

**WALT WHITMAN'S PROPHETIC VOICE IN HISPANIC LYRIC POETRY: THE
PATHS OF LEÓN FELIPE, FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA, AND CÉSAR VALLEJO**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the prophetic tradition in lyric poetry, focusing on the example set by Walt Whitman and carried forth in Hispanic letters most notably by León Felipe, Federico García Lorca, and César Vallejo. By “prophetic” I do not wish to suggest a “predictive” voice but rather one that, like the words of the biblical prophets, speaks to an entire community at large, by turns profoundly critical, but also appealing to human dignity. In the preface to the first (1855) edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman explains the public value of poetry: “[F]olks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls [...] The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight.” (621) These roots of Whitman’s lyric song would grow deep in these three contemporary Hispanic poets, the focus of my dissertation, during times of grave social and political crisis.

By tracing the influence of Whitman’s prophetic voice in their works, I show how his aesthetic of sacrifice reaches dramatic conclusions in the New York of Lorca’s poetry, as well as

in the Spanish Civil War represented in Felipe's *Ganarás la luz*, or Vallejo's *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*. Their prophetic lyric voices rise from the roots of Whitman's song, founded upon a communal humanity and an "I" freed from the limits of the individual self. This "prophetic" voice, which we see in the poetry of Whitman, Felipe, Lorca, and Vallejo, is a lament culminating in the personal sacrifice of the first-person poetic subject. I show how these four authors respond to the crises in their own times and lives with contemporary public voices that redeem our own human dignity, in a world that might seem otherwise abandoned to its own undoing.