**Martínez Sierra, Gregorio (1881-1947)**

Gregorio Martínez Sierra was a Spanish poet, playwright, and theatre director who played a key role in the Spanish theatrical avant-garde and the development of art theatre during the early twentieth century. He operated the publishing house Renacimiento, which was responsible for disseminating modernist literature and foreign playwrights throughout Spain. He was married to María de la O Lejárraga [María Martínez Sierra]*,* who was apparently the true author of much of the literature that bears Gregorio’s name.



Gregorio Martínez Sierra c.1910

<http://www.madridteatro.eu/teatr/entrevistas/2008/images/325_06.jpg>

Gregorio Martínez Sierra was born in Madrid in 1881. He briefly studied law and then philology before abandoning the university to dedicate himself to poetry and theatre. In 1900 he married María de la O Lejárraga, a teacher and writer from Spain’s La Rioja region. The pair immediately began to collaborate in the writing and publishing of short novels and plays that today carry the name of Gregorio Martínez Sierra. Recent scholarship as well as Lejárraga’s memoirs, however, have shown that María was in fact the main author of the majority of the literature that bears her husband’s name. In 1906 Martínez Sierra fell in love with a young actress in his theatre, Catalina Bárcena, though both his marriage and literary collaboration with Lejárraga would continue until Bárcena gave birth to his daughter in 1922. Despite their separation, Lejárraga continued publishing essays and novels pseudonymously under her estranged husband’s name, and curiously no new theatrical plays by “Gregorio Martínez Sierra” would premier after 1922.

Greatly influenced by modernism at the turn of the century, Martínez Sierra began his literary career as a poet. His first book of poetry, *El poema del trabajo*, was published in 1898, followed by *Diálogos fantásticos* (1899), *Flores de escarcha* (1900), and *Teatro de ensueño* (1905), the latter of which includes a prologue by the Nicaraguan modernist poet Rubén Darío. These musical verses reveal a modernist tendency to view melancholy as a source of beauty, creation, and artistic inspiration. Despite the fact that Martínez Sierra first became recognized as a poet, his most important contributions to Spanish literature and the arts are in the realms of drama and theatre, most notably in his innovative set designs and staging. In 1908 his first comedia, *Juventud, divino tesoro*, premiered in Madrid, and he soon dedicated himself exclusively to theatre. His most celebrated play, *Canción de cuna* (1911), was extremely well-received. It was translated to English, shown across Europe and Spanish America, and adapted for film in both Spain and Hollywood. While the play bears his name, his wife (Lejárraga) has since been credited as the sole playwright. Some of his other plays include *La sombra del padre* (1909), *El ama de casa* (1910), *Primavera en otoño* (1911), *Madame Pepita* (1912), *Mamá* (1913), and *El reino de Dios* (1916). Martínez Sierra also worked closely with established musicians, composing the librettos for productions of *La Tirana* (1913), *Margot* (1914), *Las golondrinas* (1914), and *El amor brujo* (1915). In the realm of publishing, he edited several important modernist periodicals in Madrid and also translated the work of foreign authors including Shakespeare and Maeterlinck. Martínez Sierra is recognized today for his great influence as a publisher within the Renacimiento publishing house, through which he made great efforts to disseminate contemporary Spanish and foreign literature throughout Spain.

Martínez Sierra was the director of Madrid’s first Art Theatre, the *Teatro Eslava*, from 1917 to 1925. In his 1926 book, *Un teatro de arte en España*, he describes in great detail his work on production and set design during this time, as well as his concept of Art Theatre, which featured a great variety of productions that incorporated music and the plastic arts. This avant-garde fusion of art, music, and theatre not only allowed the drama to go beyond the limits of the written script but also invited collaborations with contemporary painters, musicians, and playwrights, including Ramón María del Valle-Inclán and Federico García Lorca. In fact, Martínez Sierra invited Lorca to debut his first play, *El maleficio de la mariposa*, at the Eslava in 1920, and the stage shows and plays at the theatre were quite popular with Madrid’s intellectual and literary elite. As director of the theatre, Martínez Sierra featured the work of celebrated Spanish dramatists while also bringing foreign plays by Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw to Spain. Martínez Sierra’s passion for theatre and drama was greatly inspired by the aesthetics of Jacinto Benavente, whose plays depicted aspects of everyday life and ‘typical’ customs in keeping with the *costumbrista* tradition but were also seen as ‘modern’ andcontained elements of criticism and analysis, satire and humor, and the predominance of dialogue and aesthetic realism. Regarding Martínez Sierra’s theatrical ouevre in general, contemporary criticism has highlighted the groundbreaking way in which idealism and sensitivity come to the fore in the development of the plot, theme, and female characters, although much of this is now attributed to Lejárraga’s authorship.

In the early 1930s, Martínez Sierra moved to the United States to begin directing Spanish film in Hollywood. While enthusiastic about the new possibilities of cinema, he insisted that theatre and film shared little common ground in terms of production and representation. He returned to Spain in 1935, but with the onset of the Spanish Civil War he promptly left the country for Argentina. In 1947, Martínez Sierra finally returned to Spain in poor health, and he died in his native Madrid only a few days later.

**List of Select Works**

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