Back Tomorrow
FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA
POET IN NEW YORK

The New York Public Library   April 5–July 20, 2013
STEPHEN A. SCHWARZMAN BUILDING, FIFTH AVENUE AND 42ND STREET
THE SUE AND EDGAR WACHENHEIM III GALLERY
In June 1929, at a time when young writers and painters dreamed of living in Paris, Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), Spain’s greatest modern poet and playwright, broke boldly with tradition and sailed for New York. His nine months here, followed by three months in Havana, changed his vision of poetry, the theater, and the social role of the artist.

Lorca came to New York to study English but devoted himself instead to writing *Poet in New York*, a howl of protest against racial bigotry, mindless consumption, and the adoration of technology. “What we call civilization, he called slime and wire,” the critic V. S. Pritchett once wrote. But Lorca’s book reaches beyond New York—“this maddening, boisterous Babel”—into the depths of the psyche, in a search for wholeness and redemption.

In 1936, the poet left the manuscript of *Poet in New York* on the desk of his Madrid publisher with a note saying he would be “back tomorrow,” probably to discuss final details. He never returned. Weeks later, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, he was brutally murdered by fascist elements in Granada, his body thrown into an unmarked mass grave. The book was published posthumously in 1940, but the manuscript mysteriously disappeared, lost to scholars for decades. The Fundación Federico García Lorca in Madrid and The New York Public Library exhibit it now for the first time, together with drawings, photographs, letters, and mementos—traces of a *Poet in New York*... and of New York in a poet.
“I too walk’d the streets of Manhattan Island”
Rubbing shoulders with the crowd, Lorca thought of the poets who had encountered it before him: “No one can imagine just what a New York crowd is like, except perhaps Walt Whitman, who searched it for solitudes, and T. S. Eliot, who squeezes the crowd like a lemon in his poem [The Waste Land], extracting wounds, poets, wet hats, and river shades.” One of Lorca’s masters, Juan Ramón Jiménez, had wrung poetry from New York in Diary of a Newlywed Poet (1916), and both men had thought fondly and often of Edgar Allan Poe (a friend remembered Lorca’s hopeless attempts to recite Poe’s “Annabel Lee”). One day Lorca walked across the Brooklyn Bridge to meet fellow poet Hart Crane, then working on his long poem The Bridge (1930). Both men were inspired by Whitman, to whom Lorca wrote an ambitious ode celebrating his vision of male love and his unfulfilled dreams for America.

“New York seems horrible, that’s why I’m going”
In spring 1929, Lorca was caught in what he described as an emotional crisis. His love affair with the sculptor Emilio Aladrén had come to an unhappy end, and he agonized over the popular success of his Gypsy Ballads (1928), which had been fiercely criticized by his friends the avant-garde artists Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali for being too traditional—“tied hands and feet to the art of the old poetry.” Yearning to leave Spain, shed his image as “Gypsy balladeer,” and write an entirely different sort of “vein-opening” poetry, Lorca sailed for New York in the company of his professor and mentor Fernando de los Ríos, who had promised Lorca’s parents to enroll him in English classes at Columbia University. Never before had the poet traveled abroad. Soon after his arrival, in late June, he wrote home with his first impressions. One of the most vivid was of a boat trip to Coney Island for the Fourth of July holiday. It was his first encounter with a huge urban crowd—more than a million people went to the beach that weekend—and he would transform the experience into a nightmarish poetic vision: “Landscape of a Vomiting Multitude.”
In Search of Duende

The poems written in New York mark a departure from Lorca’s previous verse, much of which was inspired by traditional Spanish poetry—the ballad, the folk song, the lyrics of flamenco—and by the metaphorical splendor of the Spanish Baroque. In Poet in New York, in the film script Trip to the Moon, and in the homoerotic drama The Audience—all written in America—Lorca puts aside the “riddle of metaphor” and searches instead for images resistant to rational analysis. His lecture “Imagination, Inspiration, Evasion,” given in Spanish at Columbia, argued in favor of “pure instinct” and of poetry that can gulp down reality like a carnivorous flower. It was while reciting his New York poems that Lorca first developed his theory of duende—the mysterious creative force, dear to performing artists, that can “lash open the eyes of a poem” and help the audience understand it “at the speed of the voice.”

At Columbia University: Spaghettis and Shishpil

In June 1929, Lorca enrolled in “English for Beginners” at Columbia University summer session. A magazine article captures the moment: “The students at Columbia University, the Negro elevator attendants of Furnald Hall, the telephone operator downstairs, are all familiar with the deep bows, the peculiar walk, the pirouettes, the exaggerations, and the charm of Federico Lorca.” The poet soon gave up on English. He clung to simple words like spaghettis and shishpil (sex appeal) and got through to his “Yankee friends” in limping French. A generous allowance from his parents enabled him to spend the fall term in a Columbia dorm, John Jay Hall. But instead of attending classes, he worked on Poet in New York and registered his impressions of American students: they “stretch and yawn with the innocence of animals, sneeze without taking out their handkerchiefs and are always shouting, everywhere. And yet they are open and friendly, and truly enjoy doing a favor for you.”


“Where dream collided with its reality”
Lorca left three sorts of testimony about his trip to New York: a series of cheerful letters to his family in Granada; the poems, which he began writing a short time after his arrival; and a lecture about how he wrote them. To compare those documents and the historical record is to marvel over his powers of fantasy—the collision of dream and reality. In September 1929, he spent a few weeks with friends at an old farmhouse in Bushnellsville, New York. The farmer who had rented them the house had two children, Stanton and Helen, whom the poet quickly befriended. In poems and in his lecture on Poet in New York, Lorca invented a sinister end for both of them: Helen drowns in a well, and Stanton—"idiotic and beautiful among little animals"—is haunted by a cancer that roams his house, pulsing through the hallways, "full of clouds and thermometers." In his lecture, Lorca offered a preposterous poetic fade-out: "The girl withdraws into the well, in a host of green angels, and on the boy's chest the cruel star of the North American police begins to grow, like saltpeter on a damp wall."

In Harlem “there is human warmth and the shouts of children”
It took Lorca only days to discover both the cultural effervescence of the Harlem Renaissance and American prejudice toward African Americans. He loved Harlem, all "human warmth and the shouts of children." His friendship with the African American novelist Nella Larsen, his enthusiasm for spirituals and for the "black musical revue," and his visits to nightclubs like Smalls Paradise, where African Americans danced for white audiences, led him to compose two stirring poems, “Norm and Paradise of the Blacks,” which tries to define African American aesthetics, and “The King of Harlem,” a cry of encouragement and solidarity. “I wanted to make the poem of the black race in North America,” Lorca remarked. Being from Granada, he said, “helps me understand those who are persecuted: the Gypsy, the black, the Jew . . . the Moor we all carry inside us.”
“Search for me . . . in Cuba”
On March 2, 1930, Lorca was scheduled to give a talk on contemporary Spanish poetry at the 115th Street branch of The New York Public Library, but those who went to hear him were in for a disappointment. At the last minute, he had asked a friend—the literary critic Dámaso Alonso, a visiting professor at Hunter College—to speak in his place. The poet was on a train to Key West, where he would board a ferry for Havana. The three months he spent touring Cuba (March–June) were among the happiest of his life. “If I ever go missing,” he wrote his parents, “search for me in Andalusia or in Cuba.” Work on his book of poems came to a temporary halt, and he plunged into a round of lectures, conversations with Cuban writers and painters, re-encounters with old friends, and deeply lived musical experiences. In Havana and throughout Cuba, he lectured with passion and flair on Góngora and Baroque poetry, flamenco, the “mechanisms of the new poetry,” and Spanish lullabies. The rhythm of the Afro-Cuban son—which was just then being discovered by Cuban poets like Nicolás Guillén—found its way into Lorca’s poem “Son de negros en Cuba” (An Afro-Cuban Son), which, as the last poem in the book, provided a joyful colophon to Poet in New York.

“¡Ay, Wall Street!”
The crash of the stock market and the beginning of the Great Depression clouded Lorca’s initial admiration for “the boldest, most modern city in the world.” At the height of the panic, on Black Thursday (October 24, 1929), he hurried to Wall Street: “I was lucky enough to see it with my own eyes,” he wrote. “Several billion dollars were lost: a rabble of dead money that went sliding off into the sea.” Everywhere, “there were men shouting and arguing like animals and women crying.” Several texts in Poet in New York—among them a “Dance of Death” that makes its way through the city to Wall Street—condemn the cruelty of unbridled capitalism: “Between the sphinx and the bank vault, there’s a tense thread / that pierces the heart of all poor children.”


Back Tomorrow: The Making of *Poet in New York*

By summer 1936, Lorca had prepared a typewritten manuscript of *Poet in New York* and divided it into chapters. Not all were complete. The poet often gifted friends with his handwritten drafts, and he now found himself without copies of some poems. In July, he left the unfinished manuscript on the desk of his friend and publisher José Bergamín, together with a note: “Pepe, I was here to see you and I believe I will be back tomorrow.” Before he could return, he was murdered in Granada. Bergamín took the manuscript with him into exile—a relic of the Spain defeated by Franco—and published it in Mexico. An American edition, with translations by Rolfe Humphries, appeared almost simultaneously. Mysteriously lost for decades and since recovered by the Fundación Federico García Lorca in Madrid, the manuscript is exhibited here for the first time.

Excerpt from “Landscape of a Vomiting Multitude (Nightfall at Coney Island),” *Poet in New York*

Who could imagine my sadness?
The look on my face was mine, but now isn’t me.
The naked look on my face, trembling in alcohol
and launching incredible ships
through the anemones of the piers.
I protect myself with this look
that flows from waves where the dawn would never go,
I, poet without arms, lost
in the vomiting multitude,
with no effusive horse to shear
the thick moss from my temples.
But the fat lady went first
and the crowds kept looking for the pharmacies
where the bitter tropics could be found.
Only when a flag went up and the first dogs arrived
did the entire city rush to the railings of the boardwalk.

(Tr. Greg Simon and Steven F. White)
“To me Lorca’s drawings seem the work of a poet,” the artist Joan Miró once wrote. “And that is the highest praise I can give to any plastic expression.” Two years before the trip to New York, encouraged by his friend the painter Salvador Dalí, Lorca exhibited several dozen of these “poems,” executed in colored pencil and India ink, at a prestigious gallery in Barcelona. The drawings done in New York, four of which appeared in the first edition of *Poet in New York*, are somber, sometimes deathly in tone. In a series of self-portraits, a stylized figure is surrounded by horses or beasts suggestive of medieval illuminated commentaries on the Book of Revelation (indeed, *Poet in New York* conjures up an urban apocalypse). Other New York drawings share some of the themes of the poems: the cruelty of Wall Street; death and disintegration; bloodshed and martyrdom (as in the depiction of Saint Rodegunda); and the rootlessness of the city.

**Drawings of a Poet**


New York Public Library Programs
Visit nypl.org for further details.

Vivir la poesía / Live Poetry
Bloomingdale Branch
March 9 at 2 p.m.;
March 11 at 3:30 p.m.
Readings from The Gypsy Ballads, one of Lorca’s most important works, performed in Spanish by a contemporary poet, with an opportunity for guests to read a selection of poems.

LIVE from the NYPL: Celebrating Federico García Lorca
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
June 4 at 7:00 p.m.
Paul Holdengräber, director of LIVE from the NYPL, presents a special installment of the Library’s series in celebration of Federico García Lorca’s life and legacy.

Lectures from the Allen Room and the Wertheim Study
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, South Court Auditorium
July 9, 10, and 11 at 1:15 p.m.

JULY 9
Sharonah Fredrick
Lorca, Jews, and African Americans: From Romance to Racism or Simple Misunderstanding?

JULY 10
Melcion Mateu
Federico García Lorca Occupies Wall Street: “Poet in New York” and Global Crisis

JULY 11
J. K. Fowler
Dream Traces in Streets Revisited

Programs Throughout New York City
Visit lorcanyc.com for further details.

Los títeres de Cachiporra / The Billy-club Puppets
Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural and Education Center
April 6 at 8 p.m.;
April 13, 20, and 27 at 3 p.m.
Teatro SEA presents Spanish and English performances of Lorca’s play for puppets, Los títeres de Cachiporra / The Billy-club Puppets.

Federico García Lorca Extravaganza: El Poeta en Nueva York
Bowery Poetry Club
April 7 at 7 p.m.
An evening of poetry, music, theater, and spoken-word performances in celebration of Lorca’s legacy. Performers include La Bruja, Emanuel Xavier, and Simply Rob.

American Lorca
King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University
April 9 at 7 p.m.
Jo Labanyi, director of the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center at NYU, moderates a series of talks by leading Lorca specialists:
Antonio Monegal, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona
Sex in the City: Lorca’s Images of Desire

Paul Julian Smith, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York
Poet on the Moon: Intermediality in Lorca’s American Period

Andrés Soria Olmedo, Universidad de Granada
Letters and Poems: On Lorca’s 1932 Presentation and Reading of “Poet in New York” at the Residencia de Señoritas, Madrid

Jonathan Mayhew, University of Kansas
Postmodern Lorcas: O’Hara, Motherwell, Strayhorn

Lorca and New York: Some Memories over the Years
Butler Library, Room 523, Columbia University
April 8 at 6 p.m.
Gonzalo Sobejano, professor emeritus in the Department of Latin American and Iberian Cultures at Columbia University, shares his thoughts on the poet, his family, and his milieu. Cocktails will follow.

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Lorca in Vermont
The Graduate Center,
The City University of New York
April 16–May 30
This exhibition, curated by Patricia Billingsley and Christopher Maurer, explores the poet’s August 1929 trip to see his friend Philip Cummings in Vermont—inspiration for a series of haunting poems. The show brings together reproductions of photographs, letters, poems, and translations; Vermont maps and memorabilia; and other biographical materials that capture an intense moment in Lorca’s life and a vision of a Vermont that has ceased to exist.

Interpreting Lorca
The Graduate Center,
The City University of New York
April 16 at 6 p.m.
This in-depth examination of Lorca’s work includes a panel discussion with Caridad Svich, Mónica de la Torre, and Eliot Weinberger on issues of translation; a performance by Joan Jonas, interpreting different translations of a Lorca verse; and a concert by Ben Sidran.

Writing in New York / New York in Writing
King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University
April 18 at 7 p.m.
Hear M.F.A. students in the Creative Writing in Spanish program at NYU rewrite Federico García Lorca’s experience of New York.

Lorca, Dalí, Buñuel & Eternal Youth: Life in the Residencia de Estudiantes
Instituto Cervantes
April 19 at 7 p.m.
Jose García Velasco, former director of the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid, reflects on Lorca’s student days and his friendship with Surrealist artists Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel.

Luis García Montero and Nathalie Handal
Instituto Cervantes
April 25 at 7 p.m.
Join Luis García Montero, author of a recently published anthology on Lorca, and Nathalie Handal, who wrote Poet in Andalucía in response to Poet in New York, for a roundtable discussion and Q&A session.

After Lorca: A Day of Poetry and Performance
The Graduate Center,
The City University of New York
May 1 at 2 p.m.
Poets and performers LaTasha Diggs, Rob Fitterman, Eileen Myles, Judah Rubin, Sara Jane Stoner, Aynsley Vandenbroucke and the Aynsley Vandenbroucke Movement Group, and others explore the tensions between urban and pastoral, foreign and American, mapped and experimental, as well as the often-unexamined queerness of Lorca’s work.

Film Screenings
Instituto Cervantes
May 8 at 7 p.m.
Trip to the Moon (1998)
Directed by Frederic Amat
May 15 at 7 p.m.
The House of Bernarda Alba (1987)
Directed by Mario Camus
May 22 at 7 p.m.
To an Unknown God (1977)
Directed by Jaime Chávarri

Words and Music: Patti Smith and Friends
Bowery Ballroom
June 5
Legendary singer Patti Smith, a great admirer of Lorca’s poetry, performs a concert in honor of the poet’s birthday.

Poet in New York: Reading Lorca
The Poetry Project
Saint Mark’s Church
June 10 at 8 p.m.
Paul Auster, Aracelis Girmay, John Giorno, Wayne Koestenbaum, Rowan Ricardo Phillips, Mónica de la Torre, Frederic Tuten, and others read from Poet in New York.

Alexis Cuadrado: “A Lorca Soundscape”
92YTribeca
June 21 at 8 p.m.
A Lorca Soundscape, composed by the Spanish-born, Brooklyn-based musician Alexis Cuadrado, sets Lorca’s Poet in New York to music, drawing inspiration from Spanish and African modes and melodies and the rhythms of flamenco.
Acknowledgments

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—Christopher Maurer and Andrés Soria Olmedo

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—Laura García-Lorca
For Further Reading

WORKS BY FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM

Hours and General Information
The exhibition is open Monday, Thursday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Tuesday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, 1–5 p.m. The exhibition will be closed May 25–27 and July 4, 7, and 14. For more information on hours, current and upcoming exhibitions, programs, and services at The New York Public Library, call 917.ASK.NYPL (917.275.6975) or visit the Library’s website at www.nypl.org.

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