

R. B. Cunninghame Graham's "Aurora La Cujíñi" (1898) : An Exploration¹

Aurora La Cujíñi" (1898) de R. B. Cunninghame Graham - Una indagación

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Abstract: In *Aurora La Cujíñi*-*A realistic sketch in Seville*, published by the Scottish writer R. B. Cunninghame Graham in 1898, the frontispiece showed the sepia image of a female flamenco dancer. What might 'La Cujíñi' mean? Charles Davillier and Gustave Doré in 1862-63 note the existence of a Sevillian dancer with this name. In 2011 the present writer was gifted an old lithograph, in colour, published in Seville 'c. 1850' and entitled 'Aurora La Cujíñi' - with ñ and í. The two images are supplied. 'Aurora La Cujíñi' really existed.

Graham's sketch has five phases: Seville; the bullfight; the crowd's return to town; a low-quality flamenco show; and the highly stirring performance by an initially anonymous female dancer - the dead Aurora brought back to life. Graham emphasises the Seville blend of blood and sensuality in a realist style also capable of mockery and criticism. Graham's writing includes a good variety of well-controlled Spanish vocabulary, his empathy with horses and a deep nostalgia for times past.

W. H. Hudson, writer and friend of Graham, in 1894 recommended that Graham should read the Argentine sketches published by Alfred Ébélot in 1890. In *Aurora La Cujíñi* Graham in 1898 is beginning to show mastery of the literary sketch.

Question: Might Lorca have read *Aurora La Cujíñi* before drafting "Teoría y juego del duende"?

¹ This article is a slightly modified version of part of the introduction to a new publication by Kennedy and Boyd Publishers (Glasgow), due in the late summer of 2011: *R. B. Cunninghame Graham - Collected Stories and Sketches. Volume One - Photographed on the Brain*, edited by Alan MacGillivray and John C. Mc Intyre. There will be five volumes.

Key words: Cunninghame Graham. Seville. *Aurora La Cujíñi-The literary sketch*. A female flamenco dancer re-born.

Resumen: En *Aurora La Cujíñi-A realistic sketch in Seville* (1898) del escritor escocés R. B. Cunninghame Graham, el frontispicio llevaba la imagen en sepia de una bailadora de flamenco. ¿Qué podría significar ‘La Cujíñi’? Charles Davillier y Gustave Doré en 1862-1863 apuntan la existencia de una bailaora sevillana con este nombre. En 2011 al que esto escribe le regalaron una litografía antigua, en color, publicada en Sevilla ‘hacia 1850’ e intitulada ‘Aurora la Cujíñi’ - con ñ y con í. Se incluyen las dos imágenes. ‘Aurora La Cujíñi’ realmente existió.

El ‘bosquejo’ de Graham tiene cinco fases: Sevilla; la corrida; la vuelta de la muchedumbre al centro; un tablao flamenco de baja calidad; y la actuación apasionante de una bailadora inicialmente anónima - la Aurora muerta que vuelve a vivir. Graham pone énfasis en la mezcla sevillana de sangre y sensualidad, manejando una prosa realista, socarrona y crítica. En su escritura se notan una variedad bien controlada de léxico español, su empatía con los caballos y su nostalgia profunda por los tiempos pasados.

W. H. Hudson, escritor y amigo de Graham, recomendó en 1894 que éste leyera los ‘bosquejos’ argentinos publicados por Alfred Ébélot en 1890. En “Aurora La Cujíñi” Graham en 1898 está empezando a dominar la técnica del bosquejo.

Pregunta: ¿Podría haber leído Lorca *Aurora La Cujíñi* antes de redactar “Teoría y juego del duende”?

Palabras clave: B. Cunninghame Graham. Sevilla. *Aurora La Cujíñi-el ‘bosquejo’ literario*. Una bailaora de flamenco re-animada.

Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936)² was a Scottish

gentleman adventurer. An excellent horseman and a fine speaker of Spanish from his youth, he travelled widely in the 1870s in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, becoming virtually a gaucho. In the early 1880s with his wife Gabriela he tried ranching in Texas and cotton-trading in Mexico. He inherited debt-ridden Scottish estates in 1883. During his service as a radical Member of Parliament (1886-1892) he spent six weeks in Pentonville Prison as a result of his involvement in a major demonstration. An early Socialist and friend of Keir Hardie, he vigorously supported the emerging Labour Party. He wrote polemical articles against the Boer Wars and British and United States imperialism and supported Home Rule for Scotland. When he failed to gain re-election to Parliament, he began to think of establishing himself as a writer. He began modestly, publishing in 1895 a tourist guide to his native area of Menteith in Scotland. In 1896 he co-authored with his wife a collection of thirteen sketches and essays. In 1898 he published a record of his madcap attempt to reach the forbidden city of Tarudant in Morocco. Thereafter, the flood-gates opened. Between 1899 and 1936 Graham published just over two hundred sketches and tales in thirteen collections: eighty sketches and tales had Hispanic settings or characters. He also produced eleven substantial studies of varied aspects of Spanish American history, the most famous of which is *A Vanished Arcadia* (1901), his study of the Jesuit Missions in colonial South America. A Hispanophile to the last, he died in 1936 during a visit to Argentina.

In 1898 Graham published “Aurora La Cujíñi – A Realistic Sketch in Seville”, a 17-page literary sketch in a limited edition of 500 numbered copies: a copy, including the frontispiece, is available on the Internet³. Graham modified the original for republication in his collection *Charity* (1912): this modified version is also available on the Internet⁴. This article deals with the original 1898 version.

‘Aurora’ is one of the words for ‘dawn’ in Spanish and can be used as a girl’s name. There are few words in Spanish ending in ‘-iñi’. Where might this word come from?

The first clue comes from a French source. The writer and antiquarian Baron Charles de Davillier and the renowned illustrator Gustave Doré toured Spain together

² See: www.en.wikipedia.org > R. B. Cunninghame Graham.

³ R. B. Cunninghame Graham: “Aurora La Cujíñi - A Realistic Sketch in Seville” (Leonard Smithers, London, 1898), on Internet at: [American Libraries Free Books](http://AmericanLibrariesFreeBooks.org) > R. B. Cunninghame Graham > Aurora La Cujíñi. The 1898 frontispiece is included.

⁴ R. B. Cunninghame Graham: “Aurora La Cujíñi”, in *Charity* (London, Duckworth, 1912). This version made some changes from the original 1898 text. It is available on Internet at: [Canadian Libraries Free Books](http://CanadianLibrariesFreeBooks.org) > R. B. Cunninghame Graham > Charity > pages 146-162.

in the 1860s. Davillier's text and Doré's images, in black on white, were published as *Voyage en Espagne* in Hachette's major travel magazine *Le Tour du Monde* at regular intervals between 1862 and 1873. Hachette published the material in book form — including 309 wood-engravings by Doré — in Paris in 1874. The magazine version is available on the Internet⁵.

The Davillier/Doré introduction to Seville sets out a list of baptismal names preferred for southern Spanish gypsy girls: “Rocio..., - Soledad..., - Salud, - Candelaria..., - Aurora..., - Milagros..., - Gertrudis, etc., etc.”. Regarding the name Aurora Davillier writes: “Aurora (un nom illustré par une des plus célèbres danseuses gitanas de Séville: Aurora, surnommée la Cujini, mot qui, dans le langage des gitanos, signifie la Rose)”. So Davillier and Doré either encountered or heard about a famous gypsy dancer in Seville known as ‘Aurora La Cujini’ [no tilde in Davillier], the unit ‘La Cujini’ being either a nickname or a stage name apparently meaning ‘The Rose’ in ‘el caló’, the Indo-European language spoken by Spanish gypsies.

The second clue comes from the frontispiece chosen by Graham for the 1898 edition — an image of an unnamed flamenco dancer: this sepia-coloured frontispiece image is now given in slightly magnified form.

⁵ Internet at: *Le Tour du Monde* (Paris 1860) > “1865/07 - (12) - 1865/12” > pages 353-432 (Cádiz and the introduction to Seville), especially pages 422-424.



Imagen de la colección original de 1898.

In April 2010 Grosvenor Prints (London) offered for sale a lithograph entitled 'A Flamenco Dancer': a colour photograph in their catalogue illustrated the item. This catalogue photograph included at the top the information "Costumbres Andaluzas" ["Andalusian Customs"] and at the bottom "Aurora la Cujíñí. Chaman. Lith. G. Santigosa, Sevilla [no date, c. 1850]". The stage name is given with tilde and final written stress as 'La Cujíñí'. The lithograph was recently gifted to the present writer and a new colour copy is now provided.

Costumbres Andaluzas.



AURORA LA CUJIÑÍ

The full-figure study of the dark-haired female dancer is set against a light sepia-coloured background. The dancer looks to be in her late teens or early twenties. She is seen in semi-profile, showing the left side of her face. The pupils hint of blue, set against bright white. Her right arm is raised above her head with the fingers set in a flamenco pose. The left arm stretches forward from the shoulder to hold the end of a pale blue sash whose colour echoes that of a scarf or shawl drifting down the dancer's back. The dress is lime-green in colour from neck to foot, is nipped in at the waist and the skirt section has three or four layers of flounces. The dancer's left foot peeps out from under the skirt. To the lower right is one side of a large earthenware pot, upper centre left shows a wall-vase and hanging flowers, lower left a stone bench and lowest left a man's hat, possibly a bullfighter's dress hat, the *montera*.

The colour lithograph dated by the print specialists at c. 1850 and Davillier's text from 1862 together suggest that Aurora La Cujíñi was a real person in the world of dance in Seville in the mid-nineteenth century. Graham may not have known her personally in the late 1860s or thereafter, but he was clearly familiar with the lithograph and the name. Aurora La Cujíñi was not invented by Graham.

The 3,230 words of "Aurora La Cujíñi" seem to contain five blocks of narrative. In the first section (up to "... wheedling tongues"), Graham shows Seville's and the river's original Arabic names, Moorish-introduced plants, the Cathedral built on the site of a great mosque and other Arab-style buildings recalling tent and palm tree. Graham identifies the Arabs' "materialistic view of everything". Long after the Christian capture, far-travelled gypsies settled on the Triana bank of the river.

The second section on the bullfight runs to "... all was done". On the opening page Graham had written: "The city ... was as if filled with a reminiscence of its past of sensuality and blood". Here the bullfight leaves behind it "that mixed air of sensuousness and blood", the atmosphere becoming charged with a latent sensuality that threatens to disrupt normal conventions, with "... a scent of blood and sweat acting like a rank aphrodisiac upon the crowd ...".

In the third section — up to "... do not want." — the crowd makes its way back into town and Graham in costumbrist mode logs a range of typical behaviours, including men salaciously scrutinising the bodies of passing women and the young women selling soft drinks and their own bodies.

In the fourth section — up to "... in their sash." — the crowd packs into the 'Burrero' dancing-house where old women sell "flowers and obscenely-painted match-boxes..." and the flamenco troupe begins to create a strange tension. A solo dancer called Juana cannot, however, erase the memory of "the prowess of a gipsy long since dead, by name Aurora, surnamed La Cujíñi...".

In the fifth block, a young female dancer dances and is wildly applauded and acclaimed as the re-born Aurora from the 1840s. Her shuddering sensuality “draws the hearts of every onlooker into her net” until “she stands a moment quiet, as it is called, ‘dormida,’ that is, asleep, looking a very statue of impudicity”. The sketch ends with further insistence on blood and sensuality.

The orderly progression from the opening bird’s eye view of the city, through the collectively shared emotions of the bullfight, the crowd’s return to town and the filling up of the dancing-houses into the concentrated focus on the young dancer in the last sequence is well planned and well handled.

The sketch is sub-titled “A Realistic Sketch in Seville”, and Graham shows a sharp eye for realistic detail, as in: “The stiff dead horses were piled into a cart, their legs sticking out, pathetic and grotesque, between the bars. A cart of sand was emptied on the blood, then the ‘espada,’ some ‘Culo Ancho’ or ‘Lagartijillo,’ got into his brougham and all was done”.

This last remark goes mischievously beyond straightforward realism. Graham’s use of the Spanish diminutive ‘-illo’, which can be affectionate, here feels pejorative, suggesting that this bullfighter palely imitates an original. And ‘Culo Ancho’ means ‘Broad-Arse’, the opposite of the slim hips yearned for by male flamenco dancers, classic bullfighters and their fans. The diminutive ending ‘-illo’ and “Culo Ancho” are intended to mock.

Graham’s competence in standard realism shows again when he describes the upper classes in their clubs “... sweating blood and water in the attempt to look like Englishmen or like Frenchmen...”. Graham suggests that as the dancer bewitches her audience, “the short sleeves slip back exhibiting black tufts of hair under her arms, glued to her skin with sweat” (21). Graham is a clear-minded and clear-sighted realist.

Graham deploys extensive knowledge of Spain, regarding Seville’s Moorish background, mediæval Spanish history, the migration of the gypsies — the Caloró — from India to Triana, bullfight routines and vocabulary, water-sellers crying out “in so guttural a voice it seemed like Arabic”, and the dress, speech, eating and drinking habits and enthusiasms of the dance-hall crowd.

Graham, fascinated by foreign cultures, maintains a critical distance. The Arabs in Spain created wonderful buildings yet were “ignorant of all the plastic arts”; Spanish gypsies “behave as if the entire world was a great oyster to be opened by their wheedling tongues”; Southern children can be “little villainous-looking urchins”; and prostitution is common in Seville. Graham’s familiarity with his foreign scenario is presented thoughtfully and sometimes with sly humour.

As a fluent speaker of Spanish Graham enjoyed using Hispanisms. He delights in local place-names and personal names: the Giralda; the Alcázar; Pedro el Justiciero; Triana; and the Calle Sierpes, “the main artery and chief bazaar”. He mentions the ‘espada’ (sword, and by implication swordsman *i.e.* the bullfighter); “selling lemonade, Horchata, Agraz...”; “‘bandurrias,’ a cross between a mandolin and a guitar”; “drinking their manzanilla in little tumblers about the thickness of a piece of sugarcane...”; “his instrument well ‘requintado’”; and “‘vivas’ and ‘vayas’ rend the air”. In most of the Hispanisms there is usually for the English-language reader a smoothly arranged context or explanation.

Graham, an accomplished horseman, was besotted with the world of the horse. In “Aurora La Cujíñi” he describes the suffering of the horses used and abused in the bullring thus: “Hungry and ragged, they had trodden on their entrails, received their wounds without a groan, without a tear, without a murmur, faithful to the end; had borne their riders out of danger, fallen upon the bloody sand at last with quivering tails, and, biting their poor, parched and bleeding tongues, had died just as the martyrs at Lyons or in Rome, as dumb and brave as they.” This extraordinary empathy with the horse will serve him well after 1898 in many future stories and historical studies set in the horse-riding cultures of Mexico and South America.

Aged 45-46 in 1898 Graham had campaigned long and fearlessly for radical change — as an orator, as a Member of Parliament and in regular articles in major journals. He often carries his combative style into his sketches and tales. In “Aurora La Cujíñi”, for example, his deeply-felt mistrust of Victorian progress and capitalism is seen in: “The shops were full of all those unconsidered trifles which in Spain alone can find a market, cheap and abominably nasty, making one think that our manufactories must be kept running with a view to furnish idiots or blind men with things they do not want”.

This critical view of late Victorian values occasionally darkens into a sometimes bitter view of the whole human condition: the bullfighter’s assistants “escaped as usual with their worthless lives, for fortune, Providence, or the great motive but ill-regulated power which some think rules the world comes to the assistance of the strong, invariably.”; and “... the horses, all of which had done more service to mankind than any fifty men, and each of which had as much right, by every law of logic and anatomy, to have a soul, if souls exist, as have the wisest of philosophers, had suffered martyrdom”.

Only after an older gypsy recalls the mastery of dance of a long-dead girl called Aurora La Cujíñi does the unnamed girl rise to perform. Graham presents her as “dressed in a somewhat older fashion than the others, her hair brought low upon her forehead and straying on her shoulders in the style of 1840...”. For Graham the dancer’s curiously bent fingers may hint at ancient and certainly pre-Christian cults. On that evening in the ‘Burero’, the young dancer taking “... a brief and fleeting

reincarnation to breathe once more the air of Seville, heavy with perfume of spring flowers mixed with the scent of blood” dances wildly and drives the spectators into orgasm. Through the young ghost dancer, invested with almost supernatural power, Graham romantically calls up another older world which may occasionally surface in present times to remind us of a way of life and a culture that was different from and in some ways better than our present mode of living. Graham’s liking for the costumbrist sketch — the depiction of types and times either disappearing or past — suggests that in essence he was a nostalgic.

Not everything in Graham is easy reading. Not all his sketches and tales will be as tightly drafted as “Aurora La Cujíñi”. Occasionally a Biblical or Classical reference will test today’s reader. He can unfold a long sentence laden with commas, subordinate clauses and parentheses. His foreign-language references are wide-ranging. He can be a careless proof-reader, even of his beloved Spanish. Generally, though, Graham sustains a coherent descriptive or narrative voice, brimming with energy, excitement, insight and commitment.

In 1894 Graham’s good friend, W. H. Hudson — born and brought up on the Argentine pampa, a superb naturalist and himself a considerable writer — encouraged Graham to study the vignettes of pampa life published by the French engineer Alfred Ébélot in *La Pampa. Costumbres argentinas* (1890): Hudson wanted Graham to move away from long historical studies towards shorter pieces based on Graham’s direct experience⁶. Graham persisted with a longer format in the 1896 title story “Father Archangel of Scotland”, in “Cruz Alta” in *Thirteen Stories* (1900) and in his review of the Mexican Heriberto Frías’ 1892 novel *Tomóchic* (in *Progress* in 1905); and in 1901 he will publish *A Vanished Arcadia*, the hefty study of the Jesuit Missions in South America, the first of eleven long studies of aspects of South American history.

“Aurora La Cujíñi”, however, generated an extremely positive response from some of Graham’s closest and most valued literary associates. Cedric Watts in his 1983 biography of Graham reports Arthur Symons, leading light of the Aesthetic and Symbolist movements, showering praise on “Aurora La Cujíñi”. The influential critic and editor Edward Garnett wrote: “Only an ‘impression’ you will say. Yes, but something that transfers the intoxication *to us*: you infect us with the snaky poison of that woman, the delicious madness. Admirably seen, admirably felt, admirably described!” Graham’s great friend, the novelist Joseph Conrad, commented: “C’est, tout simplement, magnifique... This seems the most finished piece of work you’ve ever done”⁷. Graham with “Aurora La Cujíñi” was settling very comfortably into the shorter format of the 3,000-word sketch recommended to him by Hudson.

⁶ Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies: *Cunninghame Graham - A Critical Biography* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), p. 155.

⁷ Cedric Watts: *R. B. Cunninghame Graham* (Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1983), p. 45.

So “Aurora La Cujñi” shows: careful introductory scene-setting; a well-ordered narrative line; a motif that through careful repetition deepens the surface narration; realistic detail adding conviction to the text; deft deployment of knowledge and experience of foreign cultures; measured use of the local language to add authenticity; empathy with horses; a dark and sardonic view of the human condition; and a profound nostalgia for the past. Almost every sketch or tale after “Aurora La Cujñi” is likely to show one, two or several of the features manifested so fluently in “Aurora La Cujñi”.

More broadly, the late 1890s were crucial in Graham’s development as a writer. Graham had included in *Father Archangel of Scotland and Other Essays* (1896) and in *The Ipané* (1899) four pieces on the pampa, the gauchos, the lasso and the gaucho throwing-weapon, the bolas: these pieces are closer to the essay than to the sketch. On the other hand, his remaining seven sketches in *Father Archangel of Scotland and Other Essays*, the independently published single sketch “Aurora La Cujñi” (1898) and within months thirteen other sketches in *The Ipané* — set in Paraguay, the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, on the pampa, in West African waters, the Atlantic coastal desert, Tangier, Scotland, Iceland and England — show a Graham who is confidently exploring a wide variety of settings, ways of life and characters within the format of the sketch. Taken together, the collection *Father Archangel of Scotland and Other Essays* (1896), “Aurora La Cujñi” (1898) and the collection *The Ipané* (1899) mark a significant step forward in Graham’s accelerating definition of his narrative *persona*.

A Speculation.

García Lorca’s 1930s lecture on *el duende* — artistic inspiration — depicts a scenario in Cádiz where the great singer ‘La Niña de los Peines’ [‘The Girl with the Combs’] utterly fails to impress an audience of flamenco sophisticates. Stung by a sarcastic comment of “¡Viva París!”, ‘La Niña’ sings again — but this time with *duende*⁸. There is a curious similarity between Graham’s and Lorca’s flamenco scenarios and their depiction of an almost divine moment of creative inspiration that through the live performer shakes the audience to the core of its being. This writer and - quite separately - Fernando Iwasaki, the Peruvian author based in Seville⁹, wonder gently whether Lorca might possibly have read Graham’s “Aurora La Cujñi” before penning “Teoría y juego del duende”.

⁸ Federico García Lorca’s “Teoría y juego del duende” is available in English as “Theory and Play of the *duende*” in A. S. Kline’s translation at:

<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/LorcaDuende.htm>

⁹ Fernando Iwasaki: “Sangre y azahar en Cunninghame Graham”, in *ABC Sevilla*, 11 August 2007, at: <http://www.abcsevilla.es/hemeroteca/historico-11-08-2007/sevilla>

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