

Cultural Materialism in Lorca's Poetry

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Abstract

The aim of the present research is to investigate Lorca's poem from cultural materialist point of view. To do so, the researcher investigates how culture and social mechanism function in the context in which the poems have been written. Cultural materialism attempts to investigate different aspects of society, art, economy, language, and politics from an external point of view and analyze them to find out how identity and self are shaped accordingly. Cultural materialism is demonstrated in different categories including gender, ethnic studies, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and other fields. Cultural materialism highlights the relation between a work of art and the ideological system in which it has been created. In other words, cultural, social, religious and several other factors must be accounted for while interpreting a work of art. Consequently, how cultural dogma functions within fine arts in order to produce the internal textures is uncovered through cultural materialism. In Lorca's poems, the contents have symbolic and metaphoric mechanisms which can be interpreted through material analysis.

Keywords

Culture; dominant;
emergent; residual;
ideology



I. Introduction

Cultural materialism, like new historicism, privileges power relations as the most important context for interpreting texts, but where new historicists deal with the power relations of past societies, cultural materialists explore literary texts within the context of contemporary power relations (Brannigan, 9). According to cultural materialists, texts always have a material function within contemporary power structures. This is amply demonstrated by Alan Sinfield in *Faultiness*.

Cultural materialism, like new historicism, studies the means and methods by which the existing order perpetuates or attempts to transform itself, and proffers a dismal view of the possibility of effective resistance against the dominant order. But whereas for new historicism subversion is always contained by state power, cultural materialism is slightly more hopeful and for a critic like Sinfield there are sufficient cracks and contradictions in the system to allow for some oppositional intervention. It is possible, according to cultural materialist critics, to expose these contradictions to a degree sufficient to facilitate evasions of the 'structure of containment' (Brannigan, 10). The very evident difference between cultural materialism and new historicism is that the latter excludes the possibility of effective dissidence, whereas cultural materialism attempts to define how dissidence is articulated (Brannigan, 69).

For cultural materialists, literary texts behave in a direct and meaningful way within contemporary social and political formations. They look for ways in which defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political oppositions, are articulated, represented and performed (Brannigan, 108). Richard Chase in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* states that ; Adaptations of traditional novelistic procedures to new cultural conditions and new aesthetic aspirations (14). That very complexity of feelings and contradiction are the elements of American romance as they exist in social realities (Zarei , 24-37)

Cultural materialists achieve their political ends by interpreting literary texts from the stand point of oppositional or dissident subcultures. Recent British cultural materialist theory has emphasized reading dissidence into texts. This concentration on dissidence was to a considerable extent a reaction to Stephen Greenblatt's new historicist essay, 'Invisible Bullets', which argued that though literary texts may communicate subversive ideas, the dominant culture tolerated such subversion and incorporated it within itself as it allowed a relatively harmless outlet for opposition to the dominant discourses of the culture. By distinguishing the dissident from the subversive Alan Sinfield argues that 'texts can overcome such containment and thus challenge dominant discourses' (Newton, 235).

The phrase 'structure of feeling' occurs in Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958). It first appears as a symptom of Carlyle's 'direct response' to the condition of England: Carlyle captured 'that structure of contemporary feeling which is only ever apprehended directly,' and which is not to be identified with formal systems or doctrines (Raymond Williams, 77-8). The structure of feeling seems to define something like ideology in its classic and negative sense—the false consciousness emanating from a (ruling or emergent) class interest. In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams offers his first sustained account of the structure of feeling: 'an attempt to reach new ground' and to integrate a general theory of human creativity into an account of the interrelation of cultural and political revolution (Prendergast, 37). Social identity relates to how we identify ourselves in relation to others according to what we have in common. All these issues are interrelated since they all cooperate and construct a social and cultural materiality. (Gaeini, 89-99)

Williams in *The Long Revolution* (1961) shows three general categories in the definition of culture. There is, first, the 'ideal', in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values. The analysis of culture, for this definition, is essentially the discovery and description, in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition. Then, second, there is the 'documentary', in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the activity of criticism, by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued. The valued culture is that of a minority or an elite, though the authors, artists, genres and individual works may be as different as the Greek classics, the realist novel, and the contemporary avant-garde. Finally, third, there is the 'social' definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture (Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 57). As the Raoufzadeh stated about Foucault's concern with resistance, distinguishes between ethics and morality, and argues that the capacity to resist needs a type

of agency which can be developed by an ethic of care of the self. There are three decisive elements for experimentation with self, an awareness of one's current condition as defined by the given culture and historical moment, and finally an attitude or disposition to critique. Foucault believes that obtaining a good knowledge of our present reality and trying to change it at the same time is a step towards self-formation. The present reality entails our cultural and social conditions, and the way we live in society. We should accept the fact that our identity, the way we are and the way we act are all the effects of power structures and are produced by them. We have to live base on those rules and norms which are set us by the disciplinary system of power. If we are clearly aware of the mechanisms of power and the way that they act on us, we will be able to cope with them in a more effective way. (Raoufzadeh, 159-166)

II. Discussion

Federico García Lorca's poems are filled with different themes and topics which manifest cultural reference and domination of ideological system of the society. "Árbolé, Árbolé", opens as such:

Tree, tree

dry and green. ("Árbolé, Árbolé", I-2)

In the poem of "Árbolé, Árbolé", Lorca displays the lifestyle and culture of Gypsy group. Through use of different notions like the color of green and bringing it together with other elements, the image of a gypsy girl becomes more tangible. In fact, the images of the girl and tree are united and function to depict youth, energy, and innocence. The girl which is associated with the pastoral context speaks the truth and displays how culture is defined for this generation. The girl must be integrated with her own culture that has been there for her and her bond with the residua culture of gypsy group is through nature:

The girl with the pretty face

is out picking olives.

The wind, playboy of towers,

Grabs her around the waist. ("Árbolé, Árbolé", III-VI)

Picking up the olives, harvesting the fruits, the weather, and the existence of other natural elements signify that the girl rely on nature which is the residual culture of her ancestor. Moreover, Lorca shows this culture through personification as the wind embraces the girl to show nature and culture of the Gypsies are interrelated. This interrelationship between nature and culture reflects the social context of the time and context in which the poem was written. Regarding cultural materialism, Williams has moved towards social writing and believed that dramatic form of literature which is manifested as literary works show the social context of the society. Then, he has posited that literature must be judged and analyzed according to the context in which it is produced. Williams changed his moralistic and aesthetic ideas regarding criticism and moved towards more radical and social ideas. It would remark the second phase of his career as a literary theorist. Lorca continues:

Four riders passed by

on Andalusian ponies,

with blue and green jackets

and big, dark capes.

'Come to Cordoba, muchacha.'

The girl won't listen to them.

Three young bullfighters passed,

slender in the waist,

with jackets the color of oranges
 and swords of ancient silver.
 'Come to Sevilla, muchacha.'
 The girl won't listen to them.
 When the afternoon had turned
 dark brown, with scattered light,
 a young man passed by, wearing
 roses and myrtle of the moon.
 'Come to Granada, inuchacha.'
 And the girl won't listen to him. ("Arbolé, Arbolé", V-XXII)

Residual culture refers to the set of beliefs, ideas, notions, concepts, and customs that are generated from the previous stages of the society. This type of culture has a long history and it could mirror "different social formation than the present time" (Mahtabi 167). According to Williams, the residual culture could be dominant for a long time and its difference with dominant culture is that, the latter might fade away after a while. However, since residual culture is from a distant past and it has been exposed to different changes and conditions, it would not change and disappear. This shows that it does not matter if a culture is old belonging to a long time ago, but the freshness and necessity of it can be felt these days.

The emergent culture is manifested in this poem symbolically through introducing several boys with different shapes. The boys with colorful clothes and capes and their unique style come to woo the girl and makes her leave her present condition which refers to the residual culture. The girl does not look away and ignores them which show she is content with her present condition and her own identity as a working girl. In turning down the young boys' proposals, the focus of the girl is on nature which is dominant for her. She covers and resists the passion of the boys the same way the wind embraces her. The tension between different cultures could be realized in contrasting image of the girl and the boys. In this poem, the innocence of a peasant girl whose love and passion is towards nature is contrasted with different boys that signify raw sexuality and violence. Here, Lorca has opened a gallery of cultural productions that are opposing; it is modernism versus tradition; it is residual culture versus emergent culture. Moreover, the girl and her action in harvesting signify peace while the boys who are riding signify haste. The cultural productions depict being in competition with becoming that reflects the social structures of the society in which different attitudes and taste are competing.

This collection can depict the issue of culture deeply to the readers. In his lecture in 1935 on *Gypsy Ballads*, Lorca talks about the book : "This book as one, though called gypsy, is the poem of Andalusia, and I call it gypsy because the gypsy is the most elevated, the most profound, most aristocratic in my country, the most representative in its way and the one that guards the ember, the blood and the alphabet of the Andalusian and universal truth" (Prosa 179). The gypsy's lifestyle and their culture are used to mirror the ideological condition of the society. "Ballad of the Moon" is another poem that shows cultural lifestyle. The opening of the poem is as such:

The little boy stares at her, stares.
 The boy is staring hard.
 In the shaken air
 the moon moves her arms,
 and shows lubricious and pure,
 her breasts of hard tin.
 "Moon, moon, moon, run!

If the gypsies come,
they will use your heart
to make white necklaces and rings. (“Ballad of the Moon” I-X)

A little boy has grown passion for a pretty woman and feels lust for her. He looks at her, amazed by her beauty, but they are soon pursued by the Gypsies. The Gypsies want to get the boy and woman who are riding through the forge. The speaker is the narrator of the poem observing the boy’s passion for the girl. He is talking to the readers telling a unique story. Federico selected the antagonist of the poem as a Gypsy for the purpose of their own lifestyle and culture. Gypsies show the natural man whose lust and significant feelings are not limited and quenched by morals and culture norms. The sexual aspect of their identity is shown that reflects their culture.

As the Gypsies pursue the boy exposed of sexual passions, it depicts that he is forever menaced by repression but somehow breaks out and often resulting to death. The boy has deep yearning for being with this girl and is suffering through his lust. The lines in the poems influence the story by reflecting how lust can affect you and convince you to decide rashly. The cultural aspect of their life depicts the interaction between them. They have their own unique culture with particular features.

Lorca’s has written about his homeland, Andalusia, which shows the cultural condition in that place as it “received, traded with, and absorbed the influence of a surprising number of mostly Oriental cultures: the megalith builders, the Bell Beaker culture; Tartessos; traders from Egypt, Crete, Turkey, and Cyprus; the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Hebrews; Celts; Greeks; Romans; Visigoths; Vandals; Arabs; Berbers; Gypsies” (Forman and Josephs 17). His poem “City That Does Not Sleep”, shows the cultural mechanism that carry ideological structure of Lorca’s society:

In the sky there is nobody asleep. Nobody, nobody.
Nobody is asleep.

The creatures of the moon sniff and prowl about their cabins.

The living iguanas will come and bite the men who do not dream,

and the man who rushes out with his spirit broken will meet on the street corner

the unbelievable alligator quiet beneath the tender protest of the stars. (“City That Does Not Sleep” Stanza I)

In the opening lines of the poem, Lorca explains three kinds of people with whom he live in the world he has used in his poem. These kinds, through complex metaphoric chains might point out to Spanish people in Civil war. During these periods, General Franco was the leader of the Fascists in Spain.

These types of people are shown through the use of different images including the sky settlers, like inhabitants of the moon and the earth settlers. The inhabitants of the moon are distinguished by Lorca as the sky settlers who are referred indirectly, and Lorca considers himself belonging to the earth inhabitants as he uses ‘we’. Lorca uses ‘us’ who tend to ruin one another – so strong “our” dread and hate of life, on a kind of permanent vigil to make “us” able to see our own aggression. Even sky inhabitants are not allowed by the poet to rest and sleep. However, the inhabitants of the moon are the privileged or the poor uneducated people who try to live without personal joining in destruction of human history – who just desire to live longer and live without jeopardizing themselves and their safety by any effort that might be dangerous. Sky settlers might still have moral principles, but their moralities have become silent and there would be no morality. The earth settlers are formed of two kinds that are murderers and victims. Both of these kinds of people are affected by social

feelings and unusual language. Murderers require language to become fierce, and victims must have language to verbalize their fate. What could be realized in this part is a social and political tension which forms a major part of the ideological structure in the society.

In the next stanza, the poet writes

In a graveyard far off there is a corpse

Who has moaned for three years

because of a dry countryside on his knee;

and the boy they buried this morning cried so much

it was necessary to call out the dogs to keep him quiet. (“City That Does Not Sleep” Stanza II)

Lorca pictures a nightmarish world where the living and the dead are shown living together. Their existence has created a kind of a terrible condition affected by a usual existential unpleasant situation, in a kind of a nightmarish group where both dead and living creatures want to find a shared language they didn’t know before this chaos and destruction. In these lines, Lorca has shown cultural condition of Spain in the time of turbulence and chaos. The ideological and repressive functions are both working together in this society. The use of dogs to make them silence signifies repression in this society.

repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology” (145). Lorca’s lines manifest the circulation of dread which he integrates into different concepts and extend the suffering through these settlers. In the following lines, the poet juxtaposes the mechanism of different cultures which are filled with horror and terror:

Life is not a dream. Careful! Careful! Careful!

We fall down the stairs in order to eat the moist earth

or we climb to the knife edge of the snow with the voices of the dead dahlias.

But forgetfulness does not exist, dreams do not exist;

flesh exists. Kisses tie our mouths

in a thicket of new veins,

and whoever his pain pains will feel that pain forever

and whoever is afraid of death will carry it on his shoulders. (“City That Does Not Sleep” Stanza 3)

The people that are the creatures before destruction cannot identify between the living and dreaming and change life into a stage for performing the dreams, with disastrous effects for mankind’s current condition and future destiny. It can be learned that in a society where aggression and fury are norms like the act of inhaling, memories become bodily dreams in which truth are distorted and distracted. In such a society even the kisses turn into a predatory and savage animal which is necessary for making the future. In a fascist society that Lorca is picturing, flesh becomes mind, kisses are tortures and future becomes sheer violence and ruin. In this part, Lorca manifest a type of culture which is becoming dominant in the society.

The first aspect of culture can be considered as dominant culture is fixed and governing; it is through dominant culture that “new meanings and values” (Sims 223) are generated and practiced in the society. The dominant culture refers to the all norms and touchstones in the society which are used to evaluate and determined other social conducts throughout the society. The dominant culture includes religious and social dogmas that are set by different responsible organizations and institutions. The relevant social context determines which categorization seems most suitable to provide a meaningful organization (Saragih et al 2019). Since dominant culture is manipulated, directed, and enforced by daily practices with which people deal including “communicational systems, educational institutions, artistic expressions, laws, political processes, and businesses” (Marshall 250), it has acquired acceptance and legitimacy. Therefore, a majority of social agents follow and apply it into their daily matters.

The dominant culture which Williams has posited is similar to the concept of 'ideological apparatus' by Althusser. Like Williams, Althusser has based his theory on Marxist disciplines but in a revised way. The most vital ones that are influential include religious doctrines, the outcome of education and what can be taught and learned in the form of direct and indirect education. Lorca criticizes that human has failed to preserve life. In other words, violence and horror could take over humanity in the society in which Lorca is living. Moreover, he punishes human beings for the inability to realize and grasp the truth of man's misery and suffering with religiously stylized condemnation. This suffering and misery will haunt down different generations of human beings.

In Williams' theory of dominant culture, the role of the ruling class cannot be ignored. In fact, it would be the ruling class which determines the dominant culture. According to Williams, the dominant culture is a selection of several pieces of different cultures since the past as the ruling class chooses the most profitable ones for themselves. Consequently, the cultural elements from the past are incorporated into the present culture which is dominant. This version of the culture is the most powerful one which affects every practice and layer in the society. Reaching dominant culture depends on different factors in the society including economy and physical power.

, Lorca goes on and describes that violence, hatred, murder, blood shedding, and chaos will be dominant soon and the culture of the society will be characterized and distinguished through the horror.

Another day

we will watch the preserved butterflies rise from the dead
and still walking through a country of gray sponges and silent boats
we will watch our ring flash and roses spring from our tongue.

Careful! Be careful! Be careful!

The men who still have marks of the claw and the thunderstorm,
and that boy who cries because he has never heard of the invention
of the bridge,

or that dead man who possesses now only his head and a shoe,
we must carry them to the wall where the iguanas and the snakes
are waiting,

where the bear's teeth are waiting,

where the mummified hand of the boy is waiting,

and the hair of the camel stands on end with a violent blue shudder. ("City That Does Not Sleep" Stanza V)

The lines that have been used in this part of the novel focus on the intolerable truth of the a furious death which cannot be avoided on further rotting of the flesh of the dead and hurt, once different parts of the corpse want to vanish completely, to get themselves out of the torture of death into definite non-existence. Lorca requires us not only witness the physical death brought about on the living and dead, but to feel the savage death in which body and flesh are completely ruined. In fact, Lorca pictures the inevitable and horrible culture that would emerge soon due to Fascist system of ruling.

Lorca is so desperate at the culture of the society that he demands some gods and heavenly figures to have mercy on the humanity and do not leave them in their ignorance. He believes that the violence and chaos on the earth are the results of both sky-settlers and the earth inhabitants since they have abandoned humanity. Lorca wants to be given awareness and realization regarding the drastic condition of the world. In other words, metaphorically,

Lorca prays for a different type of culture which is devoid of violence, savagery, and primitive actions.

Williams posits the notion of 'equality of being' which depicts the sameness of human beings in all the aspects of society which must be accepted by human beings. Therefore, it would be a significant part of human feature in which a common form of culture must be preserved. Moreover, why upper classes in the society are responsible of serving the lower ones is questioned by Williams since the concepts of duty and responsibility are problematic. What Lorca aims to do is to preserve the culture in his poetry. "Gacela of the Dark Death" elevates the concept of love and death and balances these two opposing concepts with the culture. To show how these two contradictory concepts can be compromised, Lorca manifests Christianity and religious cultures. The first stanza opens as such:

I want to sleep the dream of the apples,
to withdraw from the tumult of cemeteries.

I want to sleep the dream of that child

Who wanted to cut his heart on the high seas. ("Gacela of the Dark Death" Stanza I)

The first line shows a speaker desiring for eating apples which refers to both the image and the contrary to death. The sign of an apple is mainly pertinent to the Garden of Eden in the Bible, and also it refers to the lost paradise of Adam and Eve. The apples stand for the fall from Eden, and the gloomy, darker part of the reference becomes vivid in Lorca's description. This part depicts the role of culture and its structure in the society as the speaker uses Christianity symbol to show his desire. The second line shows that the poet yearns to get away from the chaotic cemeteries in which dead bodies are buried. This part of the poem is ironic as it shows the cultural condition of the society. In fact, the poet is picturing a type of world in which the souls are dead and buried. The culture has crashed and the world is filled with dead bodies that are symbolic. The rotting condition of humanity and turbulence await mankind.

Lorca has shown death and cemetery without peace and they do not bring the sense of release for the speaker since death here refers to the death of morality and fall of human culture. Lines three and four reflect another aspect to this image of sleep; they show a yearning to sleep like a child that desired to carve out his heart on the seas. The image of a child signifies purity, innocence, hope, and even the heaven offered by the sleep of apples. However, in the next line violence and aggression are reinforced by the duality of peace and chaos. What could be realized here is the erotic passion of the boy that he wants to throw his heart into the ocean. The boy in his poem reflects to the concept of lover and he pictures a period of time when love and erotic aspect of feeling are mingled.

Lorca attempts to depict this state of perfection of culture through the following lines:

I don't want to hear again that the dead do not lose their blood,
that the putrid mouth goes on asking for water.

I don't want to learn of the tortures of the grass,
nor of the moon with a serpent's mouth

that labors before dawn. ("Gacela of the Dark Death" Stanza II)

In the second stanza, the speaker puts his emphasis and reflection on death. The speaker does not want to know about different types of conations of death which means lack of passion and desire. Moreover, Lorca pictures that the dead people bleed to the death and this image again shows the cultural condition of the society where people have no soul and they are dead inside. Blood might refer to the material aspect of humanity which has become significant in the present time. The speaker does not want to know about the gloomy condition of the world but the grass manifests the decay and rotting of cultural state. Williams' main focus is on the rejection of culture in traditional sense.

In each era and part of history, Williams reflects that culture can be determined according to different writers and literary figures. Williams believes that there is not just a single type of culture; rather, there is multiplicity of cultures which show how a particular attitude could be combined with the mainstream of different forms of culture. Lorca wants to acquire this type of culture which is filled with glory:

I want to sleep awhile,
awhile, a minute, a century;
but all must know that I have not died;
that there is a stable of gold in my lips;
that I am the small friend of the West wing;
that I am the intense shadows of my tears. (Stanza III)

The speaker mentions that he does not want to see the culture and the condition of the world at this time. In fact, he wants to sleep and he wants the time to pass without experiencing anything. He wants to undergo a kind of oblivion in which society and culture would change completely. He yearns for a time when there would be stable of gold in his mouth and he would be the shadow of his tears.

The speaker wants everyone to know that he has not died, that he is sleeping but not dead, and he explains the main features of this state with three lines describing what he wants everyone to know about his sleep of apples. It is an important, and somewhat curious, showing of self-consciousness that the speaker requires for everyone to know about this sleep, and it is helpful to note that this is the first place in the poem where Lorca is drawing attention to the process of drawing a new culture that he hopes to come.

III. Conclusion

Lorca pictures a nightmarish world where the living and the dead are shown living together. Their existence has created a kind of a terrible condition affected by a usual existential unpleasant situation, in a kind of a nightmarish group where both dead and living creatures want to find a shared language they didn't know before this chaos and destruction. In these lines, Lorca has shown cultural condition of Spain in the time of turbulence and chaos. The ideological and repressive functions are both working together in this society. The use of dogs to make them silence signifies repression in this society. , Lorca goes on and describes that violence, hatred, murder, blood shedding, and chaos will be dominant soon and the culture of the society will be characterized and distinguished through the horror.

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