, but also, what is more important, a striking coincidence in vocabulary and imagery'.⁷

Although historically the hegemonic interpretation of *Poeta en Nueva York* has regarded it as a surrealist-inspired dystopian vision of the alienation produced by the modern metropolis, fused with a constant undercurrent of social denunciation, these poems have undergone a protean and ongoing reception. Thus, regarding the multiplicity of interpretations of *Poeta en Nueva York*, John McCulloch has noted how the book 'resists all reductive readings and lends itself to a plethora of interpretations on the part of critics and readers who appropriate Lorca for

that 'the New York stuff is pretty much on the surrealist side and I seem to detect in Lorca a show off bad kind of bohemianism around that period, which I don't like so much [...] there will be a fine passage now and then, but in general I think the new world, and New York, were rather too much for him, and the surrealist stuff got up his nose too much [...] that surrealist smarty side [...] gets more boring as time goes on [...] And the New York poems still sound pretty hysterical' (in *Poets, Poetics, and Politics: America's Literary Community Viewed from the Letters of Rolfe Humphries (1910–1969)*, ed. Richard Gillman & Michael Paul Novak with a biographical essay by Ruth Limmer (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1992), 149, 152 & 156.

6 Felipe eventually published his Whitman translations in 1941 as *Canto a mí mismo* (Buenos Aires: Losada). In his conference-recital on *Poeta en Nueva York*, Lorca would state that: 'Nadie puede darse cuenta exacta de lo que es una multitud neoyorquina: es decir, lo sabía Walt Whitman, que buscaba en ella soledades, y lo sabe T. S. Eliot que la estruja en un poema, como un limón, para extraer de ella ratas heridas, sombreros mojados y sombras fluviales' (*Cartas y Recuerdos*, 141).

7 Ángel del Río, 'Poeta en Nueva York: Twenty-Five Years After', in Federico García Lorca, *Poet In New York*, trans. Ben Belitt, with an intro. by Ángel del Río (New York: Grove Press, 1955), ix–xxxix (p. xxxi both). For a detailed study of the intertextual relationship between *Poeta en Nueva York* and *The Waste Land* see Howard T. Young, 'Sombras fluviales: Poeta en Nueva York y The Waste Land', in *50° Aniversario de la edición príncipe de 'Poeta en Nueva York'*, ed. Christopher Maurer, *Boletín de la Fundación Federico García Lorca*, 6:10–11 (1992), 165–77.

certain ends'.⁸ Indeed, this simultaneous reduction of authorial agency and ideologically motivated cultural appropriation of Lorca as the quintessence of all things Spanish has barely ceased since his murder in 1936. In his 1939 Introduction to the English translations of Lorca's poems by Stephen Spender and Joan Lluís Gili, Rafael Martínez Nadal rather counterproductively stated that:

Whether we like it or not, Spain is from many points of view a world apart and an attempt to transfer, in Lorca's most Spanish poetry, Spanish values of men and things meets with an almost insurmountable barrier.⁹

The author of the wildly clichéd Introduction to Langston Hughes' 1951 translation of the *Romancero Gitano*, Robert H. Glauber, felt an imperious need to establish Lorca as the symbol of all things Spanish and was moved to declare that:

Lorca's literary output is a microcosm of Spanish history, thought and behavior. He was an observer whose ethnic instincts were developed to a prodigious degree. In him, the Spanish racial memory found its perfect spokesman.¹⁰

Nevertheless, *Poeta en Nueva York* entirely confounded this reception of Lorca in both the Hispanophone and Anglophone worlds. For some critics, like the Fascist sympathizer and panegyrist, Roy Campbell, Lorca's New York poetry was a mistake:

Lorca went and stayed in the U.S.A. for some time [...] The result on his poetry was entirely negative [...] In Lorca's New York poems, the *Poeta en Nueva York*, his metaphors and images fall out of focus; his verse becomes loose, plaintive, and slightly mephitic.¹¹

But Campbell's distaste for supposedly 'surrealist Lorca' was not in line with the book's hegemonic reading and broader reception in the English-speaking literary world. In fact, the mid-1950s were the peak years of the

8 John McCulloch, 'The Double Death of the Author: Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* and the (Re)territorialization of Poetic Voice in Francoist Spain', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 19:1 (2013), 31–52 (p. 31).

9 Rafael Martínez Nadal, 'Introduction', in *Poems of F. García Lorca*, trans. Stephen Spender & J.-L. Gili, selection & intro. by Rafael Martínez Nadal (London: Dolphin Press, 1939), vii–xxiv.

10 Robert H. Glauber, 'Introduction', in *Gypsy Ballads by Federico García Lorca*, trans. Langston Hughes, with an intro. by Robert H. Glauber, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, 2:1 (chapbook no.1) (1951), 1–4 (p. 1).

11 Roy Campbell, *Lorca: An Appreciation of his Poetry*. (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1952), 71.

Beat Generation's surrealism-infused reading of Lorca, which was almost entirely based on Ben Belitt's seminal 1955 translation of *Poeta en Nueva York*. The Beat Generation held a clear preference for 'surrealist' rather than 'Andalusian' Lorca, and saw this book as a quintessential text of what they tended to lump together rather incoherently as 'Spanish Surrealism', a category which even included the work of Pablo Neruda.¹² The subject matter and poetic voice of *Poeta en Nueva York* were intrinsically favourable to this profound and enduring reception. Allen Ginsberg's reading of Lorca was based on the surrealist premise of 'putting together opposite things', but one in which Ginsberg also perceived an underlying Romantic sensibility in this purportedly *avant-garde* composition:

Lorca came to New York, but nobody knew him. Nobody knew who he was. Nobody knew who Lorca was except some of the Spanish community. And he was burning and writing the greatest poetry in the world, actually, the greatest modern-esque Romantic poetry.¹³

In a relatively early study of *Poeta en Nueva York*, Betty Craige summarized this book as 'a poetry of anguish and outrage, a poetry of the solitary individual isolated within a chaotic, hostile universe with which he has no communication',¹⁴ while Christopher Maurer has further highlighted how:

In *Poet in New York*, North America and the metropolis are attacked as a symbol of racial injustice, materialism, spiritual cowardice, cruelty and the crowd's indifference to nature [...] A ubiquitous theme is that of the search for identity that has been lost in the depersonalizing crowds of the metropolis.¹⁵

None the less, despite this apparent critical consensus regarding *Poeta en Nueva York* as a book of *denunciation* (to use a term repeated by Lorca both in these poems and in the conference-recital) of social injustice by an empathetic and progressive observer from an alien culture, there has been the occasional dissenting voice among Hispanists.

12 For more information on the changing reception of Lorca through English translation, see Andrew Samuel Walsh, *Lorca in English: A History of Manipulation through Translation* (New York/London: Routledge, 2021).

13 Allen Ginsberg, 'Expansive Poetics – (Lorca – 2)', *The Allen Ginsberg Project*, 28 January 2014, n.p., <<https://allenginsberg.org/2014/01/expansive-poetics-21-lorca-2/>> (accessed 27 September 2023).

14 Betty Craige, *Lorca's Poet in New York: The Fall into Consciousness* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1977), 10.

15 Christopher Maurer, 'Poetry', in *A Companion to Federico García Lorca*, ed. Federico Bonaddio (London: Tamesis, 2007), 16–38 (p. 33).

Thus, John McCulloch has questioned in great detail the ‘Surrealist’ categorization of the poems, and in his analysis of ‘Vuelta de paseo’, has noted that ‘on a generic level, the collision of Romanticism with Naturalism is equally evident. In subsequent poems in *Poeta en Nueva York* a significant degree of resistance to *avant-garde* surrealist imagery will also begin to appear’.¹⁶ D. Gareth Walters took an alternative view and radically dissented from the consensus regarding the supposedly socially engaged and denunciatory nature of the poems.¹⁷ Rather than seeing the poet as a generous and empathetic witness to suffering, as has almost universally been the case among *lorquistas*, Walters situated the text firmly within the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Modernist misanthropy and opined that ‘*Poeta en Nueva York* emerges as a myopic and ungenerous view of humanity, and, as such, is definitively a work of its time’.¹⁸

What would plausibly seem to be beyond all doubt is that *Poeta en Nueva York* has generated a quite extraordinary amount of critical exegesis and provoked an exceptionally fertile and enduring reception in other cultures and art forms. Indeed, from the standpoint of the twenty-first century it is somewhat axiomatic that Lorca’s relationship with New York occupies a unique place in Spanish literature, since it has unequivocally transcended the frontiers of the Spanish language and exerted a considerable influence on creation in English, as evinced by the work of artists as closely associated with the city such as Allen Ginsberg, Patti Smith, Frank O’Hara and Lou Reed, to name but a few. According to the US poet Philip Levine,¹⁹ Federico García Lorca was the author of ‘the best book of poems ever written about New York City’.²⁰ In an essay entitled ‘The *Poeta en Nueva York* and Detroit’, Levine further recognized his express debt to Lorca:

16 John McCulloch, ‘Reading the Text As a Socially Symbolic Act: The Ideology of Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York* (1929)’, *BSS* (2022); forthcoming.

17 According to McCulloch: ‘Taking issue with the commonly held view that Lorca was a liberal leftist with considerable human empathy and concern, Walters believes that Lorca’s pejorative and snobbish descriptions of the masses enjoying themselves on Coney Island betray a conservative and elitist view of society’ (‘The Double Death of the Author’, 41).

18 D. Gareth Walters, ‘The intellectual and the masses: a sidelight on Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York*’, in *Tres poetas de la Generación de la República: Alberti, Cernuda y Lorca*, ed. Jordi Larios & Javier Letrán, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 17:2–3 (2011), 209–20. Regarding the inspiration and subsequent reception of the book in English-speaking culture, Walters also argued that ‘*Poeta en Nueva York* is a work squarely within the ethos of much inter-war writing in its vision and obsessions, one whose zeitgeist can be far more easily located in an Anglo-Saxon rather than an Hispanic context’ (219).

19 For more information on Federico García Lorca and Philip Levine, see Marco Antonio Antolín Lagunilla, ‘La influencia de Federico García Lorca en Philip Levine’, *Boletín de la Fundación Federico García Lorca*, 35–36, (2005), 33–54.

20 Wen Stephenson, ‘An Interview with Philip Levine’, *The Atlantic*, April 1999, n.p.; available online at <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/04/an-interview-with-philip-levine/308619/>> (accessed 7 May 2023).

Never in poetry written in English had I found such a direct confrontation of one image with another nor heard such violence held in abeyance and enclosed in so perfect a musical form.²¹

Indeed, *Poeta en Nueva York* has played such a notable part in the construction of the poetic vision of the city itself that some critics have spoken of a genuinely ‘American’ poet called Lorca due to the extraordinarily fertile reception of this poetry in the English-speaking world.²² None the less, in very recent times Lorca’s intense literary association with New York is starting to be read as problematic in translation, as his New York poems are replete with troubling and potentially offensive references to the city’s African-American, Jewish and Chinese communities. Although these references were meant to be laudatory and part of his denunciation of racism and social marginalization, they are increasingly being read and rejected as the inappropriate interference of a privileged white European interloper who singularly failed to understand New York and its sociocultural heritage.²³

As early as 2000, the *New York Times* was signalling the start of this problem. In an almost wholly adulatory piece about Lorca’s relationship with the city, which refers to Lorca’s ‘poetic love affair with the city’ and also states that for him ‘the city was a spiritual metaphor’, Dinitia Smith also pointed out that ‘García Lorca’s images of black people are stereotypical. They are depicted as purely sensual and primitive’.²⁴ Although the same writer also pointed out that ‘the injustice of racism left an indelible mark on him and his future writing’, there were clearly some signs of discomfort at Lorca’s albeit sympathetic portrayal of New York’s oppressed racial groups. In July 2013, as part of the exhibition ‘Back Tomorrow: Federico García Lorca/*Poet in New York*’,²⁵ Sharonah Frederick gave a talk at the New York Public Library entitled ‘Lorca, Jews and African-Americans. From Romance

21 ‘Philip Levine, 1928–2015’, *Poetry Foundation*, n.d., n.p., <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/philip-levine>> (accessed 17 April 2023).

22 For a complete study of Lorca’s US reception see Jonathan Mayhew, *Apocryphal Lorca: Translation, Parody, Kitsch* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009).

23 For a detailed study of this troubling aspect of Lorca’s contemporary reception, see Andrew Samuel Walsh, ‘Lorca’s *Poet in New York* as a Paradigm of Poetic Retranslation’, in *Literary Retranslation in Context*, ed. Susanne M. Cadera & Andrew Samuel Walsh (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2017), 21–51.

24 Dinitia Smith, ‘Poetic Love Affair With New York; For Garcia Lorca, the City Was a Spiritual Metaphor’, *New York Times*, 4 July 2000, n.p.; available online at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/04/books/poetic-love-affair-with-new-york-for-garcia-lorca-city-was-spiritual-metaphor.html>> (accessed 18 April 2023).

25 See details of this exhibition, curated by Christopher Maurer and Andrés Soria Olmedo at <<http://www.nypl.org/events/exhibitions/back-tomorrow-federico-garcia-lorca-poet-new-york>> (accessed 17 April 2023).

to Racism or Simple Misunderstanding?',²⁶ signalling an incipient discomfort with the New York texts that would only grow over the course of the decade as the concept of cultural appropriation has gradually become firmly entrenched in both popular and academic culture.²⁷

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3 The Letters

Although Lorca's New York correspondence has not received such intense critical attention as the poetry he wrote while there, there has been some relatively recent scholarship devoted to this aspect of Lorca's writing since the complete correspondence was published in 1997, edited by Christopher Maurer and Andrew A. Anderson. In 2013, the same editors produced the previously cited volume entitled *Federico García Lorca en Nueva York y La Habana. Cartas y recuerdos*; and in 2014, Andrés Soria Olmedo published an article entitled 'Entre Cartas y Poemas: La Conferencia de García Lorca sobre *Poeta en Nueva York*', which highlighted the intertextual relationship between the conference-recital and the New York letters.²⁸ Soria Olmedo began with the almost inevitable apologetic disclaimer regarding the already unmanageable bibliography related to Lorca's New York poetry: 'Una glosa más a un texto del escritor español que más bibliografía genera parece una nueva contribución a la "mandarin madness of secondary discourse" que denunció famosamente George Steiner'.²⁹

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With reference to the talks given at the aforementioned 'Back Tomorrow' exhibition held at the New York Public Library from 5 April to 20 July 2013, and the parallel conference entitled 'American Lorca' held at the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Centre of New York University on 9 April of the same year, Soria Olmedo also elucidated the distinction between the three types of text produced by Lorca in New York between June 1929 and March 1930:

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Se ha advertido con acierto que las tres clases de textos producidos por Federico García Lorca durante su estancia en Nueva York y Cuba, los líricos y dramáticos (*Poeta en Nueva York* y *El público*), las cartas

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²⁶ The text of the conference has not been published although a summary can be found at the following website: <<https://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2013/07/09/lorca-jews-and-african-americans-romance-racism-or-simple-misunderstandin>> (accessed 26 April 2023).

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²⁷ Even though it was coined in academic use as early as the 1980s in relation to the study of colonialism, its current ubiquity is a relatively recent phenomenon; it was only added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2017 and it started to appear regularly in the English language press from 2015 onwards. See the term's history available at <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652789>> (accessed 5 October 2023).

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²⁸ Andrés Soria Olmedo, 'Entre cartas y poemas: la conferencia de García Lorca sobre *Poeta en Nueva York*', *Revista de Letras*, 54:2 (2014), 31–47.

²⁹ Soria Olmedo, 'Entre cartas y poemas', 31.

(sobre todo las dirigidas a su familia) y la conferencia-recital que dio a partir de 1932 implican tres modos de transformar la experiencia vivida, cada uno con su autonomía relativa.³⁰

I will now analyse certain excerpts from the New York letters to his family which I believe offer strong evidence of Lorca's way of 'transforming lived experience' as evinced by the autonomous relationship of the letters to the other New York texts. In one of his first letters home to his parents dated 28 June 1929, Lorca recalls his encounter with an English friend called Campbell (Colin) Hackforth-Jones, an Oxford graduate and aspiring novelist whom he had met in Granada in 1926. Lorca describes him in this letter as 'escritor y muy bueno' and further states that Hackforth-Jones was going to help him with English classes every afternoon and that 'traduciremos cosas'.³¹ If any translation of his work did indeed take place during these hypothetical English classes (and we must remember that Lorca constantly lied and exaggerated to his family about his expensive and ultimately fruitless attempts to learn English), none of them ever made it to the printed page. Nevertheless, although Hackforth-Jones may not have managed to translate any of Lorca's work into a published format, he did indirectly have a major impact on Lorca's New York poetry as he was largely responsible for introducing Lorca to Harlem and its then vibrant cultural life, due to his friendship with the novelist and Harlem Renaissance leading figure Nella Larsen, and perhaps even Langston Hughes himself, but this hypothetical meeting has long remained in the realm of speculation, versions and counter-versions.³²

In a letter written to his family on 14 July 1929, Lorca wrote that 'Sigue mi estancia en New York sucediéndose en medio de la mayor tranquilidad. Yo soy persona que se adapta bien a las circunstancias, y me encuentro bien en este ambiente tan distinto del mío, pero lleno de sugerencias para mí' (*Epistolario completo*, 624), and this message effectively sums up the tone of his correspondence to his family from New York: the affectionate fable of

30 Soria Olmedo, 'Entre cartas y poemas', 31.

31 *Federico García Lorca: Epistolario completo*, ed. Andrew A. Anderson & Christopher Maurer (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 617. Further references to the letters are from this edition (referenced as *Epistolario completo*) and will be given in parentheses in the main text.

32 Isabel Soto quotes Richard Barksdale's biography of Langston Hughes in which Barksdale refers to Lorca as 'a friend and fellow poet' of Hughes and also provides a quote from the Harlem Renaissance artist Romare Bearden which unequivocally states that the two poets were friends: 'Lorca was studying at Columbia, and he was very friendly with Langston Hughes. I met him with Langston because Harlem was so small that when you gave a party everybody knew it, and Lorca, Federico García Lorca, was a friend of Langston's and Langston squired him around Harlem' (Isabel Soto, 'Crossing Over: Langston Hughes and Lorca', in *A Place That Is Not A Place: Essays in Liminality and Text*, ed. Isabel Soto [Madrid: The Gateway Press, 2000], 115–32 [p. 129]).

a dutiful Spanish son writing home to justify his parents' funding of this trip. Lorca was thirty-one years of age at the time he made this lengthy and expensive visit to the US and, therefore, he frequently felt the need to make pointed references to encouraging introductions to well-positioned members of American society and mentions of the influential friendships he was making in Manhattan literary society.³³ This sense of filial duty also led him to hint heavily towards the future economic possibilities that these friendships would undoubtedly provide, assuring his parents that these contacts would perhaps even compel him to return to New York in the near future to make a considerable profit from his plays. In this respect, towards the end of January 1930, Lorca wrote to his family of his plans to return to the US, telling them that 'será fácil que tenga que volver a este país, y me alegraría, no para siempre sino por otra temporada como ésta, pues aquí puedo ganar seguramente lo que en España es imposible' (*Epistolario completo*, 679).

Another positive note is frequently found in the letters regarding the prospect of Lorca's work being translated and performed in New York. Thus, in an earlier letter tentatively dated 22–23 October 1929, he wrote that 'Ahora se empiezan a mover algunos amigos míos ingleses en New York para ver si consiguen que se ponga mi teatro aquí. Esto puede ser muy Bueno para mí y ojalá se consiga, porque sería excelente cosa' (*Epistolario completo*, 658).³⁴ He then suggested that the plays that could be performed would be *Amor de Don Perlimplín por Elisa en su jardín* (which he says 'se prohibió indecentemente' (*Epistolario completo*, 658) in Spain in early 1929 due to the censors of the Primo de Rivera régime) and *Los Títeres de Cachiporra*, before further informing his family that there were several ladies taking an interest in the project and that 'Hay alguna millonaria interesada también y tres o cuatro judías literatas' (*Epistolario completo*, 658). In another letter in a similar vein to his family dated 22 January 1930, Lorca further reassured his parents by telling them that 'Es casi seguro que puedan mis obras teatrales ser presentadas en New York, ya que todos opinan esto y son gentes de influencia' (*Epistolario completo*, 667). Nevertheless, these influential friendships were not the source of the

33 Regarding his friends Herschel and Norma Brickell, Lorca wrote in early December 1929 that 'Esta gente es muy rica y muy influyente y en su casa he conocido yo a personas de gran relieve en el arte y la literatura y las finanzas de New York' (*Epistolario completo*, 668). Indeed, Herschel Brickell did subsequently lead the campaign to have *Poeta en Nueva York* translated and published and contributed a biographical note to the first, posthumous edition which, as stated previously, was published in New York in 1940.

34 It should be clarified that Lorca seemed to use the term 'ingleses' indistinctly for all those who spoke the English language, regardless of whether they were American or British. In this sense, the following reference to breakfast with a bank manager in a Manhattan skyscraper needs to be taken *cum grano salis*, when he describes him as a 'persona encantadora con un fondo frío y felino de vieja raza inglesa' (*Epistolario completo*, 637).

first English language rendering of his work and, despite the considerable amount of goodwill and influence exerted by Lorca's American friends in an attempt to see his work translated into English in New York, it was Lorca's Hispanic circle of literary critics, poets and artists, who managed this feat and they did so at an extraordinarily early stage of his stay in Manhattan.³⁵

Apart from the aforementioned ostentation of rich and influential 'English' friends in New York, another frequent tendency in the letters, and one which is conspicuously absent from the poems and the conference-recital, is the blatant mission to drop quite deliberate and reassuringly heterosexual hints about unspecified romantic possibilities with young ladies of his acquaintance. Indeed, these letters back home to his family in Granada are replete with references to fake 'novias' and possible romantic entanglements, which are evidently nowhere to be seen in the poems. Even in his first letter home, dated 28 June 1929, he immediately informs his parents that his host at Columbia University, Professor Federico de Onís, will introduce him to 'chicas americanas' (*Epistolario completo*, 617). Subsequently, on 14 July 1929 he (re)assures them that 'voy al campo con dos amigas mías y antiguas admiradoras, dos chicas preciosas de Puerto Rico, de donde son las más hermosas mujeres de América' (*Epistolario completo*, 625), and c.24 July 1929 he also pointedly describes his encounter with 'cinco o seis muchachas suramericanas que eran de una belleza increíble' (*Epistolario completo*, 630). Bearing in mind that one of the primordial reasons to send Lorca to the US was his family's desire to remove him from the disastrous aftermath of his failed love affair with the sculptor Emilio Aladrén, these frequent protestations of heterosexuality were entirely to be expected to assuage his family's darkest fears about their eldest son's then thoroughly taboo sexual orientation. In this same vein, Lorca also feels impelled to tell his family that an African-American woman he met in Harlem was 'la mujer más bella y hermosísima que yo he visto en mi vida. No cabe más perfección de facciones, ni cuerpo más perfecto' (*Epistolario completo*, 626).

Lorca's letters are invariably imbued with the simple homesickness that led him to defend the spiritual and aesthetic superiority of Catholic Spain over what he saw as the soulless practicality of the Anglo-Saxon world. As mentioned previously, there is a notable cognitive dissonance between the avowed anti-clericalism of poems such as 'Grito hacia Roma' ('los maestros

35 The first published translation of Lorca's work into English was as early as August 1929 when the Manhattan-based Hispanic journal *Alhambra*, edited by Ángel Flores, published anonymous versions of 'Preciosa y el Aire' and 'Romance de la Pena Negra' in a special edition devoted to Lorca's presence in New York. Lorca also personally assisted in the first English production of *Bodas de Sangre*, which was translated by José Weissberger with the wayward and confusing title of *Bitter Oleander* and performed to decidedly mixed reviews in 1935 at the Lyceum Theatre in New York.

señalan con devoción las enormes cúpulas sahumadas; / pero debajo de las estatuas no hay amor”³⁶ and the defence of Catholicism found in the letters such as one dated 8 August 1929 in which he declared that ‘sigo diciendo que la belleza y la profundidad del catolicismo es infinitamente superior. De ser religioso en una religion positiva no hay más perfección que el catolicismo’ (*Epistolario completo*, 634).³⁷ Presumably, these comments were principally intended to assuage his mother’s fears over the pernicious effects of her son’s exposure to scandalous American social mores and, as if to reinforce this reassuring tone, in his letters home Lorca was extremely disparaging about Protestants in particular and Americans in general, but curiously this has not generated any rejection akin to his troubling references to African Americans, Jews and Chinese people or the notorious description of the city as ‘Senegal con máquinas’.³⁸ In a letter to his family dated 21 September 1929, Lorca would declare that ‘el término protestante para mí es equivalente a idiota seco [...] Yo conozco a los católicos desde lejos, por el aire y la inteligencia’ (*Epistolario completo*, 647). In relation to a family bereavement in Granada, and regarding what he believed to be the non-existence of mourning in the US, on 22 January 1930 he wrote to his parents and siblings that:

[...] esta gente tiene muchos menos sentimientos que nosotros, porque, como es natural, apenas si tienen alma. Yo creo que en el cielo todavía no ha entrado un norteamericano, ¡ah! ... pero en el infierno tampoco. No tiene espíritu, son Buenos, sin profundidad, y malos sin relieve personal. (*Epistolario completo*, 676)

There is at least some coincidence here with the poetry, and thus in ‘Nacimiento de Cristo’ we find that Lorca’s references to ‘sacerdotes idiotas y querubes de pluma’ who ‘van detrás de Lutero por las altas esquinas’³⁹ tend to match this anti-Protestant discourse, which is explicit even as early as 14 July 1929 in the following diatribe against Protestantism and exaltation of the aesthetics of Spanish Catholicism:

He asistido también a oficios religiosos de diferentes religiones. Y he salido dando vivas al portentoso, bellísimo, sin igual catolicismo

36 Federico García Lorca, ‘Grito hacia Roma’, in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 263–65, ll. 40–41 (p. 264)

37 Maurer & Anderson point out in a footnote to this letter that Lorca had finished the manuscript of his ‘Oda al Santísimo Sacramento del Altar’ on 17 September 1929.

38 Interview with Felipe Morales in *La Voz*, 7 April 1936. Reproduced in *Palabra de Lorca. Declaraciones y entrevistas completas*, ed. Rafael Inglada con Víctor Fernández, con prólogo de Christopher Maurer (Barcelona: Malpaso, 2017), 460.

39 Federico García Lorca, ‘Nacimiento de Cristo’, in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 208, ll. 19–20.

español. No digamos nada de los cultos protestantes. No me cabe en la cabeza (en mi cabeza latina) cómo hay gentes que puedan ser protestantes. Es lo más ridículo y lo más odioso del mundo. (*Epistolario completo*, 627)⁴⁰

525 Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Lorca's rather facile anti-Americanism was not truly evident either in the poems (where his anti-clericalism is far more dominant) or in the conference-recital (which is much more positive and respectful regarding the US and is replete with admiring references to Anglo-American literature) and is only fully vented in the letters. Writing to his parents c.23 August 1929, regarding American hospitality (his hosts in Vermont had bedecked the doorway with an American and a Spanish flag in his honour), he once again railed against what he perceived as the lack of depth and maturity of Americans. 530 Nevertheless, Lorca still managed to conclude with unintentional final bathos by pompously announcing that 'Todo esto es muy norteamericano. Poesía y tontería. Fuerza y niñería. Técnica mecánica y primitivismo', and then immediately adding 'No os olvidéis de mandar mi mensualidad' (*Epistolario completo*, 642). He also often referred to the *naïveté* of Americans,⁴¹ stating that 'los americanos son cordiales, llanos, abiertos como niños. Tienen ingenuidad increíble y son serviciales en extremo' (*Epistolario completo*, 637). Lorca could in fact be offensively dismissive of Protestants and white Americans in general (or 'rubios', as he refers to them frequently in *Poeta en Nueva York*) but, as stated previously, this 545 does not seem to have generated any rejection among American scholars and readers, even in the case of a letter sent from Havana on 8 March 1930 in which he made the following astonishingly disparaging affirmation: 'en Norteamérica da lo mismo decir una cosa que otra, ya que con ligeras excepciones son algo tontos' (*Epistolario completo*, 682). Perhaps some of 550 this sweeping prejudice was due to his difficulties with the English language and its frustratingly capricious pronunciation, despite his frequent boasts to family and friends about his supposed progress in the language, and he would even attribute his linguistic tribulations to 'la especial cabeza de la raza anglosajona' (*Epistolario completo*, 650).

40 In his family correspondence, Lorca also made some illuminating comparative observations regarding other religions and their differences and similarities with Andalusian Catholicism. Thus, in a letter to his family dated 8 August 1929, Lorca declared that 'La iglesia rusa es admirable. Es casi como la católica. Está la Virgen, los Cristos, los santos, y el rito es aun más esplendoroso que el nuestro' (*Epistolario completo*, 633–34).

41 Regarding the custom of lighting candles and making a wish, Lorca opined that 'los americanos toman en serio estas cosas, porque son como niños' (*Epistolario completo*, 673). It is hard not to smile at these frequent and heavily ironic references to the 'childishness' of Americans from a thirty-one-year-old man who was still constantly asking his parents for more money.

565 Lorca could be simultaneously extremely ethnocentric and yet also genuinely and sympathetically fascinated by other cultures. On 14 July 1929, having just arrived in New York, he wrote that 'lo más interesante de esta inmensa ciudad es precisamente el cúmulo de razas y de costumbres diferentes. Yo espero poder estudiarlas todas y darme cuenta de de todo este caos y esta complejidad' (*Epistolario completo*, 626). However, in a letter to his family written in the third week of December 1929, and in what sounds like an uncharacteristic echo in his correspondence of one of his New York poems ('Nacimiento de Cristo'), Lorca made what now seems to us like an extraordinarily anti-Semitic affirmation:

570 Yo creo que la gente cristiana celebra con esta alegría el nacimiento de Cristo para expresar su desprecio a los judíos. Aquí en Nueva York, hay dos millones y medio de judíos, que son los que llevan el peso de los negocios pero que los americanos odian profundamente.
575 (Epistolario completo, 671).

580 Nevertheless, on other occasions Lorca could also confound this troubling reference with a much more sympathetic vision such as when, also in the 14 July 1929 letter, after a visit to a New York Sephardic synagogue, he sympathetically declared that:

585 También he estado en una sinagoga judía, de los judíos españoles. Cantaron cosas hermosísimas [...] Pero también comprendo que en Granada somos casi todos judíos. Era una cosa estupenda ver cómo parecían todos granadinos. (*Epistolario completo*, 627)

4 The Poems

590 According to Miguel García-Posada, '*Poeta en Nueva York*, es junto con *Sobre los ángeles*, de Alberti, *Espadas como labios*, de Aleixandre, y *Un río, un amor*, de Cernuda, uno de los grandes libros que consolida el cultivo del verso libre en la poesía española'.⁴² Apart from its importance in terms of the metrical innovation of Spanish poetry, *Poeta en Nueva York's* enduring relevance also resides in its traditional ascription as one of the foundational texts of
595 surrealist poetry. Thus, in one of the earlier studies of Lorca's work in English,⁴³ Mildred Adams (who had met Lorca in Granada in 1928 and also accompanied him during his stay in New York) stated that *Poeta en Nueva York* was 'difficult to translate, came out of season and too early to catch the

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42 Miguel García-Posada, *Lorca: Interpretación de Poeta en Nueva York* (Madrid: Akal, 1981), 195.

43 Mildred Adams, *García Lorca: Playwright and Poet* (New York: George Braziller: 1977).

attention of American critics who later would learn to understand surrealist poetry'.⁴⁴ Whilst it is evident that *Poeta en Nueva York* is indeed characterized by a torrent of startling images in frequently shocking juxtaposition, a hallmark of purportedly surrealist poetry, there are also other salient features of these poems which I will now analyse with selected textual examples of what I believe to be the predominant themes of the book: the anguish and alienation expressed by Lorca's poetic persona in these New York compositions, in stark contrast to the family letters and the conference-recital. This poetic persona is fused with an immense cognitive dissonance between the socially aware denunciation for which these poems have been almost universally lauded, and the socially unaware disgust and misanthropy that was a leitmotif of so much of Modernist poetry. The verses that make up *Poeta en Nueva York* are usually considered to be Lorca's surrealist-inspired reaction to the dehumanizing effects of the quintessential modern metropolis, and there is no space for happiness, humour or even hope in these poems, as evinced by a nightmarish verse from 'Navidad en el Hudson' such as 'He pasado toda la noche en los andamios de los arrabales / dejándome la sangre por la escayola de los proyectos'.⁴⁵ According to Lorca's own appraisal in the introduction to his conference-recital, his New York poems 'no son aptos para ser comprendidos sin la ayuda cordial del duende' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 134), and their startling, violent juxtapositions closely follow Lorca's own previously cited dictum that poetry is the union of two words that one could never have imagined together. Notwithstanding the notorious and much-vaunted difficulty and even incomprehensibility of these poems, which Lorca clearly anticipated,⁴⁶ their key themes are clearly understandable: solitude, dehumanization, and anguish in the face of the modern metropolis *par excellence*. Unlike in the letters and to some extent in the conference-recital, there is no room for optimism about the future, and in his eponymous poem about the dawn of New York, Lorca starkly declares that 'no hay mañana ni esperanza posible'. Nor can we find in these verses the occasional positive view of New York's inhabitants (i.e. the friends he mentions so warmly in the letters), or even a nuanced appraisal of the city. This coruscating and all-pervasive negativity would tend to bear out Conrad Aiken's witheringly honest assessment of the book in *The New Republic*: 'he hated us, and rightly, for the right reasons'.⁴⁷

44 Adams, *García Lorca*, 134.

45 Federico García Lorca, 'Navidad en el Hudson', in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 202–03, ll. 24–25 (p. 202).

46 He writes, on 22 January 1930 that: 'Creo que el poema que yo estoy realizando de Nueva York con gráficos, palabras y dibujos es una cosa intensísima, tan intensa, que no entenderán y provocará discusiones y escándalo' (*Epistolario completo*, 677).

47 Conrad Aiken, review ' "After All, I Am a Poet". *The Poet in New York and Other Poems*, by F. García Lorca', *The New Republic*, 2 September 1940, p. 309.

645 Rather than the essentially benign and occasionally frivolous alternation
of disparaging and positive remarks to be found in the letters, there are
instead a series of disturbing, distressed terms employed throughout the
book, perhaps the most enigmatic of which is 'el hueco', a term which
650 appears sixteen times and is also present in the title of one of the poems,
'Nocturno del hueco'. In line with Roman Jakobson's well-known theory
that 'on every level of language the essence of poetic artifice consists of
recurrent returns',⁴⁸ there are also multiple references to 'noche'
(mentioned twenty-one times compared to the fourteen references to 'día')
655 and the polysemic term 'sueño' which appears eighteen times.⁴⁹ More
specifically, the lack of sleep and the onset of insomnia in the midst of the
Manhattan night is one of the leitmotifs of many of the poems, as evinced
notably by 'Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)', in which
Lorca begins by asserting categorically that 'No duerme nadie por el cielo.
Nadie, nadie', a refrain repeated throughout the poem before concluding that:

No duerme nadie por el mundo. Nadie. Nadie.

Ya lo he dicho.

No duerme nadie.

660 Pero si alguien tiene por la noche exceso de musgo en las sienas,
abrid los escotillones para que vea bajo la luna
las copas falsas, el veneno y la calavera de los teatros.⁵⁰

665 Another fundamental presence in the book is the word 'soledad', which
appears fifteen times and also provides the title of the first section,
'Poemas de la Soledad en Columbia University'. If we also consider its
adjectival forms 'solo', which appears nine times in the book, and
'solitario', which appears twice, the impending sense of loneliness and
homesickness is a notably more profound and disquieting presence in the
670 poems than in the letters or the conference-recital. In the former case, this
is entirely predictable as correspondence with one's family back home is
unlikely to lend itself to much intense soul-baring or brutal emotional
honesty. In the latter case, the stylized and controlled representation of
the poetic experience of New York was designed to pave the way for the
675 promised book, which was a form of personal and artistic reinvention, and
would not be entirely conducive to such painful sincerity. Nevertheless,
his visit to Coney Island did lead him to refer, with an Eliotian

680 48 Roman Jakobson, 'Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet', *Language*, 42
(1966), 398–429 (p. 399).

49 Another equally polysemic term, 'cielo' appears no fewer than forty-four times, to the
desperation of the book's many complete and partial translators.

50 Federico García Lorca, 'Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)', in *Poeta en
Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 204–53, ll. 44–49 (p. 204).

intertextual nod to *The Waste Land* ('The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights'),⁵¹ in his conference-recital to the solitude felt by an Andalusian in such a quintessentially urban and Anglo-Saxon bacchanal:

Nadie puede darse idea de la soledad que siente allí un español y más todavía si éste es hombre del sur. Porque, si te caes, será atropellado, y si resbalas al agua, arrojarán sobre ti los papeles de las meriendas.

(*Cartas y recuerdos*, 142)

In 'La Aurora', the dawn of New York 'gime / por las inmensas escaleras / buscando entre las aristas / nardos de angustia dibujada'⁵² and the poem concludes with an utterly desolate and Dantean vision of the city: 'Por los barrios hay gentes que vacilan insomnes / como recién salidas de un naufragio de sangre'.⁵³ Rather than the respect and the aesthetic devotion to the Catholic Church displayed in the letters to his family, in 'Grito Hacia Roma' the poet declares that 'el hombre vestido de blanco / ignora el misterio de la espiga, / ignora el gemido de la parturienta, / ignora que Cristo puede dar agua todavía', further opines that 'Los maestros enseñan a los niños / una luz maravillosa que viene del monte; / pero lo que llega es una reunión de cloacas' and then proceeds to offer the following savage anti-clerical indictment: 'Los maestros señalan con devoción las enormes cúpulas sahumadas; / pero debajo de las estatuas no hay amor'.⁵⁴ In 'Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)', we also find another Dantean description of 'el cementerio más lejano' where 'el niño que enterraron esta mañana lloraba tanto / que hubo necesidad de llamar a los perros para que callase'.⁵⁵ While in the same poem, Lorca tells us that 'al que le duele su dolor / le dolerá sin descanso / y al que teme la muerte / la llevará sobre sus hombros'.⁵⁶ 'Panorama Ciego de Nueva York' strikes a similar note of terror in the face of death, a terror utterly devoid of the possible of the consolation offered by religion, or even some residual aesthetic admiration for the urban landscape of the city: 'Todos comprenden el dolor que se relaciona con la muerte, / pero el verdadero

51 T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), 67.

52 Federico García Lorca, 'La Aurora', in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 209, ll. 5–8.

53 García Lorca, 'La Aurora', ed. Anderson, 209, ll. 21–22.

54 García Lorca, 'Grito hacia Roma', ed. Anderson, 264, ll. 30–33, 36–38 & 40–41.

55 García Lorca, 'Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)', ed. Anderson, 204 ll. 9 & 12–13.

56 García Lorca, 'Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)', ed. Anderson, 204, ll. 20–23.

dolor no está presente el espíritu'.⁵⁷ In the same poem, Lorca's poetic persona also writes that 'las que mueren de parto saben en la última hora / que todo rumor será piedra y toda huella latido',⁵⁸ and speaks of 'el ansia de asesinato que nos oprime cada momento' and 'el metálico rumor de suicidio que nos anima cada madrugada'.⁵⁹

Essentially, New York is an infinitely more frightening and threatening place in the poems than in the letters and the conference-recital, and in *Poeta en Nueva York* Lorca presents the city in a manner which can perhaps best be summarized in one word: 'angustia', a term which appears eight times over the course of the book. In contrast to the positive light he sheds on his experience to his family, boasting of influential, high society friendships and the possibility of future artistic triumphs, Lorca's poetic transfiguration of New York was utterly desolate.

5 The Conference-Recital

Lorca presented his ample repertoire of talks in Spain, the US and Latin America from 1922 to 1936 and, according to Marie Laffranque, 'además de ser fuente de ingresos obedecen a una necesidad de expresión y formación'.⁶⁰ Indeed, Andrés Soria Olmedo considers their independent literary entity to be of such importance as to speak of how these talks 'constituyen un subcontinente de perfiles bastante claros dentro de su producción', and further highlights that 'están escritas en función de la oralidad, como quien escribe el parlamento de un personaje para el teatro'.⁶¹ Soria Olmedo specifically places considerable importance on what he believes to be the theatrical, performative nature of this New York talk and thus states that the 'conferencia-recital se dramatiza, se asimila a la teatralidad, al modo de la oratoria barroca'.⁶² In this talk, Lorca read from nine of the poems that make up the now canonical text of *Poeta en Nueva York*. After an exordium which spoke of how he was breaking his 'largo silencio poético', he recognized that a lot had already been written about New York ('un río de libros descriptivos'), before flouting all the formal rules of rhetoric and engaging his audience almost aggressively:

57 García Lorca, 'Panorama Ciego de Nueva York', in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 206–07, ll. 11–12 (p. 206).

58 García Lorca, 'Panorama Ciego de Nueva York', ed. Anderson, 206, ll. 20–21.

59 García Lorca, 'Panorama Ciego de Nueva York', ed. Anderson, 207, ll. 29 & 30.

60 Marie Laffranque, 'Una cadena de solidaridad: Federico, conferenciante', in *Nº extraordinario de homenaje a Federico García Lorca, Trece de Nieve*, 2ª época, 1–2 (1976), 132–140 (p. 134).

61 Soria Olmedo, 'Entre cartas y poemas', 32 & 33.

62 Soria Olmedo, 'Entre cartas y poemas', 36.

Yo no vengo para entretener a ustedes. Ni quiero, ni me importa, ni me da la gana. Más bien he venido a luchar. A luchar cuerpo a cuerpo, con una masa tranquila porque lo que voy a hacer no es una conferencia, es una lectura de poesías [...] Y ésta es la lucha; porque yo quiero con
 765 vehemencia comunicarme con vosotros ya que he venido, ya que estoy aquí, ya que salgo de mi largo silencio poético y no quiero daros miel, porque no tengo, sino arena o cicutu o agua salada. Lucha cuerpo a cuerpo en la cual no me importa ser vencido (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 133–34).

770 Lorca also insisted that he was giving his ‘reacción lírica’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 134) to the city and that ‘Para venir aquí he vencido mi pudor poético’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 135). Lorca was many things to the many people who knew him in Spain and America, but he was most certainly never accused of modesty or ‘pudor’ in talking about his own work, as a cursory reading of his New York letters will instantly confirm. In this
 775 regard, it should be remembered that, before writing his New York cycle of poems, Lorca had already become a celebrity in Spain due to the immense popularity of his *Romancero Gitano*, which was published in 1928. Therefore, this conference-recital, which was given in several cities around
 780 Spain and Latin America between 1932 and 1934, naturally created an immense sense of expectation regarding the forthcoming book, which Lorca was both presenting and promising in his lecture: ‘Dejo de leer los poemas de la Navidad y los poemas del puerto, pero algún día los leerán, si les interesa, en el libro’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 146). In the text of this
 785 conference-recital, Lorca declared in reference to the plight of the blacks in New York that he ‘Protestaba de toda esta carne robada al paraíso, manejada por judíos de nariz gélida y alma secante’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 140),⁶³ and also insisted rather disquietingly in a tone which might now easily seem to us redolent of a kind of ‘white saviour’ mentality *avant la lettre*:

Yo quería hacer el poema de la raza negra en Norteamérica y subrayar el dolor que tienen los negros de ser negros en un mundo contrario, esclavos de todos los inventos del hombre blanco y de todas sus máquinas.

(*Cartas y recuerdos*, 139)

795 Compared to the unencumbered anguish of the poems and frequently ethnocentric dismissiveness of the letters, there are a certain amount of conflicting feelings regarding New York in the conference-recital, in which Lorca expressed genuine admiration (and even some affection) for the city: ‘la arquitectura de Nueva York se me aparece como algo prodigiosa, algo que,
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63 In his stage version of this conference-recital at the *Teatro del Barrio* in Madrid in 2021, the Spanish actor Alberto San Juan omitted this now unacceptable antisemitic reference from the text.

descartada la intención, llega a conmovier como un espectáculo natural de montaña o desierto' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 147). Another strong tendency of the conference-recital, and one which manifests an apparently startling contradiction with the poems, is Lorca's predilection for portraying himself as a man in control of the situation, a poised, even cosmopolitan individual light years away from the anguished, alienated protagonist of the poems, and one who encounters 'otra vez el ritmo frenético de Nueva York. Pero ya no me sorprende, conzco el mecanismo de las calles, hablo con la gente, penetro un poco más en la vida social y la denuncio' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 146). Indeed, there is often a certain degree of boasting about his adventurous nature and the need to mix with everybody who inhabited the great metropolis, 'Pero hay que salir a la ciudad y hay que vencerla, no se puede uno entregar a las reacciones líricas sin haberse rozado con las personas de las avenidas y con la baraja de hombres de todo el mundo' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 184), which is in sharp contrast to the poems and certainly to the objective observation of somebody who was in contact with him like Sofía Meginwoff, who spoke of Lorca being terrified ('aterrado') when he visited an African-American church in Harlem (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 187).

There are certainly echoes of the urban solitude that dominates the poems in the conference-recital's self-depictions of 'Yo, solo y errante, agotado por el ritmo de los inmensos letreros luminosos de Times Square, huía en este pequeño poema⁶⁴ del inmenso ejército de ventanas donde ni una sola persona tiene tiempo de mirar una nube' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 135). Regarding the machine-like nature of capitalism in New York and the resignation with which its citizens accepted their fate and their 'deber' to keep the machine moving, Lorca was scathing and commented that this was a 'Resultado perfecto de una moral protestante, que yo, como español típico, a Dios gracias, me crispaba los nervios' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 140). In one of the scarce religious connections to the world of his letters to be found in the conference-recital, we can identify his references to asking for help from the Virgin of 'aquellas deliciosas gentes que eran católicas' (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 143), his American summer hosts in Vermont (the family of his friend Philip Cummings), who were not in fact Catholic at all, and to whom he devoted in his recital a composition entitled 'Luna y panorama de los insectos' (and subtitled 'El poeta pide ayuda a la virgen'). Lorca's complex and often contradictory religiosity, and his ambiguous relationship with the Catholic Church, certainly need further exploration and would undoubtedly merit a more profound thematic analysis which, unfortunately, escapes the confines of this article. Finally, unlike the poems or the letters, this conference-recital is replete with allusions to prestigious, universally acclaimed Anglophone authors such as

64 The poem to which he refers is 'Vuelta de paseo', which in the text of the conference-recital is referred to as 'Asesinado por el cielo'.

T. S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe,⁶⁵ and Walt Whitman, a form of literary name-dropping which was entirely predictable and appropriate in what was, after all, the self-presentation of a triumphant, cosmopolitan artist addressing an expectant audience back home about how his New York experience had
 845 changed his work, and not the excuses and fables of a dutiful and somewhat spendthrift son, or the despair of a lonely, homesick *granadino* in a sleepless Manhattan dawn. Nevertheless, Lorca did express at least some of this anguished culture shock in his conference-recital, speaking of how ‘Los dos elementos que el viajero captará en la gran ciudad son arquitectura extrahumana y ritmo furioso. Geometría y angustia’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 135), and describing the fearful crowds of New York and the profound
 850 impression made on him by the ‘la multitud que vomita’ of Coney Island.⁶⁶

855 6 Conclusions

The three Lorcas of the New York texts are often so utterly irreconcilable with the same person, that one is reminded of the rhetorical question posed in the film *El Jardín de los Poetas* (1995) by the Spanish cinema director Basilio Martín Patino: ‘¿Existió alguna vez Lorca, o será todo una creación poética que nos tiene sugestionados?’. However, I believe that the three voices that
 860 write about New York are distinct but interrelated, and form a curiously symbiotic relationship. Therefore, they offer an illuminating opportunity for readers who wish to comprehend Lorca’s complex and ongoing literary relationship with the city of New York and go beyond the traditional adscription of *Poeta en Nueva York* as part surrealist experimentation and
 865 part social denunciation. According to Soria Olmedo:

[...] la edición crítica de *Poeta en Nueva York* [...] permite ver en las cartas su condición de ‘pieza de escritura que se envía a alguien como un regalo’; a
 870 su vez, la autonomía literaria de las cartas—a expensas de la transparencia autobiográfica—refuerza la del poemario, y por el mismo gesto permite leer la conferencia-recital en su lógica interna, y no más ya en la función instrumental de informar sobre el canon de los poemas a los que alude.⁶⁷

875 Lorca’s poetic and personal experience of New York is perhaps the most celebrated in the long line of Spanish artists who have expressed their profound ‘desarraigo’ and existential anguish when faced with the quintessential twentieth-century metropolis. Lorca and the Spanish writers who went before

880 65 He writes ‘[...] el vidente Edgar Allan Poe tuvo que abrazarse a lo misterioso y al hervor cordial de la embriaguez en aquel mundo’ (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 135).

66 Federico García Lorca, ‘Paisaje de la multitud que vomita’, in *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. Anderson, 197–98.

67 Soria Olmedo, ‘Entre cartas y poemas’, 32.

and after him constructed a vision of a city that could not be truly understood, but which was nevertheless a place that provided them with a life-changing experience that led them to rethink their own cultural and artistic identities, and a platform from which to reinvent themselves artistically by constructing a more modernist and cosmopolitan vision of themselves and their work. Lorca's New York poems were written, and the conference-recital subsequently presented, at a time when the city was the subject of a copious amount of travel and testimonial literature in Spanish by the likes of José Moreno Villa, Josep Pla, Concha Espina or Julio Camba. But few would argue that Lorca's vision of the city has since been inscribed as the pivotal, hegemonic reference in this ongoing cultural tradition of the literary construction of New York for Hispanophone readers in the twentieth century, a tradition which has continued in the twenty-first century with Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Ventanas de Manhattan* (2004), which was both profoundly informed and inspired by Lorca's New York sojourn. As Muñoz Molina points out regarding the verses of *Poeta en Nueva York*, 'es una escritura alucinada: muchos poemas se le ocurrían mientras iba por la calle marchándose de caminata'.⁶⁸ For another Andalusian visitor, Luis Cernuda, the simile he used to describe his initial impression of the city in his poem 'La Llegada', 'fabulosa como un leviatán',⁶⁹ was intended to sound at the very least rather contradictory, just as for his friend Federico García Lorca, the very title of *Poeta en Nueva York* was clearly intended to strike a startlingly oxymoronic note. Nevertheless, in Lorca's concluding remarks to his conference-recital, the desolation and utter despair of the poems are nowhere to be seen, nor is the rather parochial, ethnocentric and occasionally dismissive frame of reference of the letters to his family from this 'Babilonia trepidante y enloquecedora' (*Epistolario completo*, 615), and instead he reflected with generosity and fruition on the lasting importance of his stay in New York:

De todos modos me separaba de Nueva York con sentimiento y admiración profunda. Dejaba muchos amigos y había recibido la experiencia más útil de mi vida. (*Cartas y recuerdos*, 147)*

68 See 'Antonio Muñoz Molina: "Nueva York es el Senegal con máquinas"', *ABC Madrid*, 12 February 2004, n.p.; available online at <https://www.abc.es/cultura/libros/abci-antonio-munoz-molina-nueva-york-senegal-maquinas-200402120300-241116_noticia.html> (accessed 11 April 2023).

69 See 'La Llegada', in Luis Cernuda, *Obra completa*, ed., intro. & notas de Derek Harris & Luis Maristany, 3 vols (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1993–1994), I (1993), *Poesía completa*, 608.

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