# Love and Death: Thematic Considerations on Lorca's *Diván del Tamarit*

It is appropriate that García Lorca's final book of verse should be a reflection of the themes that were characteristic of his life's work. Fifty years after his death, having shaken his reputation as the "gypsy poet", Lorca's legacy may be found in the pages of the *Diván del Tamarit*, a small volume of poems evoking the magic of its oriental antecedents. In the *gacelas* and *casidas* of the *Diván* lie the counterparts in verse to the keys to Lorca's drama found in *El Publico*.

The two most prevalent themes among the poems of the *Diván del Tamarit* are love and death, two themes which become inextricably interrelated in Lorca's *gacelas* and *casidas*. A glance at the titles of the *gacelas* emphasizes this point, as only three of the poems do not have either of the words *amor* or *muerto* as part of their titles ("de la terrible presencia," "de la raíz amarga," "de la herida"). As might be assumed from its association with death, love is not a happy experience in these late poems. Instead, it is a brief encounter, an impossibility, a temptation equated with poison, an enemy. Death, on the other hand, is an ambiguity. The poet seeks death, and seeks to hide from death. Rafael Martínez Nadal explains the relationship between the two themes as they occur throughout Lorca's poetry: "If love generates life and life ends in death, Lorca, in spite of his boundless love of life and horror of death, ends by seeing a correlation that makes these antitheticals inseparable."[1]

The titles *gacelas* and *casidas* do invite a supposition of differences between the two types of poems. Despite their literary antecedents, in Lorca's *Diván* there is virtually no distrinction in verse form from *gacela* to *casida*. There is, however, evidence of a thematic continuity among the *gacelas* different from that among the *casidas*. Jeremy Forster generalizes that "the twelve gazells deal generally with love. The nine qasidas [sic] lay increasing emphasis on the metaphysical problems of life's mystery and death."[2] André Belamich is of a similar opinion: "Il [the Diván] se compose de 12 Gacelas et de 9 Casidas ... les premières laissent deviner, sous des termes voilés, les tourments et les rare joies d'une passion malheureuse; ... Si la première des Casidas rappelle la cinquième Gacela, les suivants, plus objectives, rejoignent les énigmes de la vie et la mort."[3] The titles of the *gacelas* would seem to indicate a conscious attempt on Lorca's part to establish a continuity among the poems, with that continuity based on an amorous theme. The thematic unity of the *gacelas* of Lorca is more apparent than that of his *casidas* at

first glance, but as a whole, the *casidas* leave one with the impression of a body of work characterized by pessimism and pain; by the desire for the unattainable, destined for disillusionment. While the *gacelas* at least permit hope (cf. "Gacela I, del amor imprevisto"; "Gacela VII, del recuerdo de amor"; "Gacela IX, del amor maravilloso"), the *casidas* typically dwell in hopelessness. This generalization does not preclude occasional optimistic notes, or poems, such as "Casida IV, de la mujer tendida," seemingly unrelated to the prevalent negative tone. As will be seen below, however, even the hopeful note of some of the *gacelas* is exposed as an illusion, with "love" becoming the "enemy" of the poet in the *gacelas* themselves.

Other themes besides love and death do exist among the poems of the *Diván,* among them the loss of innocence (C. VIII), the pleasures of beauty (C. IV) and the mysteries of sexual passion. (G. I). Because of the predominance of the love and death themes, however, this article will concentrate primarily on an examination of their nature and treatment in the *Diván* poems.

## LOVE AND DEATH IN THE *GACELAS*

Briefly and succintly, the ninth *gacela* of the *Diván* ("del amor maravilloso") reveals both the joys of a loving relationship and the obstacles which overwhelm the lovers. The environment is hostile, the landscape is parched, the heavens are evil, and the beloved provides relief for the poet as his own *beatus ille:*

Con todo el yeso
de los malos campos,
eras junco de amor, jazmín mojado.

Con sur y llama
de los malos cielos,
eras rumor de nieve por mi pecho.
Cielos y campos
anudaban cadenas en mis manos.
Campos y cielos
azotaban las llagas de mi cuerpo.

Interspersed with the poetic devices of anaphora, parallelism, and chiasmus are the two verses which refer specifically to the beloved, "eras junco de amor, jazmín mojado," and "eras rumor de nieve por mi pecho." The fields, infertile and scattered with the parched whiteness of gypsum, provide the antithesis for the metaphor for the beloved, associated with the cool, damp banks of a river. Similarly, in the second stanza, the

heat and fire of the heavens are contrasted with the possibility of relief from the delicate flakes of snow.[4] While the terrain and the heavens offer only a desolate, painful environment ("knotting chains in my hands" and "lashing the wounds of my body"), the beloved is to the poet a refuge where he can soothe his parched and burning body. But even in a poem with such a positive message, it is not with a reference to the beloved that the poem ends. Instead the final two brief stanzas only contain descriptions of the poet's pain, caused by the evil skies and fields, descriptions which are given emphasis by his choice of poetic devices.

Like the "Gacela IX, del amor maravilloso," "Gacela III, del amor desesperado" chronicles the struggles of two lovers to be together in spite of the obstacles that must be overcome. Nightfall won't come; daybreak won't come; the appointed time of their rendezvous never comes: "La noche no quiere venir / para que tú no vengas, ni yo pueda ir"; "El día no quiere venir"; "Ni la noche ni el día quieren venir." Because the night will not come, the lovers may be destroyed by the heat of the day; but they will meet even if such destruction is inevitable: "Pero yo iré, / aunque un sol de alacranes me coma la sien. // Pero tú vendrás / con la lengua quemada por la lluvia de sal." They will meet even if they must defy the dangers of eternal darkness. "Pero yo iré / entregando a los sapos mi mordido clavel. // Pero tú vendrás / por las turbias cloacas de la oscuridad." This poem amplifies the impatience of the two lovers to be together, magnifying the sensual aspect of their relationship. In the final brief stanza, the amorous objective of the desired encounter is revealed: "Ni la noche ni el día quiren venir / para que por ti muera / y tú mueras por mí." Death, in these verses and traditionally, is symbolic of orgasm, and the lovers anxiously await their next tryst.

Sensuality, and less obviously sexuality, also play an important role in other poems from the *Diván*. The lovely "Gacela Primera, del amor imprevisto" that opens the *Diván* is both a hymn to the mysteries of sensual love and a cry of frustration at the fleetingness of the erotic encounter. Again, as in the "Gacela del amor maravilloso," and as is typical in the poems of the *Diván,* the poem opens on a positive note that is not maintained in the final stanzas:

> Nadie comprendía el perfume
> de la oscura magnolia de tu vientre.
> Nadie sabía que martirizabas
> un colibrí de amor entre los dientes.
>  Mil caballitos persas se dormían
> en la plaza con luna de tu frente,
> mientras que yo enlazaba cuatro noches
> tu cintura, enemiga de la nieve.
>  Entre yeso y jazmines, tu mirada

era un pálido ramo de simientes.
Yo busqué, para darte, por mi pecho
las letras de marfil que dicen *siempre.*
*Siempre, siempre:* jardín de mi agonía,
tu cuerpo fugitivo para siempre,
la sangre de tus venas en mi boca,
tu boca ya sin luz para mi muerte.

The mystery of sensual passion is conveyed in the first words of the poem, as no one, in the eyes of the poet, is capable of understanding the scent emitted by the womb. The poet and all others are blind to the secrets hidden within the beloved. No one is completely aware of the delights of that "dark magnolia".

The brevity of the encounter is revealed in the second stanza. The poet has spent only four nights embraced with his beloved. He tries to preserve the moment, to make it last forever, symbolized by the ivory letters he wants to give to his beloved. He is frustrated in that effort, however, for we find in the fourth stanza that instead of forever possessing his beloved, the poet has lost her: "Your body, fugitive forever." This first *gacela* already contains indications of the way the theme "love" is manifested in the *Diván.* Emilia de Zuleta writes that, in the *Diván,* "el tema fundamental vuelve a ser, como en sus primeros libros, el amor, pero sujeto ahora a experiencias dolorosas y amargas."[5] Instead of love being an ideal, it is "amor, siempre fugitivo"; "amor como lucha"; "imposibilidad del encuentro."

In "Gacela VI, de la raíz amarga," the emotion expressed is pain, compounded by bitterness. Love now is the enemy of the poet:

Duele en la planta del pie
el interior de la cara,
y duele en el tronco fresco
de noche recién cortada.
Amor, enemigo mío,
muerde tu raíz amarga!

Love has only resulted in pain, pain that spreads from the sole of his foot to his head; pain that permeates the night through displaced adjectives. It is not the night that has recently been cut, but the "fresh trunk". Using a poetic device common among the poets of his generation, Lorca displaces his adjectives to emphasize that even nature herself ("night") suffers along with him.[6] André Belamich has noted a continuous communion between man and nature in the *Diván:* "Le *Diván* y instaure un échange incessant entre l'homme et le cosmos. Aucune frontière entre eux; ils comuniquent dans une realité supérieure oú les angoisses du poète *deviennent* celles de la nature tout entière."[7] This romantic trend

continues as the poet pleads with his "enemy", love, to forget its dark side, to destroy the bitter root that is destroying him. The one bitter root, however, is more powerful than all the positive, romantic aspects of love. "Hay una raíz amarga / y un mundo de mil terranzas;" "Hay un cielo de mil ventanas... / y hay una raíz amarga." The bitterness, already clearly the most important theme in the poem, ("amarga" appears five times in the poem, including in the title), stands out starkly in a one-word verse, "Amarga", repeating and reiterating the word immediately preceding it.

Seemingly unrealted to the poems that surround it is "Gacela V, del niño muerto." Although Belamich considers death a metaphor for orgasm in this poem[8], overall this *gacela* is far too similar to the "Casida Primera, del herido por el agua" to be included into the same category as the *gacelas* previously discussed. Water, the agent of death in five poems of the *Diván,* here destroys the poet's beloved, who is among those who die in the waters of the river. "Todas las tardes en Granada, / todas las tardes se muere un niño. / Todas las tardes el agua se sienta / a conversar con sus amigos." Death by water is the "muerte oscura" in "Gacela VIII" and the death the poet wishes to avoid in "Gacela X, de la huida": "Ignorante del agua, voy buscando / una muerte de luz que me consuma." "Casida Primera, del herido por el agua" echoes the theme of death by water in the fifth *gacela;* and finally, in the eighth *casida,* "de la muchacha dorada por el agua," water and fire combine with fatal results for the young girl: "La muchacha de lágrimas / se bañaba entre llamas / y el ruiseñor lloraba / con las alas quemadas." Water, then, synonymous with death in many of its manifestations in the *Diván,* appears as a river in "Gacela V, del niño muerto," and it is in the river that the boy dies: "No quedaba en la tierra ni una miga de nube / cuando te ahogabas por el río."

The symbols of death permeate the fifth *gacela.* It is water, that agent of death discussed above, that appropriately appears in the first stanza: "Todas las tardes el agua se sienta / a conversar con sus amigos." In the second stanza, "los muertos llevan alas de musgo." *Musgo,* since the early *Libro de poemas,* has been synonymous with stagnancy and death in Lorca's poetry, as it clearly is in this verse. After the discovery of the dead body, "un gigante cayó sobre los montes / y el valle fue rodando con perros y con lirios." The water, ever present, is now a giant leaving destruction in its wake. Dogs and lilies, seemingly harmless natural elements, are instead also symbolic of death throughout Lorca's poetry. In "Casida III, de los ramos," from the *Diván* itself, the dogs are "leaden dogs" who are the harbingers of death in that poem. The lily traditionally has been the flower of death, and the tradition continues with García Lorca. In "Balada triste", from *Libro de poemas,* the death associated with lilies is the death of innocence: "Y vi que en vez de rosas y claveles /

ella tronchaba lirios con sus manos." In "Reyerta," from *Romancero gitano,* Juan Antonio del Montilla is dead, and as a result, "rueda muerto la pendiente, / su cuerpo lleno de lirios." The dogs and lilies in "Gacela V" carry with them the association with death established in the other poems. The references to the poet's beloved ("tú") sandwich the deathly symbols discussed above, and it is with a reference to the dead body that the *gacela* ends: "Tu cuerpo, con la sombra violeta de mis manos, / era, muerto en la orilla, un arcángel de frío."

## DEATH AND THE IMPOSSIBLE IN THE *CASIDAS*

As María Teresa Babín notes in her *Estudios Lorquianos,* the *Diván* is dominated by two distinct, but interrelated, themes: "El *Diván del Tamarit* recoge en su recinto los temas del amor pagano y sensual, y el horror perenne a la desintegradión física después de morir. Aun cuando se goza de la caricia y de la alegría de vivir, la sombra de la muerte acecha al hombre."[9] Death, impending doom, and the unfulfilled desire for the unattainable are three closely related themes representative of the *casidas.* With the exception of the "Casida IV, de la mujer tendida," a poem which thematically would seem appropriately placed among the *gacelas* with its comparison of a woman to mother earth, the remainder of Lorca's *casidas* illustrate the point made by Emilia de Zuleta: "La muerte se presenta como corrosión, corrupción y sacrificio, y el poeta la rechaza añorando una muerte inocente."[10] There is no innocent death ("muerte de luz") in the *Diván;* instead beginning with the first *casida,* death, as was love in the *gacelas,* is associated with pain, agony, and doom.

The foreshadowing of doom permeates the "Casida III, de los ramos" through both its poetic structure and its images. With a mournful rhyme scheme compounded by the uncertainty implied by the poem's grammatical constructions, the poetic structure provides a fitting background for the omens of doom that flood the poem. Lorca's use of "a esperar que se caigan los ramos" and its parallels is reminiscent of similar techniques in his earlier verses, as in "Burla de don Pedro a caballo" from *Romancero gitano,* when the nightingale menacingly says "Veremos."[11] The rhyme scheme is an assonantal pattern in o-o which is made more solemn by the frequent combination of nasals with the more open vowels. The threatening tone established by poetic structure is maintained and intensified through the harbingers of doom appearing in the poem. The basic image developed in the poem is, of course, "los ramos". Throughout his poetic career, Lorca associates "ramos" with death, beginning with a reference from *Libro de poemas* in "Elegía a doña Juana la loca": "te dio la Muerte rosas marchitas en un ramo." The connection between "ramos" and

death continues through the *Cante jondo* and the *Romancero gitano,* as seen in the death of don Pedro in the aforementioned *romance:* "Está don Pedro olvidado / ay! jugando don los ramos." An example from *Poeta en Nueva York* comes from "Vals en las ramas," where "La dama / estaba muerta en la rama." The possible loss of his "ramos" in "Casida III, de los ramos" terrifies the poet; as in the "Soneto del dulce llanto," he is afraid of losing his "ramos," his vitality, his fruitfulness; and he associates that loss with his own death. In the "Casida" the situation is hopeless. It is inevitable that the branches will fall, and the leaden dogs and children with veiled faces waiting for the fall are merely symbolic vultures who recognize the inevitability of the poet's destruction. The metaphors of the storm, autumn, and darkness explain the cause of the fall as the approaching death of the poet, a theme which recurs in poem after poem in the *Diván* ("Casida de los ramos", "Casida de las palomas", "Casida del herido por el agua", "Gacela de la huida", "Gacela de la muerte oscura").

It is not the poet's death but the suffering of others that concerns the poet in two other *casidas,* "Casida II, del llanto" and "Casida V, del sueño al aire libre." Both poems are dominated by the contrast between illusion and reality, starkly stated in the "Casida del llanto" and more subtly worded in "Casida del sueño al aire libre." The latter poem is best interpreted in the light of Robert Bly's explanation of the poetic device "association": flitting rapidly or "leaping" between the conscious and the unconscious.[12] Consciousness and unconsciousness in turn represent reality and illusion, as Lorca presents a distinct contrast between a deceptively pleasant illusion and its dire revelation as being no more than that. The first stanza of Lorca's *casida* is only explicable in terms of rapid association, for there is no obvious connection between a jasmine flower and a beheaded bull, nor, as the second verse continues, among "Pavimento infinito. Mapa. Sala. Arpa. Alba." It is unclear at first which of these images represent the illusion and which the reality, but the third and fourth verses reveal the relationship between the jasmines and the bull, as "la niña finge un toro de jazmines / y el toro es un sangriento crepúsculo que brama." It is only in the imagination of the innocent girl that the harsh reality of the bleeding bull can be converted into the illusion of fragrant flowers. In the second stanza, Lorca paints his ideal, illusory world: "Si el cielo fuera un niño pequeñito, / los jazmines tendrían mitad de noche oscura, / y el toro circo azul sin lidiadores / y un corazón al pie de una columna." Children for Lorca represent innocence. The poet is imagining a mythical, nostalgic state of innocence, where sweet jasmines lessen the fear of the night. The bull also returns to an innocent state, symbolized by the blue ring untainted by the red blood brought by bullfighters. As quickly as the illusion is created, however, it is destroyed. Through a device also used in "Casida del llanto," the poet

immediately reveals that the vision he has just imagined is a false one. The innocence of the tiny child is replaced by the danger of an elephant, the jasmine is lifeless ("bloodless water"), and the girl who so innocently dreamed of an ideal world is dead. As in the "Casida de los ramos," death is symbolized by a fallen branch: "Y la niña es un ramo nocturno / por el inmenso pavimento oscuro." In the final stanza, nothing of the illusion remains in its ideal form. Nothing remains at all, except the skeleton of the girl who had dreamed that ideal world.

In "Casida II, del llanto," the poet, like the girl of "Casida del sueño al aire libre," retreats into his imagination to escape the unpleasantness of reality: "He cerrado mi balcón / porque no quiero oír el llanto." However, immediately, as in the fifth *Casida*, he denies his readers the possibility of escaping from reality, because "no se oye otra cosa que el llanto." The "llanto" permeates the walls, the sound of falling tears muzzles the wail of the wind, and the poet is not allowed to escape the pain of reality. Jeremy Forster, as he explains in "A Prodigy of Passion: Lorca's Last Book of Verse," believes that the angels, dogs and violins in "Casida del llanto" represent three common sources of solace for people: "Neither religion, not the comfort of home, nor the beauty of art avail to shut out the sorrow of the world."[13] Indeed, these elements have become part of the lament itself: "Pero el llanto es un perro inmenso, / el llanto es un ángel inmenso, el llanto es un violín inmenso." There is no escape from the sorrow of the world outside the walls in religion, in music, or anywhere.

The desire for escape from reality can be compared with the desire for the impossible that is apparent in both the "Casida de la mano imposible" and the "Casida de la rosa." The hand that Lorca covets would protect him from the death he wishes to avoid, the dark death associated with water and with the moon: "Sería el guardián que en la noche de mi tránsito / prohibiera en absoluto la entrada a la luna;" "Yo no quiero más que esa mano / para tener un ala de mi muerte." The title of the poem reveals that his desire is unattainable, "la mano imposible." In "Casida VII, de la rosa," the desired object is unattainable and unknown. Unlike the poet of "Casida de la mano imposible," who clearly states the object of his desire ("una mano herida, si es posible") the poet of "Casida de la rosa" only lists those things for which the rose is not searching: "La rosa / no buscaba la aurora;" "La rosa, / no buscaba ni ciencia ni sombra;" "La roas, / no buscaba la rosa." Instead, in each stanza, the rose "buscaba otra cosa," that intangible "something else" that is always out of reach. There is no fulfillment of desire in the poems of the *Diván,* whether that desire is for escape from death, escape from reality, or for that "something else" the poet never identifies.

## CONCLUSION

Martínez Nadal has noted that "the final equation love = death, or death = love, is what gives to Lorca's amorous poetry after the book *Songs* such an unmistakable and grave intensity."[14] The *Diván del Tamarit,* Lorca's swan song, is thus a manifesto in verse on the nature of love and death. The love that Lorca describes in the *Diván* is associated only with pain, with frustration, and with bitterness, all of which also describe the death the poet is seeking to escape. He seeks love desperately, but is overwhelmed by the obstacles confronting him, and frustrated by the eventuality that even should he find love it would lead to death.

Linda Britt
University of Virginia

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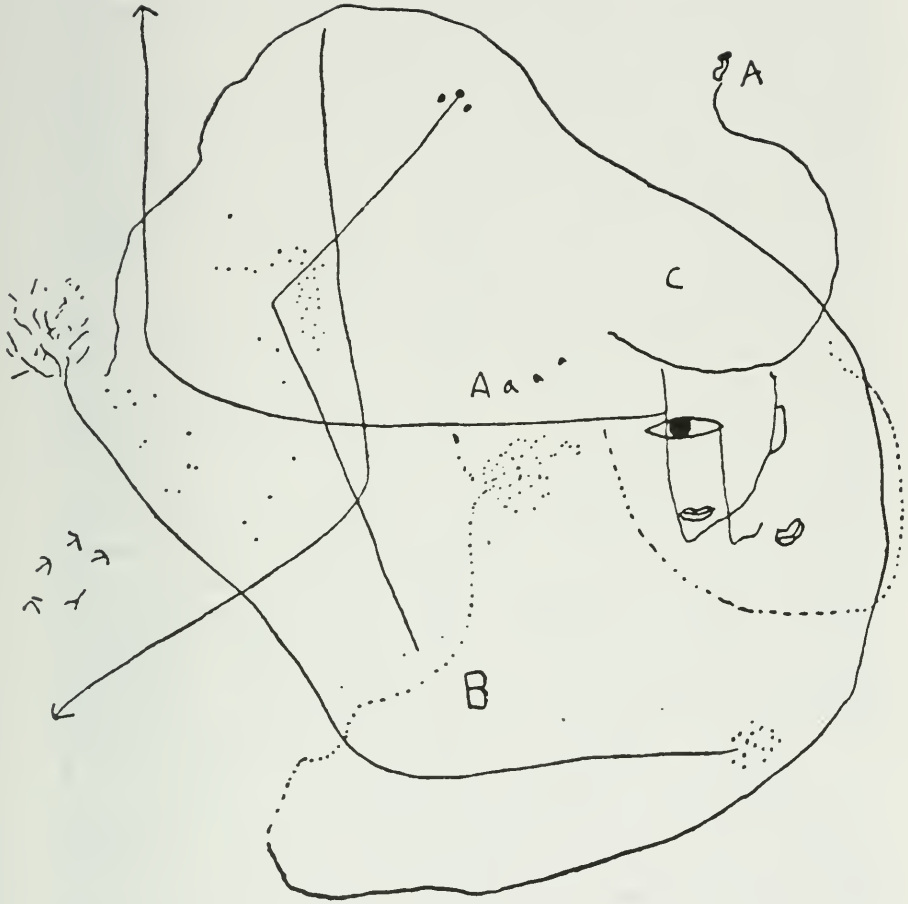
Notes

[1] Rafael Martínez Nadal, *Federido García Lorca and 'The Public'* (New York, Schocken Books, 1974), 127.
[2] Jeremy Forster, "A Prodigy of Passion: Lorca's Last Book of Verse", *Queen's Quarterly LXXIII,* 263.
[3] André Belamich, *Lorca* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1962), 118.
[4] Snow is often a negative image for Lorca, as it is associated with cold, ice, and death. See Gacela I, where the obviously pleasant warmth of the beloved's *cintura* is an enemy of the snow.
[5] Emilia de Zuleta, *Cinco poetas españoles* Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1971), 260.
[6] See Carlos Bousoño, *Teoría de la expresión poética,* 5 ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1970)
[7] Belamich, 73.
[8] Belamich, 143.
[9] María Teresa Babín, *Estudios Lorquianos* (Barcelona: Editorial Universitaria de la Univ. de Puerto Rico, 1976), 315.
[10] Zuleta, 261.
[11] See Mario Hernández, "La muchacha dorada por la luna" in *Trece de nieve* (1976), pp. 211-220, for a study of the *ruiseñor.*
[12] Robert Bly, *Leaping Poetry* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975)
[13] Forster, 264.
[14] Martínez Nadal, 153.




Nostalgia. Federico García Lorca. 1917

Nostalgia