

Lorca: A Dream of Life

By Leslie Stainton

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With a rare blend of grace, warmth, and scholarship, Leslie Stainton raises the stakes of our appreciation for the greatest of Spain's modern poets, Federico Garca Lorca. Drawing on fourteen years of research; more than a hundred letters unknown to prior biographers; exclusive interviews with Lorca's friends, family, and acquaintances; and dozens of newly discovered archival material, Stainton has brought her subject to life as few writers can. She describes his carefree childhood in rural Andalusia; his residencies in Madrid and Granada, then in New York, Havana, and Buenos Aires; his potent interaction with other Spanish artists, such as Salvador Dal, Luis Buuel, and the composer Manuel de Falla; and, finally, Stainton shows how Lorca's marginal political activity during the Spanish Civil War still cost him his life.

Throughout, Stainton meticulously but unobtrusively relates the oeuvre to the life. Her biography is quickly becoming the standard one-volume work on the poet.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) was not yet 40 when he was executed by Falangists during the Spanish Civil War, yet he already towered over literature in Spain. He was arguably his generation's greatest poet and playwright. Although Lorca was best known in his lifetime for works like *Gypsy Ballads* and *Blood Wedding*, which expressed the soulful intensity of his native Andalusia, this well-researched, probing biography reminds readers that he was both cosmopolitan and unpredictable as an artist and a man. Despite his privileged background, Lorca was "a poet of the people who viewed poetry as something that walks along the streets," someone who wrote as naturally as he breathed and loved music and drawing nearly as much as poetry and drama. Leslie Stainton, an American scholar who lived in Spain for several years while researching this book, perceptively analyzes Lorca's homosexuality, his left-wing political views, and his artistic convictions, painting an intriguing picture of a man whose strong feelings and beliefs were tempered by a dislike of being pinned down. Though judiciously critical in evaluating Lorca's work, the author conveys with force her appreciation of his ability to forge new language for the exploration of age-old themes: "the capriciousness of time, the impossibility of love, the phantoms of identity, art, childhood, sex, and death." --*Wendy Smith*

From Publishers Weekly
Federico Garc!a Lorca called the fatal goring of a bullfighter friend "an apprenticeship for my own death." More because of his homosexuality than his openly sexual poems and plays, or his moderate leftist politics, he expected right-wing retribution. It came in August 1936, when he was arrested, despite being sheltered in the house of a well-known fascist family, and was promptly executed by Franco's devout murderers. His body has never been found. He left behind, unproduced, three plays, among them his greatest, The House of Bernarda Alba. He also left, unpublished, three poetry collections. Stainton's biography traces the trajectory of his doomed lifeAhis years of apparent idleness, supported by an indulgent and prosperous father who counted upon his son's inevitable fame; his coming to terms with, and then flaunting, his sexual orientation; his burgeoning fame as poet and playwright; his conflicts with the church and with the political authorities over what he said and how he said it. His relations with Neruda, Dal!, Benavente, Bu?uel and de Falls, among others, are explored, often from heretofore unexploited documentation. Lorca's great creative achievements are a bit muted here, perhaps because so many of his 42 years were spent in incubation rather than productivity, and perhaps also because so many pages explore his grappling with his sexuality and his subsequent glorifying of it. In Stainton's telling, however, Lorca's artistic development, and his struggles with interfering forces form a dramatic and powerful story. 68 b&w illustrations.
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From Library Journal
Finally, a straightforward biography of the greatest Spanish poet of this century that chronicles his day-to-day life and includes his homosexual dimension, so assiduously concealed by generations of his admirers. In a career of less than two decades, Lorca produced nine books of verse and 13 plays that revitalized some of Spain's basic literary strains: ballad, sonnet, tragedy, and farce. His themes explore the unattainability of love, the phantoms of identity, the creation of art, and aspects of childhood, sex, and death. He was a declamatory poet who preferred a live audience to the renown of publication, and despite his plain looks and rotundity he had a magnetic stage presence. Aware that he lacked the confrontational instinct to take sides politically, Lorca believed that literature needed to be apolitical in order to effect social change less abrasively. Yet his murder by Franco supporters in 1936 was politically motivated. Lorca scholar Stainton draws on a cache of newly discovered letters and archival material to breathe vigorous life into her subject.

Highly recommended.AJack Shreve, Allegany Coll. of Maryland, Cumberland
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Users Review

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