

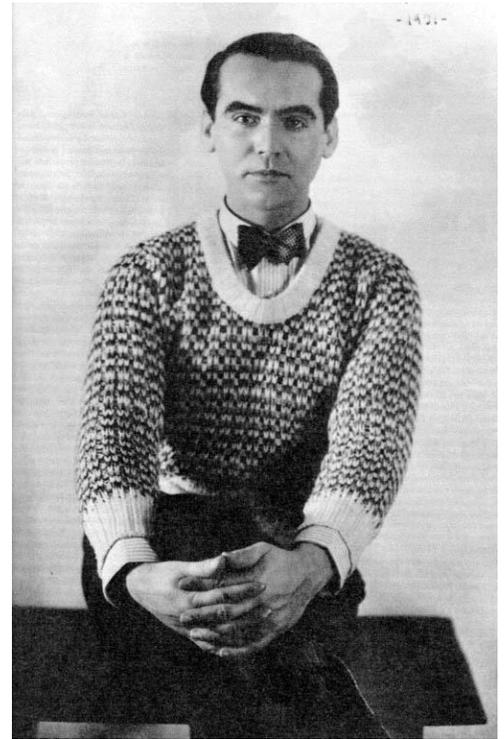
DIRECTIONS: Choose any of the following passages from “Elegy, December 1918 (Granada)” and compare a similar passage from *Yerma*. This should be a close reading that looks for similarities in diction, imagery, and theme. Answers should be TWO paragraphs apiece. You may refer to other parts of the poem (beyond the passage) in your paragraphs.

Sample Passage and Paragraphs:

“Like a censer filled with desire,
You pass in the luminous evening
with your dark flesh of wilted nard
and sex omnipotent over your gaze” (1-4)

As the woman described in the 1921 “Elegy,” *Yerma* too is consumed with longing that remains frustrated in its efforts to express itself concretely. Consider, for example, the poem *Yerma* recites to herself after the departure of Juan in Act Two, Scene Two. She begins with two images emblematic of her frustrated fertility: “Oh, what a pasture of pain! / Oh, the gate barred against beauty!” The contrast in each is the subversion of the normally creative potential of a “pasture” or “gate” respectively that, for *Yerma*, remain blocked or stymied by circumstance: a harvest of “pain” (i.e., no harvest at all) and a passageway that remains stubbornly shut. This juxtaposition of connotative oppositions continues with “breasts” (emblematic of motherhood) that are “blind [...] under [her] clothing,” upending that which implies the nurturing and continuance of life with that which is sterile (blindness) and imprisoning (clothes). Finally, “doves” lack both “eyes” and “whiteness” (30). As before, García Lorca utilizes a potentially positive image-- suggestive of both creative flight and innocence, a symbolic unity of mother and child-- stripped of that which gives it animating force (the vision that guides its flight, the color that gives the bird its figurative meaning). Thus, *Yerma* sees herself in terms that express the latent potential that is frustrated in its expression, a symbolic nullification of attempted meaning.

Similarly, the language of “Elegy, December 1918 (Granada)” displays this paradoxical relationship between intention and actuality, leaving only the remainder of unfulfilled desire. The opening simile, for instance, compares the unnamed woman to a “censer filled with desire” (1). The desire is, as with the censor, trapped within; as with the censor, the desire burns; and, most crucially, as with the censor, the burning is stifled (choked with lack of oxygen), creating that which is suggestive of desire (the smoke or signs of desire), but not the full expression of the thing itself (combustion or motherhood). This allegorical restraint is also embodied in the idea that the sexually suggestive “flesh” is paired with both the adjective “dark” (recalling the blindness of the dove in *Yerma*) and composed of “wilted nard” (3). That the flesh is “wilted” expresses an idea on a denotative level, that the possibility of fertility fades with the passage of time, but it also implies an over-ripeness before actual spoilage. The “nard,” a narcotic root, connects the image back to darkness of the flesh and the imprisonment of desire, for the woman’s womb remains a potential site of fertility that has been anaesthetized against its proper function. Last, all of this occurs in a “luminous evening” (2), the oxymoronic synthesis of light and dark, potential and frustrated potential, genesis and the failure to initiate the creation that would liberate desire.



Federico García Lorca
1898-1936

Passages from “Elegy, December 1918 (Granada)” [choose from one of these]:

“You have dead chastity’s sadness on your lips,
and in Dionysian goblet of your womb,
the spider weaves a barren veil for entrails
that have never bloomed with living roses,
the fruit of kisses” (5-9).

“In your white hands
you hold a skein of dreams
now dead forever, and in your soul,
passion that hungers for kisses of fire,
and motherlove that dreams distant visions
of cradles and quiet, spinning
on your lips the blue of lullaby” (11-15).

“Like Ceres, you would have given golden sheaves
if sleeping love had touched your body,
and like the Virgin, you could have
shot from your breast another Milky Way” (16-19).

“No one makes you fertile. Andalusian martyr,
your kisses should have been beneath the vine,
filled with midnight silence
and the turbid rhythm of stagnant water” (32-35).

“You are the mirror of an Andalusia
that suffers silently gigantic passions
rocked by fans and by mantillas folded
over throats trembling with blood and snow
and scratched with the red trail of gazes” (43-47).

“You pass into the mist of autumn,
virginal like Agnes, sweet Clara, and Cecilia;
bacchante who could have danced,
crowned with grape leaves and green vines” (48-51).

This is due Friday March 1. If you turn in the assignment early enough, I will mark it up with comments and corrections as if it were a timed writing. If you turn in the assignment early, there will be a small grade incentive (+3 points). If you miss the midnight deadline but turn in the assignment before eight hours have elapsed, there will be a small point deduction (-3 points). If you turn in the assignment between eight and twenty-four hours late there will be a larger point deduction (-10 points). If you turn in the assignment at any point after that, there will be a substantial point deduction (-20 points; this is a flat deduction, not a cumulative one based on the number of days late). If you turn in the assignment late, but do not want points deducted, you may earn back credit by connecting the play to TWO passages (instead of one).