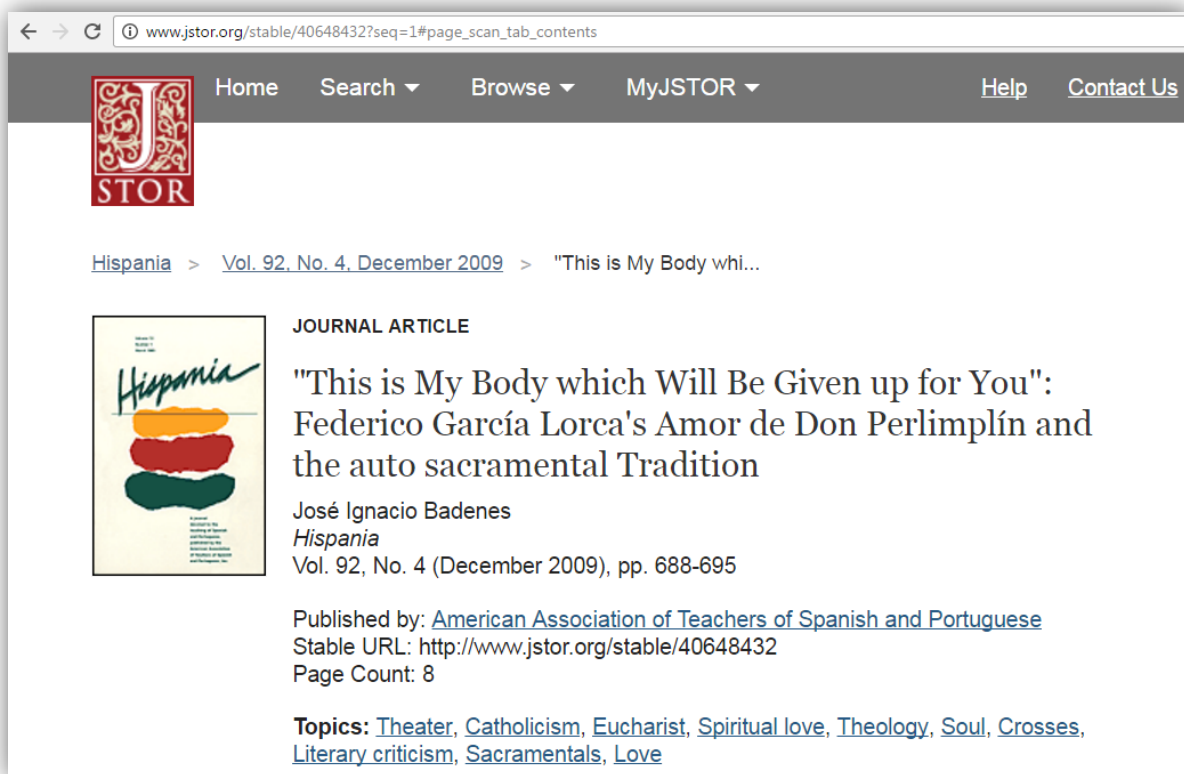


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JOURNAL ARTICLE



"This is My Body which Will Be Given up for You":
Federico García Lorca's Amor de Don Perlimplín and
the auto sacramental Tradition

José Ignacio Badenes
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First page of the journal article:

“This is My Body which Will Be Given up for You”: Federico García Lorca’s *Amor de Don Perlimplín* and the *auto sacramental* Tradition

José Ignacio Badenes
Loyola Marymount University

Abstract: *Amor de Don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* is one of Federico García Lorca’s shortest plays as well as one of his deepest. Its theme is love, particularly the interaction between spiritual longing and carnal desire, body and soul, humanity and divinity. These are aspects found in Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology which the seventeenth-century *auto sacramental* tradition associated with Pedro Calderón de la Barca staged. This essay links Lorca’s four-scene subversive farcical play with the Baroque theatrical genre. It highlights Lorca’s progressive and challenging Catholicism, heterodox during his time.

Key Words: *Amor de Don Perlimplín*, *auto sacramental*, Calderón de la Barca (Pedro), Christ, Eucharist, García Lorca (Federico), love, Roman Catholicism, sacrifice, transubstantiation

Federico García Lorca’s *Amor de Don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* (1928) is a poetic, cartoon-strip-like farce about a cuckolded husband who disguises himself as a mysterious lover with whom his wife falls in love. This Cyrano-like short play ends with Don Perlimplín’s self-oblation so that his wife Belisa may learn to love. The cuckold kills his body so that his beloved may have a soul. Though farcical, the play is replete with allegorical figures and symbols that point to Christ’s redemption of humanity through his loving sacrifice on the cross. This idea is at the heart of the mystery of the Eucharist and at the center of the seventeenth-century Spanish *auto sacramental* (an allegorical and didactic one-act play that had alluded to Roman Catholic dogma in general and the Eucharist in particular, usually staged during the *Corpus Christi* festivities in June). Seventeenth-century Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca distinguished himself in writing and staging *autos sacramentales* during this time.

At first sight, Federico García Lorca would not seem to have anything in common with Calderón, the *auto sacramental*, the Eucharist, and Roman Catholic dogma. Though raised Catholic, Lorca, as many of his biographers point out, was not a faithful practitioner of his faith, though he did engage in some devotional practices and was always spiritually restless. There are scholars, such as Ian Gibson, who insist on his heterodoxy as a result of his gradual recognition and acceptance of his same-sex orientation over and against the Roman Catholic Church’s laws and Spanish society’s prejudices. However, other critics, like Eutimio Martín, note a theological depth in his writings that merits attention. For example, one of Lorca’s longest poems is his *Oda al Santísimo Sacramento del Altar*, whose focus is the Host or Eucharist inside a monstrance during the Catholic rite of Benediction (adoration of and blessing with the Host). Other “theological” writings include the 22 pieces of prose he wrote as a teenager which he called *Místicas*, the youthful *Cristo*, *Una Tragedia Religiosa*, and the poem “Grito hacia Roma.” However, there seems to be no explicit mention of an *auto sacramental*, though Lorca was very familiar with the Spanish theatrical tradition. This essay explores the link between the *auto sacramental* and Lorca’s *Amor de Don Perlimplín*.

Amor de Don Perlimplín tells the story of Don Perlimplín, an eighteenth-century, ugly and

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public image (*la honra*) that Calderonian dramatic theatre was so well-known for staging. Lorca's *Amor de Don Perlimplín*, therefore, not only looks at the Calderonian *auto sacramental* tradition from a "deliciously wrong" perspective, but also at Calderón's honor plays, bringing the two together in the one single work. Thus, at the same time that he subverts tradition, Lorca goes deeply into it giving birth to a prophetic new understanding of life and love, body and soul, which he teaches through theatre.

Lorca's *Amor de Don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* is a deeply lyrical work of art which connects the author's initial theatrical attempts with his subsequent major dramatic successes. It also links what Lorca called his "theatre beneath the sand" (or unstaged theatre) with his "open-air theatre" (or staged theatre). The play brings together diverse genres and motifs found in literary tradition, combining them in an astoundingly original manner that defies categorization. One of them is the *auto sacramental* tradition associated with seventeenth-century dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca. The *auto sacramental*'s focus was the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ present in the bread and wine offered at the altar during Mass. Besides imperceptibly enfleshing the Lord, the Eucharist stands for the integration of the human and the divine, body and soul. The Eucharist is also about love as self-giving: precisely what one finds in *Amor de Don Perlimplín*. The play, therefore, illustrates in subversive fashion Lorca's prophetic sense that love ought to be both spiritual and physical, which is at the core of the *auto sacramental* tradition in general and the Eucharist in particular.

NOTES

¹For a thorough study of the *aleluya*, see Helen Grant.

²Please see also the Introduction to Margarita Ucelay's edition of *Amor de Don Perlimplín*.

³For an in-depth account, see Antonio Gallego Morell.

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