



Lorca: A Poet in New York

Author:

Carles Esquembre

Reader's name:

Kathleen Monaghan

READER'S NAME: Kathleen Monaghan

Engaging, vivid graphic novel about famed Spanish poet Federico García Lorca's stay in New York City in 1929, during which he wrote one of his best-known books of poems, *Poet in New York*, in which he analyzes what he experiences and witnesses in New York and finds much to criticize. Author Carles Esquembre draws on biographical details, archival materials and García Lorca's own book of poems, *Poet in New York*, to tell the story, weaving all of these materials into comic book dialog among García Lorca and various friends and acquaintances, portraying what Lorca was thinking, feeling, and experiencing during his stay in New York City in 1929.

The characters of García Lorca, his friends, and various people he meets and interacts with are well-drawn and sympathetic. The comic strip layout is fun to look at and easy to follow, and the pace is quick and interesting. We follow García Lorca on a wide-ranging adventure on the steamboat journey, to the docks of New York City, to iconic locales like Coney Island, Times Square, Broadway, and Columbia University. He goes to speakeasies with his friends, listens to jazz music for the first time, and socializes with artists from the Harlem Renaissance movement. He also witnesses the infamous Black Friday in 1929 when traders threw themselves from their Wall Street offices.

About half of the story is conveyed through its beautiful drawings, which of course would require no translation. Esquembre intersperses the smaller comic strip drawings of people and places with larger, surrealist images seemingly inspired by imagery from García Lorca's poems. They connect with the story told in the comic strips by exploring in larger detail one aspect of what García Lorca is thinking or saying to his friends in the smaller pictures. This gives even the mundane experiences depicted in the comic strips a dramatic, surrealist feel.

Esquembre draws a portrait of a sensitive, sympathetic, likeable García Lorca with a tragic destiny that lurks just off of the page, which at times he seems to intuit and which is explained in the last page of the book.

This book would be fairly simple to translate, since the dialogue is short and simple. A possible complication might be rendering the smatterings of English and the smatterings of simplified or accented English (as García Lorca attempts to communicate in English in New York) in such a way that it was clear when the speakers were speaking in a different language.

An Epilogue contains more biographical details and background explanations for the episodes recounted in the book, drawings of García Lorca's rooms in Spain and in New York, and five poems from *Poet in New York* illustrated as García Lorca had proposed to his editor they should be shortly

before his death in 1936.

Since García Lorca is one of Spain's foremost poets, a member of the Generation of '27, and *Poet in New York* is one of his most famous books, the subject matter would be of interest to many: lovers of poetry, history, New York City, Hispanic studies, García Lorca, and Spain. Aficionados of graphic novels could enjoy the book without any previous knowledge of García Lorca, because his experiences of heartbreak, life in a new city, friendship, and loneliness have universal appeal and are made very accessible by the graphic novel format and Esquembre's sympathetic portrayal of him. The tragic end of the story is haunting and intriguing, as well, inviting further questions about García Lorca's life and Spanish history.

Esquembre is a freelance illustrator and musician and this is his first graphic novel. Prior to *Lorca: Un poeta en Nueva York*, there have been at least two other graphic novels published about the poet in recent years. Furthermore, in 2018, renowned García Lorca biographer Ian Gibson published a graphic novel version of his famous biography along with Quique Palomo, who illustrated it.

The graphic novel might serve to popularize García Lorca with a different audience and make him more accessible to the contemporary reader, as well as providing fresh enjoyment and insight into García Lorca for those who already know his work. Also, as Sam Jones points out in *The Guardian*, how fitting that García Lorca, known for his works which capture the folk songs and sensibilities of rural southern Spain, should be immortalized in this popular format.

1. Jiménez, Jesús. "Carles Esquembre nos habla de 'Lorca: un poeta en Nueva York'" *Viñetas y Bocadillos* (blog). November 22, 2016. Accessed April 27, 2019.
2. Jones, Sam, "The Revolutionary Life, Love, and Tragic Death of Lorca." *The Guardian*, November 10, 2018. Accessed April 27, 2019. .