Blood Wedding Study Guide

Blood Wedding by Federico García Lorca

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Introduction

Blood Wedding, completed in 1932, premiered in Madrid in 1933. Its popular success was such that Lorca was able to support himself from proceeds stemming from his writing for the first time. Its success also demonstrates the degree to which large Spanish audiences, by 1933, were highly receptive to the innovations in theater and literature that had been developing since the turn of the century. The play incorporates song, chant, poetry, music, and rhythm, and its action and sets are highly symbolic and stylized. These non-realistic and anti-naturalistic techniques capitalized on drama as a live event. As opposed to a play whose actions and sets seemed exactly like things in everyday life, Lorca's audience witnessed the stage exploited for all of its sensate and dramatic potentialities.

While some argue that the play treats certain universal themes, others disagree with this point of view, seeing it instead as a veiled criticism of certain sectors of Spanish society. On the surface, Blood Wedding is a tragedy that plays out the conflict between individual wishes and societal decrees and laws. It is a tragedy insofar as two of the central characters, Leonardo and the Bride, were once in love, but due to unknown impediments, were never married. Their tragedy is the tragedy of love missed. In the meantime, Leonardo has married another and the Bride is betrothed and about to be married herself. The thought of a definitive loss of his first love to another man drives Leonardo to instigate the major event of the play, which is the lovers' flight on the very day that the Bride marries.

For those critics who view the play within its historical context, Lorca's theme is based in the rigid laws of the lovers' community, which decree that Leonardo must die for his transgression. That is, the terrible vengeance enacted against Leonardo is seen to represent extremism, intolerance, and inflexibility. These charges of inflexibility were understood to be leveled against those persons who were resistant to social and cultural change during an era when such change was largely inevitable.

Author Biography

Federico Garcia Lorca was born on June 5,1898, in the small town of Fuente Vaqueros, near the city of Granada, in Spain. He grew up in comfortable and pleasant circumstances, cultivating his tastes and talents for music (piano) and writing. By 1909 his family had moved to Granada, and by 1914 Lorca was enrolled in the University of Granada studying the liberal arts and law. He published a first book of collected articles and essays in 1918.

This first book whetted Lorca's appetite for more ambitious literary forays. In 1919, Lorca moved to the Residence of University Students in Madrid, where he believed he would encounter and benefit from a greater concentration of cultural activity than Granada, at the time, could offer. In Madrid, Lorca became acquainted with and established close, lifelong associations with Salvador Dali, the surrealist artist, and Manuel de Falla, the orchestral composer, amongst others.

While Lorca wrote some dramatic pieces in his early writing years, he began his literary career most notably as a poet. However, while he was writing this poetry, he was also involved in a theatrical group of which he was the director. It was in the late 1920s that Lorca began to concentrate on drama. His famous trilogy of rural plays, of which Blood Wedding is one, was written between 1933-1936. Two of them were also staged during these years. (This trilogy includes Yerma and The House of Bernarda Alba.)

Lorca's short life was busy and full. He wrote a great deal, he was feted and admired, and he traveled extensively (for example, to the United States, Cuba, and South America). While Lorca's public life is well documented, biographers are less certain about precise details concerning Lorca's private life. The reason for this is that Lorca was gay, and the frank disclosure of such a fact during his time would have substantially endangered his career and social position.

Lorca was assassinated in 1936 just outside of Granada. The Spain of the early 1930s was a country uneasily negotiating the shift from monarchical, parliamentary traditionalism to full democracy and cultural liberalism. The political and social situation in Spain was as beleaguered and chaotic as that which characterized European politics and society, in general, at the time. The continent as a whole was struggling with the effects of lingering post-WW I economic depression as well as the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany, and Spain. The fascist army general Francisco Franco was gaining support in Spain, primarily from those who feared substantive change in either cultural or political terms. It was supporters of right-wing leaders such as Franco who saw Lorca and others as threats to the traditionalism and dictatorial society and law they wished to impose upon the Spanish nation. Lorca was arrested on August 16, 1936, and shot on either August 18th or 19th.

Plot Summary

Act I

The play opens in the home of the Mother and Bridegroom. It is learned that her husband and other son met violent ends, presumably in a feud. They also discuss the son's upcoming betrothal and marriage, until he leaves for work at his vineyard. A neighbor woman arrives and provides information concerning the Bride and her family. She confirms the mother's suspicions regarding the Bride having had an earlier love, and it turns out that this love, Leonardo, is from the family whose members are responsible for the deaths of her husband and son. The second scene takes place at Leonardo's house. Leonardo's wife and mother-in-law are rocking a baby to sleep. Leonardo's wife asks him why his horse is always tired these days; she says he has been seen "on the far side of the plains," which is where the Bride lives. Leonardo denies that he has been riding in that vicinity, and the subject of conversation shifts to the upcoming marriage of the Bride and Bridegroom. The third and final scene of Act I takes place at the Bride's home. The mother of the Bridegroom and the father of the Bride formalize the match, each praising the worthiness of their offspring. The Bride is demure and reticent in company, but once alone with the Servant she expresses her true frame of mind, which is impatient and frustrated. The Servant asks her if she heard a horse at the house the night before, and the Bride says no. But, at this point, a horse is heard and both see that it carries Leonardo.

Act II

Act II takes place at the Bride's house on the day of the wedding. Young girls and others appear singing and chanting wedding songs. Leonardo and his wife and mother-in-law are the first guests to arrive, and soon Leonardo and the Bride are speaking heatedly. He declaims against her marriage, their continued separation, and the disaster of their never having married. She replies that she is marrying to finally bury the past and the memory of him. By the second scene of Act II the guests have returned from the marriage ceremony. The wedding celebration is set to begin. In the midst of a large gathering, the mother and father speak of Leonardo, noting his family's reputation for violence. Soon, the overwhelmed Bride announces her wish to rest for a time. When the Bridegroom goes to find her a bit later, she is nowhere to be found. It is discovered that the lovers have fled. A party with the Bridegroom at its head is formed to seek out the lovers and exact revenge for their transgression.

Act III

Act III takes place mostly in a forest. This is as far as the lovers have managed to flee by the time the party catches up with them. Three woodcutters open the scene, commenting on the terrible events. Death and the Moon also appear in this scene, both

looking forward to what will be, inevitably, somebody's death. Death, as a beggar woman, points the way to the lovers for the Bridegroom. In the meantime, the Bride encourages Leonardo to escape without her, as their horse is unable to carry them both. She knows that they will try to kill him. He refuses to leave her. With the stage directions having indicated the lovers' exit and the Moon's entrance, two shrieks are heard. At the sound of the second shriek, Death appears and moves to center stage with her back to the audience. She spreads out her arms such that a great cape unfurls. This impressive sight ends the second scene of Act III. The final scene of the play opens with two girls winding a skein of red wool. Confusion reigns with various characters appearing and asking for definitive news about the hunt for the lovers. Finally, the Mother is apprised of the terrible truth; her last son is dead at the hands of Leonardo. Leonardo is also dead. The Bride appears, dejected, asking for death. The Mother barely registers her presence as she announces her final descent into inconsolable pain and suffering.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

In "Blood Wedding," a woman's son falls in love with a lady who used to date a member of the family that murdered his father and brother. Although the lady knows that his love is true, she is still in love with her ex-boyfriend. She runs off with her ex-boyfriend shortly after marrying the son. The woman and her ex-boyfriend do not escape the revenge of the son. In the end the son's revenge backfires. All of the characters learn their respective lessons about revenge, love, and family.

A routine goodbye between a mother and her grown son turns cold. Before leaving to tend to his vineyard, the son asks his mother for a knife he can use to cut down grapes for his lunch. The son's request launches the mother into a speech about how she hates knives, guns, and any other weapons that can "split the body of a man apart." She reminds her son that his father and oldest brother both died at the hands of men who used weapons. His mother thinks the killers got off easy because they can still experience a decent life in prison, while her dead men will remain in the ground for eternity. Orders to be quiet come from the son amid the mother's angry comments and pleas for her son not to go back to the country.

The son offers the mother a place to stay with him and his fiancee. She refuses to leave. She must visit the grave sites of her husband and son every morning and make sure no one in the Felix family, the family who killed her men, is buried next to them. The boy's mother has not yet met her son's fiancee although they have been together three years. She inquires about the girl's mother and previous relationships. The son is happy when his mother agrees to talk with the girl's father on Sunday. When the son prepares to leave the house his mother reminds him to have lots of grandchildren, and girls too.

A neighbor comes to visit the son's mother. Since she has not been off her street in 20 years, the neighbor fills her in on what has been happening in the world. Rafael, the son of a mutual neighbor, showed up in the neighborhood without the two arms he had lost to a machine. The mother tells the neighbor that her son has bought a vineyard and then asks if she knows his fiancee. According to the neighbor, the girl is good and stays to herself. Her dead mother was beautiful but unloving and proud. The mother becomes upset when the neighbor goes on to tell her that the girl used to date Leonardo of the Felix family, who ended up marrying her cousin instead. The neighbor explains that Leonardo should not be blamed for his ancestors' mistakes in killing the mother's husband and first son. Leonardo was very young when the killings happened and took no part in them. The mother agrees to take her neighbor's advice and not tell her son about his fiancee and her past relationship with Leonardo.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Bitterness and anger are hidden in the words of the son's mother. She has not stopped mourning for her husband and first son. Weapons take lives, and she believes there to be no good use for any of them, including knives. Her anger for the Felix family is strong. The anger runs so deep that she will not move just so she can make sure her family's killers are never buried next to her family. It appears that her relationship with her son is distant. She has not yet met her son's fiancee of three years and does not approve of where he lives. The son acts unconcerned about his mother's fears of weapons. His immaturity stands out because he has not grasped the consequences weapons can bring.

The son's residence somewhere outside the home symbolizes how he has dealt with his family's deaths. The son may still mourn, but he has moved on. The deaths have not even stopped him from using the very weapons that killed his own. The mother's residence at home symbolizes how different she has dealt with the deaths of her family. The mother has not moved on. Every day she reminds herself that her husband and son were murdered when she visits their grave sites. Their deaths have consumed her to the point that she hates weapons and will not move away. The mother's decision to hide the girl's past from her son shows that although she hates the Felix family, she loves her son more. She is willing to hold important information for her son's happiness.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Leonardo's wife, with the help of her mother, recites a lullaby to their baby so that he will sleep. The baby was up crying the previous night. Leonardo's wife indirectly questions him about riding the horse too much. Neighbors saw him ride the horse almost to the edge of the plain. The wife's mother says she saw the horse dripping with sweat. Leonardo is defensive and says he was only out doing man's work. When the wife mentions that her cousin is going to be married soon, her mother reminds her that Leonardo dated her cousin for three years. Leonardo says that it was he who broke it off with his wife's cousin and then demands that his wife not cry about it.

A child runs in and tells the mother-in-law that a young man was in the store buying expensive things with his mother. The man even bought silk stockings with roses. When the child tries to tell Leonardo the news, he acts uninterested and tells him to go away. The wife picks up on Leonardo's frustration and asks him what is bothering him. Leonardo continues to tell her to leave him alone and eventually leaves the house. Their baby begins to cry. Leonardo's wife and mother-in-law cry while reciting the same lullaby to the baby.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The most important thing this scene shows is the strained relationship between a husband and wife. The wife carefully questions her husband's whereabouts without having an argument. The place where they live is small enough for people to know what her husband is doing when he isn't home. Leonardo is defensive, which suggests that he may be lying to his wife about something. He is controlling enough to keep the wife scared and in her place at home. Leonardo's agitation at the mention of the marriage of his wife's cousin shows the reader that something is going on. Why is Leonardo so agitated if he broke it off with his wife's cousin? Why does the wife cry when Leonardo talks about her cousin? Her emotional state during the conversation is a sign that she and Leonardo have talked about her cousin before. The wife's inability to control her emotions shows that in her heart she does not believe what Leonardo tells her. As with any other human being, her emotions are her body's way of sending a "red flag" that something isn't right.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

The son's mother and her son talk with his fiancee's father. The mother complains about the four hour drive to the house sitting on empty plains. According to the mother, if her husband had plains he would have covered them with trees and not left them empty. After the greetings, the father tells the two how good it would be if the son moved his vineyard to his plains. The mother disagrees with combining all of their land together. The girl's father and son's mother briefly discuss the marriage of their children. Both mention the good qualities their child has to offer. The son says he would like to have the wedding next week on his fiancee's 22nd birthday. His mother reminds them that her oldest son would have been 22 now if he hadn't been killed.

The mother meets her son's fiancee. Her father comments on how solemn his daughter looks, but she insists that she is happy to marry. After presenting the girl with gifts and confirming the marriage date, the son and his mother leave. Immediately the servant begs the girl to open her presents and show what she has been given. The girl says she does not want to open the presents. The servant continues to beg to see the presents, but the girl refuses to touch them. The servant asks the girl if she saw the guy on horseback standing at her window last night. The girl saw no one, but says it must have been her fiancee. She is shocked when the servant tells her that it was not her fiancee but Leonardo at her window. Then the girl admits that Leonardo was indeed at her window.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The idea that something may be going on between Leonardo and his wife's cousin continues to unfold in this scene. The girl's lack of excitement about getting married shows in her actions, even though she says she is happy. Throughout the play there has been discussion on how nice and expensive the son's gifts for his fiancee are. It is strange that the bride does not open all the gifts. Her actions suggest that she may be torn about something. When her groom was at her house she spoke of wanting to be with him. Seconds after he leaves she becomes disgusted and refuses his gifts. When the servant mentions that Leonardo has come by her window, the girl tries to hide that she knows of his presence. The fact that she eventually admits that she has seen him shows the reader that there is something going on between her and Leonardo. Leonardo did ride his horse to the girl's window at night, although in the previous scene he denies riding the horse at all. Because both Leonardo and the girl are acting secretive about each other, it is obvious that they still have mutually strong feelings.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Just before dawn on the wedding day, the servant combs the girl's hair on the courtyard of her room. Looking out at the plains saddens the girl. She wishes she were around trees, instead of being choked by walls and bare fields. The servant talks endlessly about the wedding as she tries placing a crown of orange blossoms on the girl's head. The girl throws down the crown. When the servant asks her how she can be so sad on her wedding day, the girl admits her fears. She likes her fiancee but thinks that marriage is a big step. The servant tries teasing her into a better mood.

Leonardo is the first guest to arrive at the bride's house on the wedding day. The servant tells Leonardo that the bride isn't available to talk because she is dressing. When the servant asks how Leonardo's baby is doing, Leonardo replies as if he doesn't know what baby she is talking about. When the servant asks about his wife, he says she is coming by road but he came by horse. The bride overhears the groom ask the servant if she has gotten her orange blossoms from her groom. She shows herself and expresses her anger at him for coming and asking questions. Leonardo brings up the past. He says that when he was with her, oxen and a lousy shack weren't good enough for her. He tells her that she is the reason he is married. She gets defensive when he tells her that someone is to blame and that ignoring something does not make it go away but grow. The bride admits she is torn up inside about something, but she doesn't want to deal with it. The servant asks Leonardo to leave because more guests are arriving and the bride is too upset.

The voices of maidens, servants, youth and family recite welcomes to awaken and bid the bride to come out of her room. The bride enters in a black gown and a crown of orange blossoms. The bride and groom exchange small talk. Leonardo places a flower the bride's hair. At this the mother asks why Leonardo and his wife have come. The bride's father reminds the mother that he and his wife are family and she should forgive. The mother agrees to tolerate their presence but says she will never forgive. The groom urges everyone to go the church. The groom and the bride tell each other that they are eager to be united. As they leave maidens and servants recite goodbyes.

When Leonardo and his wife are left alone, she tells him she wants him to go to the church with her in the wagon. Leonardo tells her he is not one for wagons. She responds by telling him she is not one to go places without her husband. Leonardo's wife then admits to him that she sees coldness in his eyes. Although she has a boy with him and another child on the way, she says she fears he might want to leave her. Raising kids without their father is the same fate her mother was dealt. Leonardo ignores her and tells her they will go to the church together.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The bride's longing to be around trees instead of bare walls symbolizes her unhappiness with being in a place she does not want to be. Her sour mood, even on her wedding day, proves that she has doubts about marrying her groom. Through the conversation between Leonardo and the servant, it is obvious that Leonardo is unconcerned with his wife. He is the first person to show up for his ex-girlfriend's wedding. His wife has not come with him because he rode his horse. His preference for riding horses symbolizes that he does not want to be around his wife. She says she hates horses, yet he rides them everywhere he goes. Riding a horse guarantees that his wife won't go with him. This suggests that Leonardo is going places he can't take his wife.

Through Leonardo and the bride's brief conversation the reader learns that they both still have feelings for each other. Leonardo implies that he tried to forget about her by marrying someone else, but that made him think of her even more. He hints to the girl that she should not marry her groom because she will be in the same situation he is in. The bride's reaction shows that Leonardo has spoken the truth. If he had not, she would not have become so upset. The color of the bride's dress foreshadows the trouble to come and shows her true feelings about the day. Leonardo's wife finally admits to herself, and to Leonardo, that she knows he does not love her. Leonardo's coldness toward her remarks reveals that she is right. It is ironic that on a wedding day, Leonardo's marriage is falling apart. The bride hesitates marrying her groom, and the two people who really do love each other - Leonardo and the bride - are not the couple getting married. The two people in love are in fact committed to other people.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Servants recite greetings to welcome the bride and groom home. The bride's father and son's mother arrive home from the wedding first. The father learns that Leonardo and his wife have already come back and comments that he is looking for trouble. The mother goes off into another speech about how Leonardo can't help but be trouble since he is from a family of troublemakers and killers. They talk about how anxious they are to have grandchildren to help with work and keep them from loneliness. The father wishes they could have full grown grandchildren in one day. The mother reminds him that children grow and there is always a possibility that they won't live long, just like her son.

Relatives and people from everywhere attend the wedding. When the bride and groom return home, the bride comments that she is tired. The groom's mother says she should not be tired on her own wedding day. Conversation between bride and groom is awkward. The groom asks if the bride is happy and expresses that he can't wait until that night when they can be together. The bride hardly looks at him and shows no enthusiasm. She even shuns him when he tries to show her public affection. No one at the party can keep up with the bride or Leonardo. The groom is told his wife is in another room or undressing when he asks where she is. The wife has not seen Leonardo at the party yet and spends her time going from room to room looking for him.

The maidens begin to argue over who the bride gave a hair pin to first. Whoever gets the first hair pin is the one who will marry next. When the maidens ask her who got a pin first, the bride dismisses them. She says it is a hard hour for her. The maidens do not understand why, but the bride tells them they will know in due time. The mother gives her son words of advice about marriage before she gets ready to leave. She tells him to be loving to his wife, but to be a little rough if she gets out of line. The roughness will show her that he is a man. Around this time the father begins to look for the bride. Everyone thought she was in the house dancing in one of the rooms, but she is nowhere to be found. Leonardo's wife informs them that her husband and the bride have run off on horseback together. At this news the mother gives orders for the family to divide into two groups and go after her son's wife and bring her back.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The mother's constant reminders of her family's death begin to foreshadow something terrible. Even the father admits that Leonardo is trouble. The disappearances of Leonardo and the bride at the same time make the reader wonder if the two people are intentionally sneaking off together. The bride is pushing her groom's physical advances away. The marriage to her groom is losing strength to her desire to be with Leonardo. By the time the bride tells the maidens that it is a hard hour for her, the reader anticipates that she will run off with Leonardo. The constant worry about Leonardo from

his wife shows that she knows that it is her cousin that Leonardo loves. It is ironic that the two families the mother has been speaking about the entire play are now divided at the wedding. Although Leonardo was young when his family murdered the mother's family, his blood still leads him to ultimately betray the mother's family. The mother has been physically betrayed by the Felix family. Now she is being betrayed again by the same family.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Three woodcutters talk in the woods about the search for the bride and Leonardo. One woodcutter reminds the other two that the bride and Leonardo will both be killed for running away with each other. Another woodcutter says the two could not help themselves. "You've got to do what your blood tells you to," the woodcutter says. He knows the two people feel that it is better to die loving their true love than to live loving someone they don't love. The three woodcutters request that the moon hide the couple in the dark shadows where they won't be found. The moon speaks. The moon says he will not hide the couple. The moon will shine bright into the darkest corners of the forest until the couple is exposed. Death, in the form of an old woman beggar, and the moon discuss how they will seek the couple until death comes upon them.

The groom talks with a youth in the forest as they search for his bride. The youth thinks they are going the wrong way, but the groom tells him to be quiet. The groom knows he has heard the horse of Leonardo, which he thinks is the only horse out in the forest. He explains to the youth that with the blood of his murdered father and oldest son he will find the couple. The youth goes off to investigate a noise when the groom runs into the beggar. The groom inquires about the couple, and the beggar agrees to show him where they are. The woodcutters plead with death. They ask death to bring love instead of blood that night.

The bride begs Leonardo to leave her. Although she wanted to run away with him and loves him, she knows that he could be hurt because of her. Leonardo says he tried to forget her but could not resist or stop loving her. She tells him that she wants to be with him every second, but doesn't want him to suffer because of her. He promises to take her to a place where they can't be found and begins to drag her. Leonardo says that only death can part them. The bride agrees to go with him even to death.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The woodcutter's conversation brings the theme of the entire play to light. Blood is more than a liquid running through veins. Blood symbolizes the person's true intentions and desires. These intentions and desires are undeniable and impossible to get away from. If this is the case, a greater force was at work in bringing Leonardo and the bride together. It is almost as if they are not to blame for their surprising actions because their blood was too powerful to resist. The same blood runs through generations. Could the betrayal of the groom have come because it was in the blood of Leonardo Felix to betray him? Does the blood of the son seek revenge for his family's deaths?

The cooperation of death and the moon to bring about consequence suggests that all forces of nature are of one accord. When death comes, it cannot be avoided. There will

be no forces of nature willing to fight the death of someone. Lorca's description of death as a beggar could mean that death does not look like what we think. Beggars are ignored and overlooked. This beggar is surprising because of its power. As with the boy in the forest, sometimes humans may even be face to face or in conversation with death and not even know it. Leonardo and the bride know their fate. The fact that they are ready and willing to sacrifice their lives in order to be with each other shows the power of their love. It is better to die with the one you truly love than to live with one that you care nothing about.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

A child and two maidens sing of their curiosity about what is happening on the groom's hunt for his bride and her lover Leonardo. The maidens ask Leonardo's wife and her mother what has happened to the groom and Leonardo. The wife's mother doesn't know. The wife wonders out loud. Her mother tells her to forget Leonardo and concentrate on raising her sons alone. The maidens ask the beggar what she saw when she comes in. The child is afraid of the beggar and wants her to go away. The beggar tells the maidens with excitement that both the groom and Leonardo are dead. The groom's mother and her neighbor enter the empty room. When the neighbor starts to cry, the groom's mother tells her to be quiet. She can now sleep well because she knows where her sons are - in the cemetery.

The bride walks into the room where the groom's mother and neighbor talk. The groom's mother is angry at seeing her. After trying to restrain herself the mother knocks the bride to the floor. The bride tells the mother she can kill her if she wants, but she must plead her case. The bride says over and over that she never gave her body to anyone, including Leonardo. She explains that she did love her groom, and that he was good for her, but that Leonardo's love was too strong. She didn't want to run off with Leonardo, but Leonardo's love tore her away from what was right. The mother tells her she could care less about her purity or life. She agrees to let the bride weep for her son with her but from a distance. The women recite a eulogy of remembrance for the dead young men whose bodies are being carried to the house. They take turns repeating how "a little knife too small to hold in your hands" is sharp enough to forever end lives.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

The bride fought to love freely and lost. Following love does not always bring about a happy ending. Her focus on her purity overshadows her ability to see the fault in loving a man and marrying another. She is also unable to take responsibility for her feelings. The bride describes Leonardo's love as a power she could not get away from. If she really wanted to she could have resisted his advances. Because the mother was always in constant fear of her son's use of knives, his death actually frees her from this fear. This is the reason she tells her neighbor she can now sleep at night. It is ironic that death would bring about a peaceful sleep. The story ends just as it began - with a discussion about knives. Just as the mother said, knives are dangerous and ultimately killed her only living son. Just because something is small does not mean it cannot hurt you. Because the mother has spent the entire play consumed by the power of knives and the deaths of her family, she may have brought this tragedy to herself.

Characters

Beggar Woman

See Death, Old Woman

Bride

The Bride is the last of the major protagonists to be introduced in the play's first act. The order in which the major characters are introduced first the Bridegroom and Mother, then Leonardo, and then the Bride could indicate their degree of social power and instrumentality. Unlike Leonardo, for example, who has the freedom and mobility to instigate the action and tragedy, the Bride is a character who must wait at home for things to happen to her. The first thing that happens to her is that her hand in marriage is asked for. Her behavior during the betrothal meeting and her conversations with the Servant show her frustration over her lot and her relative disinterest in the Bridegroom. She will marry only to drive out the memory of Leonardo. However, she believes that she will one day come to love her husband, even if it is with a love less passionate than the love she has for Leonardo. In joining Leonardo in flight from the community, the Bride knows that she and her lover are doomed. Clearly, she is as passionate as he, and this rebellion and expression of her repressed desires is a release.

Bridegroom

Of the major characters in the play, the Bridegroom is perhaps the least compelling. Unlike Leonardo, the Bride, and the Mother, he is devoid of struggle and deep emotion. He is, rather, a straightforward and content young man. He works hard, he obeys his parents, and looks forward to his connection with the Bride with all the confidence of a groom who is convinced that he is making an excellent match.

Death

Death (also known as Beggar Woman and Old Woman) as a beggar woman is an outsider to the play's community who does not bother herself with the community's pain. On the contrary, she seems to enjoy the proceedings, and as Death she thirsts after every life with which she comes into contact. Her bloodthirstiness and emotional coldness suggest how death is thought of by mere mortals, who view its inevitability and demands as anathema to human wishes and hopes.

Father

The Father can be aligned with the Bridegroom and contrasted to the doubting and suspicious Mother. Like the Bridegroom, this patriarch is wholly oblivious to the fact that anything exists in his world to disturb its smooth workings. He seems convinced of his daughter's willingness to marry, and he seems to have wholly forgotten her earlier passion for Leonardo, if indeed he was ever aware of it at all. He does not notice, as does the Servant, that Leonardo is visiting his daughter. He thinks, instead, of how the ensuing match will enhance the already solid stature of the two families.

First Woodcutter

Like the young girls in the play, the Woodcutters function like a chorus, that is, characters who are peripheral to the main action but who comment on it. The woodcutters are appropriate characters with which to open the last act of the play. As men who cut down living trees, they foreshadow the deaths of the two young men. The First Woodcutter, like the Second Woodcutter, seems to sympathize with the lovers' passion and transgression. "You have to follow the path of your blood," he says of the lovers' rebellion.

Leonardo

Leonardo is the only character in Lorca's play who has a proper name. The other characters are designated according to their societal position or role. This indication of individuality suggests how he is the protagonist who disturbs the smooth social workings of his community. He asserts his own will against the rules of the community and brings tragedy upon all of the families to which he belongs or to which he is dramatically connected. He is driven by deep passion, as his furious travels by horse to and from the Bride's house demonstrate. Leonardo's fateful decision to deny the bonds of matrimony in favor of his abiding desire for the Bride occurs only when the Bride is certain to be married to another. This suggests the manner in which Leonardo's actions are motivated by possessiveness. As long as the Bride belongs to no other, Leonardo can tolerate their separation. While Leonardo's motivations are in certain respects selfish or possessive, and while he brings pain and suffering upon a number of persons, the play nevertheless generates a great deal of sympathy for his and the Bride's actions. The "doubleness" of Leonardo's character, that is, its attractiveness and its faults, suggests how there is a fine line between righteously asserting personal will and wrongful antisocial behavior.

Moon

The Moon (also known as Young Woodcutter) is personified and made into a character just as Death is. It appears as a young woodcutter with a white face. Like Death, the Moon appears to look forward to the culmination of events, the bloody conclusion to the

hunt for the fleeing lovers. The Moon enters the final act of the play craving tragedy as if tragedy were needed in order for its own life to be sustained. This suggests how tragedy is an unavoidable part of life; it is as likely as the moon in the sky. The Moon, accordingly, offers to flood the land brightly with its light so that the lovers will have no place to hide.

Mother

The Mother is the strongest presence in Lorca' s play. She senses and expresses the likelihood of the imminent tragedy, and she discourses freely on how things should be as opposed to how they often turn out. As a wife, mother, and widow who has trod the path of social respectability and duty, she has accrued the considerable social power available to women in her society. This power is clearly substantial even if it is less instrumental than that of men. For example, her influence over her son amounts to almost total control, and in this way women's indirect power over what happens outside of the home is evinced. Much is made of her stoic suffering in the play (suffering that occurs due to the deaths of loved ones). On the one had, her acceptance of life's freak injustices and her decision to suffer quietly is noble and supports the reader's sense of her considerable strength of character. However, insofar as her limited access to public life keeps her ignorant of the histories of the Bride and Leonardo, and insofar as she is alert and willing to dispense orders and advice, she might very well have been able to prevent this latest tragedy if she were not so closely tied to the private space of the home. As the play's references to the lives of married women suggest, women in this society are unduly kept from public affairs and spaces. The Mother's stoicism takes on a different meaning when these particular factors are considered. Clearly, the Mother embraces and supports the widely opposed roles given to men and women and the curtailing of her considerable powers that this entails. In this respect, her stoicism and sense of duty is like quietism, or the passive acceptance of things that can or should be changed.

Mother-in-Law

Leonardo's Mother-in-Law is known as a woman who was scorned by her husband. Her daughter is soon to suffer the same plight. This generational repetition creates a sense of inevitability in regards to these women's situation. It is as if there will always be those who are scorned. Indeed, the Mother-in-Law and Wife prepare for the Wife's imminent humiliation with a minimum of agitated bitterness and a maximum of sorrow and acceptance. The Mother-in-Law is companion and support to her daughter.

Neighbor

The Neighbor Woman provides important information for the audience; information that neither the Mother nor the Bridegroom can know if events are to have proceeded as far as they have when the play opens. Thus, a family outsider must appear in order for this

information to be presented. The neighbor's conversation with the Mother in the first act apprises the audience of the Bride's past connection with Leonardo, such that it also comes out that Leonardo is of the dreaded Felix family, members of which are responsible for the deaths of the Mother's husband and son. This information establishes, from the play's start, a sense of foreboding and imminent tragedy.

Old Woman

See Death, Beggar Woman

Second Woodcutter

The Second Woodcutter joins the First Woodcutter in sympathy for the fleeing lovers, saying that the community "ought to let them go." He vacillates as to the success of the lovers' escape attempt, saying at one moment that one never escapes payment for a transgression ("But blood that sees the light of day is drunk up by the earth."), and at another that they might just be able to avoid punishment ("There are many clouds and it would be easy for the moon not to come out").

Servant

The Bride's Servant is, in contrast to the Father, quite aware of what is happening in the Bride's house. Her exchanges with the Bride bring out the Bride's true feelings and frustrations. Throughout the play, the Servant attempts to rein in the Bride's feelings by instilling calm and caution in the young woman. Thus, for all of her enthusiastic participation in the wedding events, it is sensed that she is aware that things are not as they seem. She makes every effort to protect the Bride from herself and from Leonardo, begging Leonardo, at one point, to let the young woman alone: "Don't you come near her again."

Third Woodcutter

The Third Woodcutter is the least sympathetic to the lovers of the three, and he is no way convinced that they will succeed in escaping. His first words are: "They'll find them." His succeeding comments are equally blunt. For example, he states that "they'll kill them," and that when the "moon comes out they'll see them." Like Death as the beggar woman, he seems to look forward to a gruesome end to events.

Wife

Leonardo's Wife is clearly wronged by her husband's and the Bride's actions. Yet, there is little sympathy felt for this character. Her failure to win substantive sympathy is partly, at least, due to the degree to which she accepts, indeed almost expects, her fate. Yet,

her passivity is crucial for the overall sense of the play. Through this character the manner in which these women are largely dependent upon the actions of men for their happiness is made clear. Her passivity is a necessary feature for a play, which contains strong criticism regarding the lesser social freedoms of women at the time. Her passivity is therefore a symptom of a society in which women learn early and well, and better than men, how to curb their desires and wants.

Young Girls

Individual, paired, or groups of young girls appear at various points in *Blood Wedding*. Their function is usually to lyrically accompany or comment on action; like the woodcutters, then, they are like a chorus. For example, on the day of the wedding, girls enter and exit singing or chanting wedding songs and verses. This accompaniment helps to create the appropriate stately but festive wedding atmosphere. At the end of the play, two girls open the final scene winding a skein a red wool, which reminds the audience of blood. They sing of death but, later, they clearly do not have specific information about the wedding, the hunt, at its outcome. As characters within the events of the play, their actions and knowledge are realistic, but when they serve as figures who comment on action, they might be drawn outside of events so that they can be all-knowing commentators.

Young Men

The young men serve as counterparts to the young girls during the wedding scenes. These youths' function to represent the future of all young men just as the young girls exemplify the future of all young women. Interacting as they do on a wedding day, the play suggests how both the girls and these boys will, one day, marry themselves. Together, the young men and girls contribute to a sense of the unceasing cycles of life, in which marriage occurs as routinely as does birth and death.

Young Woodcutter

See The Moon

Themes

Death

There are two ways the theme of death is developed in this play. First, there is death as the end, and the enemy, of mortal life. Death as an inevitable end that must be accepted is developed through the character of the Mother, who often laments the deaths of loved ones, while stoically enduring these painful losses nevertheless. There is more to this first theme of death than death's inevitability, however. The passionate bond of the lovers gives shape to another aspect. Their bond represents human life in general as being characterized by our connections to others. Death, therefore, kills not only our physical body, it also puts an end to that which makes us human. In claiming a person' s life, Death sunders human bonds. Lorca introduces and develops this of death in the actions of his characters. For example, it is learned at the play's outset that the Mother's husband and one son were violently killed. One way the Mother mourns these events is by pointing to the fact that the killers reside seemingly content in jail. Not only do the killers escape real punishment, but she, the wholly innocent one, is the one being punished by having been deprived of her loved ones, and they, the loved ones, are being punished by having been deprived of their share of life. Death does not simply end life, it is anathema to it by destroying precious connections. Hence the play's characterization of death as a cruel and cold beggar woman who acts as the lovers' "enemy" by revealing their whereabouts to the hunters.

If death is anathema to life, then being deprived of a full life is like death-in-life. The theme of death-in-life is generally most closely associated with the female characters, although it is also closely associated with Leonardo and the Bride, in particular. It is linked to Leonardo and the Bride since, to them, not to be able to love each other is not to live fully. Hence, at the end of the play, both would prefer death than endure the death-in-life of separation. As the First Woodcutter says, "Better dead with the blood drained away than alive with it rotting." In terms of the female characters, the theme of death-in-life takes on broader connotations. Women as beings whose lives occur behind "thick walls" is underscored throughout the play. For example, at one point in the play, the Mother asks the Bride: "Do you know what it is to be married, child?" The Bride says she does but the Mother emphasizes her point anyway: "A man, some children, and a wall two yards thick for everything else." Their lives, in the private realm of the home, is like life within a thick-walled coffin. It is a death-in-life because these exaggerated limits on women's social roles prevents them from pursuing all of the joys and varieties life has to offer. The men come and go; but the women are mostly at home. While the women are depicted as having many responsibilities and solid social stature, they are nevertheless firmly excluded from deciding how the community is run and what its rules, laws, and traditions will be. The stark separation of male and female spheres no longer seems like fairly divided work when the differing nature of the work is considered. If women cannot contribute to making the rules, then the rules might not accommodate their needs. If their needs are not accommodated then they cannot live fully and must live a death-in-life.

The Individual versus Society

The theme of the individual versus society is central to *Blood Wedding*. Leonardo and the Bride find their respective social positions intolerable and rebel against their fates. They break the bonds of marriage and destroy the equilibrium of the community. The way the characters are named in Lorca's play reveals a great deal about how the playwright conceives this problem. With the exception of Leonardo, who instigates the disequilibrium, none of the characters are given proper names. Rather, they are designated according to their societal position or role. The Bride, therefore, is on her way to become a Wife or a Mother. The Bridegroom, besides being a son, is on his way to become a Husband or a Father. What this suggests is the manner in which, in some deep sense, there are no real individuals in societies, insofar as individualism entails total self-determination. In other words, to live in harmony with other humans, human beings in fact conform to a limited number of roles and possibilities that accord with the rules and agreements of social living and life. Hence, it is only Leonardo, who contests these rules, who can be individualized by being given a proper name. The play's development of this problem gives credence to those critics who see the play as a criticism of sectors of Spanish society unwilling to countenance change. These views will ring true as long as there is a need for persons to assert themselves against their society when its institutions or laws do not allow for the reasonable happiness and creativity of its members. Since the play generates sympathy for the passion of the lovers, it can be seen to generate sympathy for the forces of change.

Style

Setting

Lorca's stage directions indicate settings that are simple, stark, and highly symbolic. The play opens within the house of the Bridegroom in a room that is painted yellow. The Bridegroom will be associated with yellow throughout the play. This color symbolizes his wealth, since gold is yellow, and his vigor, since yellow is the color of wheat, from which bread, the food of life, comes. It also symbolizes his eventual death, since yellow is the color of his lips when he is dead at the play's end. Leonardo's and the Bride's homes, however, are characterized by the color pink, a variant on red which is the color of passion and of vibrant life (or blood). They are, certainly, the characters who are the most passionate in the drama. The final scene takes place in a stark white dwelling, as if to suggest a place bleached of life and hope. The stage directions say that the room's white lineaments should resemble the architecture of a church. A church is the place where the rituals of birth and death are routinely commemorated; hence, it is an appropriate place for the mother to learn of her last son's demise and to accept her future drained of happiness. In contrast to these dwellings, is the forest to which the lovers flee. The forest has long been that setting in literature where society's rules mutate, change, break down, or no longer apply. It is a wild place, beyond human-made, communal order. These lovers, clearly, cannot be together within their community, and so their only recourse is to attempt to escape its bounds. Their true home, in some sense, therefore, is this forest.

Modernism

The movement in the arts known as Modernism was an international, metropolitan set of movements. Impressionism and Dadaism in the arts, stream-of-consciousness techniques in the novel, and atonality in music are some of its central artistic movements and forms. It was announced very vigorously by Picasso's strange Cubist paintings, for example, that instead of painting people how they seemed in real life, painted them with three eyes, two heads (or one head seen from different perspectives), and so forth. Other modernist movements were Symbolism and Surrealism, to which Lorca was close. Lorca's play is a modernist play. Like Picasso's paintings, it departs from realism, or the highly naturalistic and realistic sets, plots, and action that dominate European and Spanish theater in the decades immediately preceding this set of movements. Lorca's modernism entails the attempt to return the "drama" to drama by making the theatrical event into a feast for the senses and the deepest emotions. The stark settings, the chanting, and the songs and music all contribute to an event which is designed to move an audience through all of the visual, aural, and dramatic means available to the dramatist.

Chorus

A chorus in a play is made up of a group of commentators, chanters, or singers not directly involved in the play's action. The chorus's role is either to comment on the action, to present the views of the community regarding the events, or, simply, to lyrically accompany action. Choruses of all of these types were common in Classical-age Greek plays. Lorca's play adapts from this tradition. A single girl, or a pair or groups of young girls, for example, will enter and circulate at various points, singing or chanting songs and commentary. In the final scene of the play, two young girls sing about how brief mortal life is and what might have happened at the wedding. Their contribution is primarily a lyrical accompaniment to the action, as the mother waits in fear to hear about the fate of her son.

Historical Context

A Nation Divided

Spain entered the twentieth century as a constitutional monarchy. The Spanish populace, however, had little faith in this regime as the country was hampered by persistent and grave economic instability. Clearly, a change in the political and economic order of things was necessary. Widely opposed forces vied for contention. In various parts of the country, where industrialization had taken place, workers determined to ensure their proper treatment and compensation and to enhance their social status. These groups were eager to see a left-wing, socialist government take the reins of Spain. These groups were forward-looking in cultural terms. A society still imbued with classist notions, for example, was not a society able to accommodate a new working and middle class made up of former peasants who would no longer tolerate the old class hierarchy. This old hierarchy heavily favored the aristocracy and educated classes. These new social groups were also staunchly anti-monarchical, and they were also secular in view. To the opposing groups of Spaniards, these forces of change represented a drastic and fearful break from centuries of tradition, whether in social, cultural, or political terms. These other groups wished to maintain a traditional class structure, the succession of kings and queens, and the Catholic Church as a centrally shaping social and educational force. Lorca was on the side of change. His relations with the left-wing government voted into power in 1931 were cordial. Its Minister of Education, Fernando de los Rios, funded the theater project of which Lorca was artistic director (the project was called La barraca).

The Democratic Republic versus The Dictatorship

The political scene in Spain was highly changeable during the late 1920s and early 1930s. A left-wing government, elected in 1931, was voted in again in 1936 after a brief return to a right-wing government in between. But Spain seemed determined to change, to try to negotiate the difficulties of modifying political and cultural institutions shaped for centuries by attitudes and beliefs no longer viable. This effort was effectively halted, however, as one of the leaders of Spain's traditionalist factions staged a coup d'etat, or overthrow of the government, in 1936. This army general, Francisco Franco, was funded by fellow European nationalist and fascist leaders Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. A bloody three-year civil war ensued, with the forces of Franco finally winning. As Lorca was clearly aligned with the forces of change, he was an obvious political target at the time. He declared his solidarity with workers and the republic on a number of public occasions. His murder was an act of terror, designed to quell the spirit of those who contested Franco's right to claim power by force instead of by election. The Civil War attracted a number of foreigners, both men and women alike, sympathetic to the Republic. In democratic regimes around the world, the Republican effort would come to be known as "The Good Fight."

Critical Overview

When Blood Wedding premiered in Madrid in 1933, Lorca was a celebrated poet. He had not yet had a major theatrical success. Blood Wedding changed this. On opening night, the Teatro Beatriz in Madrid was filled to capacity, and in the audience were Spain's leading intellectuals, artists, and critics. The play was an outstanding success. It was interrupted numerous times by extended applause, and the playwright was compelled to emerge twice during its course to take a bow for the wildly appreciative audience. The play was translated into English and staged in New York, in 1935, as Bitter Oleander. It made its way fairly quickly to France and Russia, as well. It found its greatest foreign audiences, however, in the Latin American countries, in Argentina in particular. Lorca traveled to the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires, in 1933, where he, his lectures and his plays were most favorably received.

Blood Wedding is certainly the most enduringly popular of Lorca's plays. It has long been considered to represent the maturing of Lorca's dramatic talent, along with the other plays of what is known as the "rural trilogy." Blood Wedding was the first of trilogy to be written, with Yerma following, and The House of Bemarda Alba completing the cycle. Candelas Newton, in Understanding Garcia Lorca, sums up this long-standing critical opinion: "The so-called rural trilogy ... has been traditionally appraised as the culmination of Lorca's dramatic production. Of the three rural tragedies, the last one written, The House of Bemarda Alba, is considered to represent the culmination of his talents, in that he relies less on poetry and poetic interludes to create his effects." These plays are seen to represent the maturing of Lorca's talents in the sense that before these three plays, he had written a number of more experimental pieces of drama. These shorter, experimental pieces do not make up all of his dramatic work before Blood Wedding, but they do characterize it. However, as Newton also points out, recent scholarly work is revising this traditional view of Lorca's work and career. The experimental pieces are now being reconsidered: "Regarding the more experimental plays, Lorca himself claimed them as his true voice. Although theater at the time may have been unprepared for such a different dramatic orientation as those plays represent, they are presently achieving increasing recognition in critical studies and stage performance."

The critical literature on Lorca's work is vast, and approaches to Blood Wedding are various. However, all of these studies, in some way, examine and analyze the formal and thematic elements of the work. Formal approaches explore Lorca's dramatic techniques, such as his incorporation of chant, song, and poetry. According to Gwynne Edwards in Dramatists in Perspective: Spanish Theater in the Twentieth Century, Lorca's "fondness for [the] integration of different art forms" stems from his reverence for Symbolist theater. This Symbolist movement, along with Surrealism, Edwards states, are the contemporaneous modernist movements to which Lorca was closest (many of his experimental works are surrealistic). Other critics, such as Herbert Ramsden in his book Bodas de Sangre, mine the rich field of imagery and symbolism in Lorca's play. Ramsden, as do many other critics, points out that Lorca is, above all, a poet "of the concrete." "Thus," says Ramsden, "instead of referring to death as an abstraction,

Garcia Lorca evokes a death scene." Lorca's characters do not talk about death, rather, their words conjure up the very vision of one dead. Or, death appears in the play as an actual character. This avoidance of abstraction and this reliance on the concrete, highly visual image, is part of what Lorca derives from the Symbolist poets and dramatists he so avidly read. Other studies of Blood Wedding focus on the play's various themes, such as passion, fate, or death. Gwynne Edward's book, *Lorca: The Theater Beneath the Sand*, contains a lengthy chapter on the drama's major themes.

Other approaches to *Blood Wedding* focus on its literary antecedents and influences, whether in Greek tragedy, classical Spanish theater, or contemporaneous developments in theater. These studies often remark on Lorca's reputation as a thoroughly Spanish poet and dramatist, in the sense that his style and subject matter seem to draw heavily from indigenous traditions and mores. These studies, however, must reconcile *Lorca's* closeness to broad European trends in the arts. In the introduction to *Lorca*: *A Collection of Critical Essays*, Manuel Duran captures this doubleness: "Symbol of Spain and of all thing Spanish, compared to Lope de Vega by Damson Alonso because of his direct and profound understanding of the popular idiom, acclaimed outside Spain and in his own country as the embodiment of the Spanish spirit, he nevertheless could state a few days before his death he was "a brother of all men" and that he detested the Spaniard who was only a Spaniard." Lorca's art, thus, is seen to fuse the "popular idiom" and contemporaneous developments in the arts. According to Duran, Lorca's "task was to assimilate [the new] movements without destroying the Spanish tradition, or rather to assimilate them in a way that would allow this tradition to make itself felt again, to acquire a new vitality."

Most critics also draw links between Lorca's political sympathies and the play's subject matter. Spain was not, during the 1920s and 1930s, a country in which a citizen did not know his or her political mind. Lorca, in this respect, was staunchly on the side of Republicanism, and deeply committed to policies which would improve the lot of the country's poorest citizens. Lorca's adoption of the "popular idiom," and of folklore and legend, takes on a political significance in this light. It announces his belief that the culture which arises from a country's people is as rich as any culture produced by an educated elite.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
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Critical Essay #1

Carol Dell'Amico is a Ph.D. candidate in the Program of Literatures in English at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. In the following essay, Dell'Amico examines how Garcia Lorca's story celebrates community, social life and living, at the same time that it points to the necessity of rebellion in situations where social laws and mores are oppressive or unduly limiting. Carol Dell'Amico teaches English at Rutgers, the state university of New Jersey.

One of Federico Garcia Lorca's most notable features is how his protagonists are named. With the exception of Leonardo, the characters are designated according to their societal position or role; hence, there is a Mother, a Father, a Bridegroom, and so forth. This particular practice of naming de-individualizes his protagonists. They are made to seem less important as individuals than as social beings. This technique suggests that the play advocates the appropriateness and inevitability of communal, social life. Yet, troubling the stability of this theme is the naming of the Bride's lover, Leonardo. In choosing to individualize a single character in this way, the play advances the possibility that social customs, and the conformity they require, might be a problem. Clearly, the reader is to sympathize with Leonardo's rebellion and the lovers' desire to be together. The play thus poses the following questions: Is it ever appropriate to break social laws? Are such acts always destructive and antisocial? This essay examines these problems of social life and an individual's transgression of social mores.

The play's simultaneous celebration and criticism of social life and conformity finds expression in its presentation of two different types of communality, one that is rendered in an attractive light, and another that seems ominous or oppressive. The first type is a development of human sociality as part of what is beautiful about life on earth, and the other type points to a variety of social conformity that is like ethical quietism, or the refusal to stand up to laws and beliefs that are repressive or oppressive.

The idea that human life is governed by certain perennial institutionalized routines that are wondrous, simply because they define an unchanging aspect of human life, is consistently developed throughout the play. For example, in including only a single "Mother" character, a single "Father" character, and a single "Mother-in-law" character, and so on, the play likens the broad community within the play to a single family. The family, whether in its extended or more limited, contemporary guises and arrangements, is still and always has been a universal human institution. It is an institution in which each member is supposed to be succored and protected by the others. Likening the play's society to a family thus suggests its naturalness, inevitability, and the manner in which social life is designed to ensure the well-being of each of its members. Individuals wither, left to their own, lonely devices, the play suggests, and a person is only healthy and happy when he or she is a part of different communities and groups.

This idea of the wondrousness of human sociality is also imparted by the play's theme of social life as that which is utterly natural in an organic sense, as natural as the growing of trees or the falling of rain. This sense of the naturalness of human

interdependence is effected through the drama's linking of humans to things in nature, in conjunction with its focus on the community's closeness to the land. For instance, the Mother refers to her (now dead) husband as a "carnation," and to this husband and a son together as "beautiful flowers." In another of her expressions, men in general are linked to, indeed considered indistinguishable from, "wheat": "Men, men; wheat, wheat," she says. These simple and earthy metaphors for human beings gain full significance once they are considered against the play's rural backdrop. The community's wealth and stability derive, clearly, from the agricultural potential of the land. This land the men work diligently. A small plot of land not owned by either of these families permanently divides the properties belonging to the families of the Bride and Bridegroom, who should never have married. This detail suggests that even the land, or the earth itself, decrees that the union should not take place. If it were meant to take place, then their properties would not be divided. The play, in this way, imparts the sense that the rhythms, bounties, and terrain of the earth itself determine the rhythm and shape of these peoples' lives. Since their lives reflect the very structures of the earth, and since metaphors consistently render the characters indistinguishable form things springing from the earth (flowers, wheat), the play succeeds in suggesting that this community gains its salient and central traditions based on the authority of the universe itself. The community and how it lives are utterly natural events; human community is as beautiful and inevitable as carnations or wheat. While communal social life clearly is sanctioned and celebrated by the play, other elements point to the necessity of rebelling against social roles and rules. If such rebellion brings about tragedy within a community, this is understood to occur only because a community has developed in ways that thwart the otherwise reasonable inclinations of its members. This idea comes about through the story of the lovers, the Bride and Leonardo.

The circumstances that pertain to the original relationship between the lovers are shrouded in mystery. It is never known why the Bride and Leonardo never married. Regardless, what is significant about the action of the play is that the Bride and Leonardo desire each other above all others, and find themselves enchained in arrangements neither can tolerate. Leonardo's dismissive behavior towards his wife, and his mother-in-law's history, tell the reader a great deal about such arrangements. Like her mother before her, Leonardo's wife is a scorned woman, a woman never truly loved by her husband: "One thing I do know. I'm already cast off by you. But I have a son. And another coming. And so it goes. My mother's fate was the same." Both Leonardo's wife and her mother, then, endure marriages and lives in which they must suffer a certain degree of humiliation and frustration. Unloved and not being able to love, they are nevertheless bound within marriages they cannot escape. As frustrating as Leonardo's wife's situation is, so is the Bride's, before she escapes and enjoys, however briefly, some satisfaction of her true desires. When the Mother and Bridegroom leave her house after the betrothal meeting, she expresses her sense of her intolerable social limitations to the Servant. When the Servant playfully asks to see the Bride's betrothal presents, the young woman cannot bring herself to be obliging. It is clear that the thought of her impending marriage is torture. Her mood is foul, and so she shakes off the Servant's kind hands violently. Her violence is so extreme that the woman exclaims over her strength: "You're stronger than a man." To this, the Bride replies: "Haven't I done a man's work? I wish I were." For this young woman to wish she were a

man suggests the problematic extent of her social limitations, limitations which derive from her status and gender. As an unmarried young woman, she can in no way consider leaving her father's house to seek, for instance, forgetfulness in a new life in some town or city far away. She is bound by the rules of decency to remain in her childhood home until she moves to the home of a husband. There is never to be any independence for her; she always must be under the close protection of a man. Related to these limitations are the indignities suffered by Leonardo's wife in a world in which flight from the bonds of marriage, or separation or divorce, are unthinkable and profoundly shameful acts. This gallery of thwarted female characters tells the story of Catholic Spain in Lorca's time. Divorce was simply not an option; it was not legal.

The depth of the lovers' passion for each other suggests the degree to which it is an authentic problem, and not merely unthinking or selfish willfulness of a destructive or antisocial nature. The lovers are like the famous Shakespearean literary pair, Romeo and Juliet. Their rebellion, like Romeo and Juliet's, is the sincere rebellion of individuals who must step outside of their socially designated roles and assert their individual wills. Romeo and Juliet's rebellion teaches their respective families the folly of their continued mutual hatred. The particular rebellion recounted in Lorca' s play, however, signified to many of Lorca's audiences the playwright's criticism of socially conservative Spain. His conservative detractors saw in his presentation of the Bride's sullenness and depression an implicit feminist plea to allow women to become more independent. They saw in his treatment of the passive and downtrodden wife of Leonardo a plea for divorce legislation. These conservative groups in Spanish society were outraged by such intimations of change, and this outrage fueled, in part, the events that led to Lorca's murder by right-wing sympathizers in 1936.

Meditation on social living and individuality suggests that while the play celebrates the fact of each person's dependence and indebtedness to others and to shared rules, these obligations can only be demanded by a society whose rules are just. Thus, if Leonardo is given a proper name, and in this way is set apart from his community, he is set apart and acts in order to effect the greater social good. Blood Wedding reminds its readers that while social living is natural, it is still made up of laws, mores, and regulations that are made and shaped by human beings. When these laws become oppressive, they must be contested so that they will be changed.

Source: *Carol Dell'Amico, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale, 2001.*

Critical Essay #2

Roberto Cantu is a Professor at California State University, Los Angeles. In the following essay he examines the structure o/The Blood Wedding with regard to its formal aspects associated with tragedy of the Spanish Golden Age.

Originally set in southern Spain, Bodas de sangre/Blood Wedding (1933) dramatizes a bride's ambivalence between a marriage sanctioned by society because it promises upward mobility, and the inward calling of a true love bound by the forces of fate. Lorca scholars have interpreted the play's theme of a love triangle as an allegory of Spain's modernization and the cultural crisis manifested prior to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), ominously anticipated in this drama of family murders and forbidden love. Viewed from a different perspective, the play's mythical cluster represented by the Moon, a Horse, and Death, unveils a symbolic dimension of madness, lustful passion, and the price paid when social conventions and family interests are not obeyed. Scholarly interpretations aside, you will note that the title of Lorca's drama plays on the ironic meaning of "blood weddings," on the one hand as a violent aftermath (i.e., the death of the bridegroom after the wedding) and, on the other, as the true "blood" marriage in the play, namely: that between the bride and Leonardo. After their elopement, the Moon declares: "You must follow your heart. They did well to run away. They had been lying to each other. But in the end, blood was stronger!" Blood Wedding is thus structured according to formal aspects associated with tragedy of the Spanish Golden Age and classically manifested in a protagonist's difficult and often destructive choice, followed by a change from ignorance to self-knowledge.

Margarita Galban's adaptation divides the play in two acts (as opposed to the original three), and allows Death and the Moon to intervene throughout the play, consequently intensifying the sequential and conflicting elements of the plot while creating a tragic subtext written in the language of maternal premonitions, symbolic pagan features and sacramental allusions. For instance, the opening scene begins with the bridegroom leaving home to work in the vineyard, considering grapes as sufficient breakfast; a reference to a work knife elicits in the mother a series of associations with violent weapons and the memories of two murders: her husband and her first-born son. The mother's language of mourning conjoins her erotic memories; when referring to her dead husband, she states: "To me he smelled like carnations, and I enjoyed him only three short years. How can it be that something as small as a pistol or a knife can destroy a man who is like a bull? I'll never be quiet." Later she will tell her son about his grandfather: "That's good stock, good blood! Your grandfather left a son on every corner. That I like-men that are men, wheat that is wheat." The theme of grapes and wine-central to the ancient worship of Dionysus and to Christ's Passion-thus frame a story of Nature's fertility and of man's alienation, hence the tendency towards self-destruction and misguided affections.

Desirous to change the subject, the son reminds his mother about his fiancee and his forthcoming marriage; the mother, not one to be discouraged, feels a stronger premonition: "every time I mention her, I feel as if I' d been struck on the forehead with a

rock." Reassured by her son that his fiancee is a good person in spite of having been in love with a previous boyfriend ("Girls have to look carefully at who they are going to marry," he argues), the mother reluctantly accepts to ask for the girl on his son's behalf. In the second scene, the mother learns through a neighbor that the fiancee's past boyfriend Leonardo Felix, now married to the fiancee's cousin belongs to the family who killed her husband and first-born son. A dramatic pattern of doubles begins to surface with the theme of unhappy marriages: the fiancee's mother is said to have been beautiful, but not in love with her husband, hence the tacit connection to her daughter's fate. In subsequent scenes, Leonardo's growing detachment from his wife will find expression in the obsessive galloping to and from the future bride's home. In acts that mirror each other, Leonardo denies his nocturnal wanderings when asked by his wife, while the former girlfriend also insists in denying Leonardo's nightly visits. But by the end of the first act, both Leonardo and the bride admit to the fatality of their attraction. From this point in the drama, a series of fast-paced actions will reveal that the mother's premonitions were justified.

At the core of the unhappiness is family wealth. Indeed, the only available ladder to social climbing in this pastoral setting appears to be a "good" marriage. You will note, for instance, that the play sketches a triple-tiered agrarian hierarchy composed of landed gentry whose domains include fertile vineyards (e.g., the mother and the bridegroom); secondly, there are small ranchers who own sterile plains (e.g., the father, the bride); lastly, the landless peasantry (e.g., Leonardo Felix) are found at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. Once grasped, this problematic generates a story that unfolds as follows: although in love with Leonardo, the bride soon looks to the play's bridegroom as a better suitor because of his economic standing (he has recently enlarged his inheritance with yet more vineyards). In addition, we learn that bride and bridegroom have been in courtship for three years, and that Leonardo married the bride's cousin two years back, consequently there is an overlapping year that suggests a period of ambivalence and contradictions in the soul of the bride. Should she marry into poverty or into wealth? On the morning of her wedding, Leonardo addresses the bride and, oblivious to the situation, speaks reproachfully: "Tell me, what have I ever been to you? Look back and refresh your memory! Two oxen and a tumbledown hut are almost nothing. That's what hurts."

And yet it is more than just poverty that afflicts Leonardo, for he represents the stereotype of the "impractical" Gypsy who wastes his life on errands and illusions. When asked by the bridegroom why they don't buy land, Leonardo's wife responds: "We don't have any money. And the way things are going.. .[Leonardo] likes to move around too much. He goes from one thing to another. He's very restless." But this restlessness is also felt by the bride, who approaches the altar with last-minute doubts. It is at this point, as well, that Lorca's dramatic art effectively sketches the onset of complications and obstacles that Leonardo and the bride must face and resolve. Since the choice rests on the protagonist, the moral trajectory of the play is thus embodied in the bride who must choose between two men. And her choice will cause destruction but, in the process, will also resolve the play's major conflict: marry for love or for wealth. Unexpectedly, the bride undergoes two weddings, one traditional, and the second by elopement-with both resulting in the violent death of her two suitors. When Leonardo's

wife discovers the elopement, major changes occur in three characters: the bridegroom, the mother, and the bride. The first two characters change from peace-loving social stereotypes (as has often been observed, only Leonardo has a first name) into revenge-seeking characters who are moved by a sense of honor. On the other hand, the bride far from offending her audience with a husband's betrayal-soon reaches tragic proportions, first through the nature of her frailty (her own tragic flaw) and, secondly, because her subsequent suffering far exceeds the expected punishment. She is both a virgin and a widow on the day of her wedding, which also coincides with the day of her twenty-second birthday.

Let's recall that the play opens with Death singing a brief "overture," with references to the Moon in a language of contradiction: the Moon "lewdly, purely" "bares her breasts of solid steel," followed by references to Spain's Gypsies and to a Moon-gazing child. The poetic diction of this overture gives expression to an ambivalent motherhood that borders on transgression (lewd, but pure), and contextualizes the inner exile symbolized by the Gypsies, thus challenging our understanding of the play's Romantic theme, namely: the cosmic madness and the lust that consume lovers when Fate binds their destinies. Next to the language of motherhood that strongly characterizes Lorca's Yerma (1934), and to the despair that leads to suicide in the play La casa de Bernarda Alba (1936), Blood Wedding has instances of rhetorical expressions that construct a female sexuality and eroticism that are not necessarily limited to motherhood nor to an eagerness to leave an oppressive maternal household. When Leonardo appears on the morning of the wedding, the bride admits the profundity of her attraction: "I can't listen to you! I can't listen to your voice! It's as if I drank a bottle of anisette and fell asleep on a quilt of roses. And it draws me under, and I know I'm drowning, but I follow."

This attraction, governed by Fate, constitutes the heroine's moral flaw and the cause of her widowhood. The conclusion of the play discloses how importantly dramatic are the mother and the bride, for both mourn the men they loved. And although the mother's role continues to be fundamental to the play's success (and brilliantly acted by Margarita Lamas), as a character she will be overshadowed by the bride, thanks to the courage and honesty of her appeal. In an unexpected turn, Lorca transcends the sexual and erotic levels so as to reach the moral plane that best fits a tragedy. In a moment of dramatic eloquence and convincing dialogue, the mother and bride confront each other; admittedly, we are left with the impression that the latter wins the argument. Again, the moral victory is made with a language that the mother understands: the language of desire voiced in the condition of widowhood: "Because I ran away with another man, I ran away! You would have gone, too! I was a woman consumed by fire, covered with open sores inside and out, and your son was a little bit of water from whom I hoped for children, land, health! But the other was a dark river filled with branches that brought close to me the whisper of its rushes and its murmuring song . . .Your son was what I wanted, and I have not deceived him. But the arm of the other dragged me-like the surge of the sea, like a mule butting me with his head-and would have dragged me always, always, always! Even if I were old and all the sons of your son held me by the hair!"

The resolution of the conflict in Bodas de sangre ends all complications and closes with an irony: in the opening scene, the mother tells her son that she wishes he had been born a girl. At the conclusion of the play, the mother mourns the death of her son, but has gained a daughter: the daughter-in-law. Listen to the concluding lines and you will hear the same song in the lips of the mother and bride-at this point easily understood as a leitmotiv that opens and closes the play speaking against weapons that cut lives before their time.

Source: *Roberto Cantii, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale, 2001.*

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Molarsky provides an overview of the countries that performed Lorca's plays for his 700'* birthday commemoration.

A spate of international productions serve up the passionate depths of Garcia Lorca's plays.

Three days before opening night, New York's Gramercy Park Theater is dark inside. It's so black you have to feel your way down the aisle. Then a soft, dream-like spot appears upstage left and gradually brightens.

"A little more, just a little more!" calls director Rene Buch from the depths of the balcony. "Yes. Perfect. Que bonita!" he laughs, shifting into Spanish. A young man walks downstage, draped in white chiffon. "Do you like it, Flor?" he asks Buch, doing a slow turn. "No. No quiero! It looks like Carole Lombard," Buch complains to the costume designer. In a minute she's up on stage, snipping and pinning the fabric.

Tonight is the pre-dress rehearsal for a long-overdue New York premiere. Written in 1930 by Spanish poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, El Publico has had to wait almost 70 years to get produced in the same city where it was conceived. Dubbed by Lorca his "impossible theatre" because of its technical difficulties and then-taboo theme homosexual love El Publico "disappeared" after Lorca's 1936 execution by Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. When it reemerged, 20 years later, the play stayed unperformed for another whole decade. El Publico has since been published, translated and performed numerous times, but never until now, that is in New York. This year, to honor the 100th anniversary of Lorca's birth, Buch, and the company of which he is artistic director, Repertorio Espanol, is producing the still-subversive play.

Lorca has been a mainstay at Repertorio, which over the last 30 years has produced all his major works, including Blood Wedding, Yerma and The House of Bemarda Alba, his three tragedies set in the Spanish countryside. Staging El Publico is clearly an act of love for the company and a way for it to be judged in the international arena during Lorca's centennial year.

Throughout the world, from Buenos Aires to Tokyo, theatre groups are mounting tributes to the playwright, who was born in on June 5, 1898, in Granada. Every one of his 15 plays is currently in production somewhere including Madrid, Brussels, Havana, Cairo, Lyon, Moscow and New York, among other cities. Even his lesser-known plays the comedies, tragicomedies, puppet shows, and "experimental" works like El Publico are finally getting the attention they deserve.

This year, Spain alone is hosting a vast array of events to commemorate Lorca, who remained censored there from the Civil War until Franco's death in 1975. There are festivals, poetry readings, dance performances, concerts, exhibitions and lectures dedicated to Lorca, offering the chance to see unusual productions like Lorca's short,

experimental piece Buster Keaton's Bike Ride in Barcelona. In the spirit of La Barraca, Lorca's traveling theatre group that brought classics to the poor during the early ' 30s, several companies are now touring rural Spain. An unprecedented number of puppet productions are scheduled, too. Lorca was fond of puppetry and wrote several puppet plays, including The Billyclub Puppets and The Puppet Play of Don Cristobal.

Lorca's work has long been venerated in the Spanish-speaking world. As Buch puts it, "When he published his poems, The Gypsy Ballads, in 1928, he became a torero, a bullfighter. Everyone in Spain knew his poems and quoted them." At this time, as Lorca was being hailed "the people's poet," he was also working on various experimental theatre projects, plans for a traveling puppet troupe and an avant-garde magazine. His friends and artistic collaborators included painter Salvador Dali, filmmaker Luis Bunuel and composer Manuel de Falla. In 1930, Picasso designed the costumes for Lorca's comedy The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife, which premiered in Madrid with Spanish star Margarita Xirgu in the lead role. By 1933, when he arrived in Buenos Aires, where Blood Wedding was a hit, Lorca had become a celebrity in Latin America as well. He remains beloved there to this day.

But Lorca in translation is another matter entirely. In 1935, the same year that Waiting for Lefty catapulted Clifford Odets to fame, Blood Wedding opened at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse to bemused reviews. What could Americans make of a play that included among its characters the Moon, personified as a woodcutter, and Death as a beggar? Plain-talking actors from the land of Jimmy Stewart found themselves speaking lines like "with a knife/ with a tiny knife/that barely fits the hand/but that slides in clean/through the astonished flesh."

In the six decades since, Lorca has never become a staple of the American theatre, but south of our border and in much of Europe, he's mentioned in the same breath as Synge, Brecht, Pirandello and Genet. Some American directors have been frightened off by supposedly difficult works like El Publico, and translation problems have dogged his plays. One critic, reviewing Ted Hughes's version of Blood Wedding in London two years ago, said, "Its poetry at once flinty and florid is damnably hard to make work in English."

But Lorca's troubled relationship with Anglos involves more than just language. The author, whose American visit in 1929 compelled him to write Poet in New York, a book containing poems like "Landscape of the Vomiting Multitudes," has an emotional temperature many on these shores find unnerving. Once famous for declaiming his writings at the drop of a hat, Lorca is vibrantly theatrical and emotional to the core. What might read like "The Surrealist Manifesto" on paper reveals a potently visceral force on stage.

That much was clear when I returned to Repettorio on opening night. From the first moment when veteran actor Ricardo Barber made his entrance down the center aisle, the house was spellbound. A ghostly light, the sound of whispers and wind blowing - little in the way of costumes or sets was necessary. Director Buch had stripped El Publico down to its essentials actors on a stage, engaged in wild, intense, free-flowing

dialogue. The play, like so much of Lorca, attacks the conventions of theatre and gender, arguing for a more flexible, profound reality. Early on, two men fall into a lover's quarrel:

A: If I turned into a cloud?

B: I'd turn into an eye.

A: If I turned into caca?

B: I'd turn into a fly.

A: If I turned into an apple?

B: I'd turn into a kiss.

A: If I turned into a breast?

B: I'd turn into a white sheet.

A: And if I turned into a moonfish?

B: I'd turn into a knife.

Actors Edward Nurquez-Bon and Chaz Mena batted the images back and forth as if they were so many humorous little insults. Their grace and inimitable timing had the audience roaring. Deep in this modernist text, Repertorio Espanol has located Lorca's soul, subversive and passionate as ever.

Source: *Mona Molarsky, "A Feast of Lorca," in American Theatre, Vol. 15, No. 6, July-August, 1998, p. 52.*

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Zimbardo analyzes the symbolic imagery and its relationship to the characters.

Lorca's *Blood Wedding* enjoys a curiously paradoxical fame. Critics are unanimous in praising it, both as an expression of Lorca's best mode, his "Andalusian vision" and as one of the finest products of that twentieth century movement in drama which tries to find new roots in the elemental soil. Yet the praise itself is damning, for we have been led to think of Lorca's plays as "peasant drama," so Spanish in their symbolism as to be incomprehensible beyond the locale which inspired them. For example, in the judgment of Angel del Rio, *Blood Wedding* "may very well miss becoming a world classic because of its local color and the fact that its action seems limited and appears to lack real spiritual content... a great deal of its atmosphere can be communicated only to a Spanish-speaking public steeped in Spanish artistic traditions." This perception of the play not only confines it to the Spanish speaking world, but suggests that its atmosphere is its crucial ingredient. Elemental emotion, or atmosphere, is thought to constitute the very meaning of *Blood Wedding*. "Sensuality, hatred, love and tragic destiny bringing with it a bloody and violent death are the central themes of this play." Moreover, the confusion of the atmosphere with theme, unfortunately suggesting melodrama, extends even to close critical interpretation. Campbell, for example, in discussing the lullaby of Act I asserts in one breath that it is evocative and meaningless: "though it means little enough, yet [it] suggests ... terror and tragedy," or again, "In spite of its lack of meaning, this 'nonsense rhyme' creates the same ominous atmosphere as the nonsense of Edgar in *Lear*." Our response to *Blood Wedding* is generally to praise its elemental power and then refuse to take it seriously.

Lorca's drama is not "peasant drama" if we mean to imply by that description either parochiality or mindless simplicity. It is elemental in the way ancient drama is elemental; its symbolism operates in much the same way as that of Aeschylus. Although Lorca reaches for his imagery into the depths of Spanish consciousness, the images emerge beyond Spanishness as symbols universal in the Western tradition. The bull as a symbol of fertility, or the moon as a symbol of the changing aspects of the life-force (now a wedding moon, now a moon of death) are, after all Greek and, beyond Greek, universal. Moreover, powerful as Lorca's imagery is, it does not exist for its own sake. Its function is not sensational; it is not "delightful gibberish." Rather it operates within the most formal of dramatic structures to figure the archetypal pattern of tragedy, or, to be more precise of ur-tragedy, for Lorca is in this play shaping the elemental conflict in human nature out of which the vision of tragedy arises. *Blood Wedding* is not merely about a wedding but about the wedding in the blood of the antagonistic forces that together compromise the paradoxical human condition. The play envisions this war in the blood on many levels. It is the conflict between physical nature, in whose hands man is merely an instrument for creating new life, and individual will, which asserts the value of itself. It is the antagonism between the tribal self and the individual self. And ultimately it is the cosmic struggle between community of the species, which insures endless life, and individuation, which insures endless death. The theme of this play is

not its atmosphere, but its ritual enactment of the wedding in man's blood of his divided human nature. It structures a vision of the fractured whole that Lorca once suggested in the image of a pomegranate:

The pomegranate is the pre-history

Of our own blood. So gashed apart

Its bitter globe reveals the mystery

Both of a skull and of a heart...

Cancion Oriental

The governing metaphor of *Blood Wedding* is an extended allusion to a ritual enactment that, like the play itself, is elemental in Spanish consciousness but reaches beyond nationality toward archetype: the bull fight. The mother tells the Bridegroom that he, like his father before him, is a bull-man, and she calls the Felix family matadors. The wedding of the Bride and Bridegroom arises, as the handmaidens sing, "like a bull," a bull that is destined to be destroyed by the matador, Leonardo. If we pursue this figure we find that it leads to the central thematic pattern of the play. The bull, here as in ancient thought, embodies the principle of natural order. It symbolizes human fertility *within* a natural cycle of fertility. Those characters who are associated with the bull have no individual identity. They *are* that which their position within the cycle of fertility demands "the Mother," "the Son," "the Bride's father." The matadors, on the other hand, do have individual identity; they are the Felix family, their name expressing the irony of their destinies. Leonardo Felix, still more precisely identified, is the matador, a solitary figure who is the antagonist of the natural order, or the individuating principle in human consciousness. At the moment of truth the matador confronts nature, challenges it with his singularity, defines his man-ness in resisting, rather than in cooperating with it. Yet his very individuation contains death. Like the bull fight to which it alludes, Lorca' s play imitates the elemental conflict in man's nature.

The design of the play is tri-partite; its structure rests on the three points that define the arc of life; the promise of birth, the fulfillment of sexuality and the limitation of death. The opening movement is dominated by the tribal theme. It promises the rebirth of nature in the movement toward the wedding. It looks toward the union of the Bride and Bridegroom within the communion of nature. The zenith of the arc, the center of the play's structure, is the wedding feast itself. Here two men contend for the Bride, a vessel that contains the potentiality both for life and death. The Bridegroom offers her the fulfillment of her tribal destiny, peace and fertility within nature. Leonardo offers separation from the tribe and the fulfillment of her individual destiny, an individuation that contains death. If we consider this configuration mythically we find that the Bride has associations with the triple goddess in her aspect of "the divine maiden" who embraces the whole of the life force and who is therefore potentially both the giver and destroyer of life. The twin males who vie for her are the summer king the Bridegroom descendant of bulls and the winter king Leonardo, the horse whose hooves are frozen.

The goddess in turn cooperates with one against the other. The last movement which completes the design of the play and the arc it traces is the ritual sacrifices, the triumph of death over life, of winter over summer, of barrenness over fertility.

Act I, the movement toward the wedding, or rebirth in union, shapes the tribal theme. Interestingly, its structure expresses tribal truth, for scenes land 3 (dominated by the Mother and the Bride's father who hope for renewal of life in the land and in human beings) surround Scene 2 (which is dominated by Leonardo). In this first movement the tribe contains, or embraces, the urge toward separation. The play begins, as the arc begins, with the Mother. Her son, the Bridegroom, has been born from the union of the Earth mother and the rain god themselves. The Mother cannot differentiate human nature from all of nature. She is Demeter herself, a stalk of wheat the sign of her power. In the past, the time of her own fertility, she looked only to her husband, who was a planter of trees.

Your father, he used to take me. That's the way with men of good stock; good blood. Your grandfather left a son in every corner. That's what I like. Men, men; wheat, wheat.

In the present she lives only in her son and the hope of renewal in his fertility.

Half of the Bride's nature descends from this same drive toward fertility. Her father, like the bridegroom's mother, urges the communion of nature and looks to the renewal of life in his daughter.

FATHER: If we could just take twenty teams of oxen and move your vineyards over here, and put them down on that hillside, how happy I'd be!

MOTHER: But why?

FATHER: What's mine is hers and what's yours is his. That's why. Just to see it all together. How beautiful it is to bring things together.

The time of his fertility, like that of the Mother's, was cut short. He too was undone by the death-dealing Felix family, but death came to him in the barren lovelessness of his wife and his land.

BRIDEGROOM: This is the wasteland.

MOTHER: Your father would have covered it with trees.

BRIDEGROOM: Without water?

MOTHER: He would have found some. In the three years we were married he planted ten cherry trees. Those three walnut trees by the mill, a whole vineyard and a plant called Jupiter which had scarlet flowers but it dried up.

The Bride's father was prevented from being such a planter of trees by the resistance of the soil, the matter in which he had to work.

FATHER: When I was young this land didn't even grow hemp. We've had to punish it, even weep over it, to make it give us anything useful.

As resistant as his barren earth, was his frozen wife, a Felix who "didn't love her husband" and who also had to be tortured to bring forth anything useful. The Bride carries within her the twin nature, her mother's barren, resistant Felix blood, as well as her father's will to bring life.

Act I, Scene 2, contained in the center of a promise for life, centers on Leonardo Felix. As the bridegroom and his father are bulls, Leonardo is the "snow-wounded" horse, more specifically the horse who "won't drink from the stream." The bridegroom' s father watered the land and drew forth its life, and the bride's father wept over it to pierce its barrenness, but Leonardo refuses to drink from the stream of life, the stream of birth, begetting, death and rebirth. In Mariana Lorca says of water,

For some good reason Jesus

Realized himself in water

For some good reason Venus

In its breast was engendered.

The stream of life for Leonardo are his wife and son, the tribal promise of immortality, but he turns away from them in pursuit of personal passion. He is Felix because he wants his own happiness, his own desire and it is this that threatens communion, the harmony in nature that the bridegroom promises. The ballad of the horse, which Campbell says is meaningless, contains the whole idea of Leonardo, the principle of individuation so crucial to the theme. The horse is wounded by winter, the death of nature; his hooves and mane are frozen because he will not be reborn in the stream of life. Moreover we are made to understand why he cannot drink: "deep in his eyes stuck a silvery dagger." Leonardo, the horse, cannot look outward to the harmonious whole; he can only look inward to the self. The horse must die in his own blood because he will not be reborn in the stream of life.

In Act II, the climax of the play, as it is the zenith of the arc that the play describes, the "wedding," or warring, in the blood, is presented emblematically. Here summer and winter, life and death, contend for the possession of nature. The forces of life, represented by the bride's father and the bridegroom's mother, urge the triumph of the Bridegroom. They look to the fertility of man ("My daughter is wide-hipped and your son is strong") within the fertility of nature, for they are concerned with the work of promoting life.

This land needs hands that aren't hired. There's a battle to be waged against weeds, the thistles, the big rocks that come from one doesn't know where. And those hands have to be the owner's, who chastises and dominates, who makes the seeds grow. Lots of sons are needed.

The Bridegroom promises not only the vertical union of man with nature but the horizontal union of man with man. His heritage is the whole network of the tribe.

MOTHER: Whole branches of families came.

BRIDEGROOM: People who never went out of the house.

MOTHER: Your father sowed well and now you're reaping it.

The wedding guests come from the seacoast as well as the land. Their dancing which, as the stage directions tell us, should form "an animated crossing of figures," is the dance of life. They are the intricate pattern of life which man tries to set as a bulwark against the dissolution, death and chaos that constantly threaten him. It is under the subjection of this tribal order that the Bridegroom tries to bring the Bride. But, as the Bride says, "The step is a very hard one to take," for it consists in submitting self to the race, dissolving into the network of the tribe, and working in the service of the life force rather than the service of individual need.

The Bride chooses instead to follow the winter king, Leonardo. As the Bridegroom, the Father and the Mother represent one force in human nature, that which impels the human being to dissolve himself in the life of the race and thereby find a kind of immortality, Leonardo represents the other, equally strong force in human life, that which demands the satisfaction of the selfish passions which, because they turn a man's eyes inward, are isolating. This isolated, defined self, by the very nature of its individuation, must suffer dissolution. The first step that Leonardo and the Bride take toward realizing their desires is isolation; they cut themselves off from the tribe and thereby prepare for the third and last phase of the ritual, sacrificial death.

In contrast to the Bridegroom and his father, the planters of seed, whose presence opens Act I, Act III is opened by the woodcutters, the destroyers of nature's life. Moreover the moon has changed from the new moon, associated with the labor of childbirth, to the full moon, the moon of death that brings the cycle to its end. As the moon has changed its face, so has the tribe. In this aspect the tribe no longer promotes life but hunts it down.

FIRST YOUTH: This is a hunt.

BRIDEGROOM: A hunt. The greatest hunt there is.

The Bridegroom no longer promises peace and fertility in the tribe; he has become the armed might of the tribe that must hunt down and kill the deviant. The Mother, before the promoter of life, pants for the blood of Leonardo and the Bride. It is she who turns the tribe into avenging Furies.

Two groups. There are two groups here. My family and yours. Everyone set out from here. Shake the dust from your heels. We'll go help my son. For he has his family: his cousins from the sea, and all those who came from inland. Out of here! On all roads. The hour of blood has come again.... After them! After them!

The communal order must kill the deviant because his singularity threatens the whole; it fights one-ness because one-ness must lead to death. The third phase of the ritual is the casting out of the pharmakos. In casting out, hunting down and slaying Leonardo, the community is casting out and destroying individuating passion, the human impulse that threatens tribal harmony.

The climax of Act III, Scene 1, is a strange stychomythia between Leonardo and the Bride. The stage directions tell us that the scene must be played with violence and great sensuality. The relation between Leonardo and the Bride is not a union, rather it is a most intense conflict. Passion, because it grows out of the need of the self, is the antithesis of the union that the Bridegroom offered. Individual passion is ambiguous; it weds pleasure with pain. It consumes that which it enlivens. The Bride is driven by her passion toward Leonardo but her passion does not nourish, it would rather destroy him.

LEONARDO: And whose were the hands/strapped spurs to my boots?

BRIDE: The same hands, these that are yours but which when they see you would like to break the blue branches and sunder the purl of your veins. I love you! I love you! But leave me for if I were able to kill you I'd wrap you round in a shroud.

The Bride does not want life ("neither bed nor food") from Leonardo. He is the demand for the satisfaction of passion, of self. He is the object of her sensuality, for sense serves the individuated self. Only reason is able to abstract the conception of a communal order to which self must be subjected.

The final scene of the play, like the lullaby of Act I, presents the theme emblematically. It is opened by little girls, the Fates, who wind the red wool of man's life.

FIRST GIRL: Wool, red wool, what would you make?

SECOND GIRL: ... At four o'clock born,

At ten o'clock dead.

A thread from this wool yarn,

A chain 'round your feet

A knot that will tighten

The bitter white wreath.

And they sing of the "dirty sand" that is "over the golden flower." The cycle has come its full course; all human order falls to ruin, all natural life ends in death. The end of the arc, like its beginning, is dominated by the presence of the Mother-goddess, but here she assumes the form of the Mater Dolorosa. She has come to the final isolation, and ironically, she has been freed from her life-promoting work and worry. She is left in the

confines of herself: "The earth and I. My grief and I. And these four walls." She has no function, for the Mother, deprived of young, loses identity.

The Bride in this last phase of the play is nature locked in the grip of winter. She takes pride in her barrenness: "they can bury me without a single man ever having seen himself in the whiteness of my breasts." Having denied the Bridegroom, the chance to bring forth life, for Leonardo, personal desire which is self-love, the Bride is snow-bound in her own whiteness, a barren virgin. Her virginity is unimportant to the Mother for the chance for life to be renewed in her is gone. The mourning Demeter can finally only bless the cycle of life which she has embodied.

But what does your good name matter to me? What does your death matter to me? ... Blessed be the wheat stalks because my sons are under them; blessed be the rain, because it wets the face of the dead. Blessed be God who stretches us out together to rest.

Source: R. A. Zimbardo, "The Mythic Pattern in Lorca's Blood Wedding," in Modern Drama, Vol. 10, No. 4, February, 1968, p. 364.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Touster discusses the concept of "modern poetic drama" through a variety of styles.

Lorca has been widely praised for the achievement in Blood Wedding of a tragic form the distinctive features of which are the fusion of lyric and dramatic impulses; the skillful integration of a musical pattern in the drama's structural design; the thematic relevance of songs, stage effects, and recurrent images in short, for the assimilation of the Spanish folk and classical traditions in a poetic drama that is modern, sophisticated, and authentic. But some questions remain to puzzle the reader, especially the reader of an English version of the play: How does Blood Wedding fit our current concept of poetic drama? In what sense is the organization of the play musical? What is the function of the lyrics in the development of action and theme? Is there a comprehensive structure of imagery defining the tonality and modulations of the play, and supporting themes perhaps resting upon and therefore nearer to the surface of the text than those more profound echoes of vegetation gods and human sacrifice which the archetypal symbols of the play suggest? The following essay is an attempt to explore some aspects of these questions.

Our concept of modern poetic drama has been formed largely on the theory and practice of Yeats and Eliot, yet no one has been willing to call either Yeats or Eliot a dramatist of the first rank. The consensus seems to be, as Francis Fergusson implies, that Yeats is "cultish" and Eliot "middlebrow ersatz." But either label would be inaccurate if applied to Lorca. It is true that his range is limited, even that he speaks primarily to a Spanish audience, but, as Fergusson says, "he writes the poetry of the theater as our poets would like to do." Yeats, Eliot, and Lorca are all fundamentally lyric poets working toward the drama. In their use of myth, ritual, and symbol they cut across the barriers of national cultures, but only Lorca has cut across intellectual class lines to appeal to both the naive and the sophisticated in his own culture (as Shakespeare did in his day). Perhaps in the modern world this could happen only in Spain, where class lines are not drawn on the basis of speech habits.

What is the source of this appeal? Perhaps it is "poetic drama." Although Eliot is far from being satisfied with his own plays and I suspect that he would not be satisfied with Lorca's there are some features of Blood Wedding that should please him. Not, certainly, the medium. Eliot is opposed to a mixture of verse and prose unless, as in Shakespeare, the author wishes to produce a jolt, to "transport the audience violently from one plane of reality to another." But Lorca has come near achieving that "ideal toward which poetic drama should strive": the expression of a range of sensibility not possible to prose drama (the kind of feeling almost but not quite conveyed in the plays of Chekhov and Synge). In Eliot's terms the ideal poetic drama would be "a design of human action and of words, such as to present the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order . . . without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms. ..." The real problem, then, for the writer of poetic drama is not versification, but the resolution in a single work of two principles: that of decorum (a

synthesis of incidents, character, and theme) and that of associative rhythm, which may be more verbal than metrical. In his essay on "The Music of Poetry" Eliot makes the point that a musical design can be observed in several of the plays of Shakespeare, "a music of imagery as well as sound." In Blood Wedding Lorca has created such a design without violating the principle of decorum which underlies dramatic action. And he has remained sufficiently close to the world in which the audience lives so that the poetry is acceptable on the stage.

Although the plot was suggested by a newspaper account of an incident that occurred in Almeria, the play is as far removed from the realism that characterizes folk drama as it is from the urbanity of Eliot's own dramatic dialogues. Its highly stylized medium conveys authentic folk emotion; and if its lyrical passages do not reproduce the speech rhythms of the Spanish folk, its images "come from the speech people of the Andalusian countryside use in emotional moments, describing their passions and half-comprehended thoughts in ageless, occult metaphors, as though in magic formulas." It is this quality in Blood Wedding that brings it close to being Eliot's ideal poetic drama. And it is this quality rather than the versification that is preserved in the English text of the play.

It is worth noting that Lorca called Blood Wedding simply a tragedy, whereas he designated Yerma "a tragic poem." The labels might have been reversed. I say this because, although both plays conform to Kenneth Burke's description of the tragic rhythm (from purpose to passion to perception), it is in Blood Wedding rather than in Yerma that the theme is embodied in the play not primarily by the logic of character, but by the rhythm of its imagery. Blood Wedding is indeed a tragic poem, a meditation on life and death in which the characters (all are nameless except Leonardo) are victims of a collective and inevitable destiny. Leonardo and the Bridegroom meet violent death, but the Mother is the real incarnation of the tragedy. She is the most vital person of the play, the chief interpreter of the human situation as well as the chief victim of the tragic circumstances. If it is the Bridegroom who affirms the "purpose" and Leonardo and the Bride who supply the "passion," it is the Mother who furnishes the "perception" of the play. And she speaks for all women frustrated in their love and haunted by the fear of extinction. The response to Blood Wedding is, as Northrop Frye asserts the response to all tragedy properly is, "this must be" rather than "what is the cause?" It has already been observed that in Blood Wedding "a knife can be drama's final reason." Here, as in Greek tragedy, the event is of first importance; the explanation other than in Fate or Destiny is secondary.

The generic affinity of Blood Wedding with Greek drama is a valuable directive and illuminates as many features of the play as does the comparison generally made with the dramas of Lope de Vega and Calderon. The ceremonial and spectacular content as well as the lyric chorus are conventions of Greek drama recognizable in Blood Wedding however they have been adapted to a contemporary situation and theme. Lorca's "hero" is scarcely a dying god, although associations with the autumn fertility ritual enhance the play and place it in the larger context of literature dealing with fecundity and death as reconcilable opposites in a natural process. But the impact of Blood Wedding is felt not so much in the sacrifice of the flower of manhood to Mother Earth as it is in the grief

of the women and the ambivalence of its tragic motifs. For all its violence and Fate, the play modulates to an elegiac conclusion. When the reconciliation with death comes, it is the submission of the Mother to the nature of things and it is religious. But the meaning of the play is more than the Mother's experience of the tragic event. It inheres in universal symbols the significance of which the Mother only half perceives. If the play does not rise to the triumphant conclusion of traditional elegy, it becomes less starkly tragic in the explicitly Christian dirge with which it closes.

In the development of the theme of death and the other themes related to it honor, passion, pride the lyrical passages are of the utmost significance. There are lyrics of several kinds (the lullaby, the prothalamion, the love-duet, the choral ode, the dirge) and the range of emotion they express is as great as their several kinds suggest. But they are not isolated or incidental poems; they are linked to each other and to the prose of the play in a comprehensive scheme of images that includes the whole world of nature and contemplates human life from the cradle to the grave as part of a unitive life-death experience. To use the metaphors suggested by the play, the grave becomes not only the marriage bed, the wedding sheet now the winding sheet; it becomes the cradle as well, where all mothers' sons may sleep in peace. (Near the end of the play, the Mother, mourning her dead son, says: "And of my dreams I'll make a cold ivory dove that will carry camellias of white frost to the graveyard. But no; not graveyard, not graveyard: the couch of earth, the bed that shelters them and rocks them in the sky" an ironic reminder of the lullaby in Act I and the second of the marriage songs in Act II.)

The imagery throughout is that of the Earth itself, of the fundamental categories of existence: the knife and associated images from the mineral kingdom (the silver dagger stuck in the horse's eyes, the pins from the bridal wreath, the glass splinters stuck in the tongue of the Bride, the nails, the metal chain, the frost and snow, the Moon, the ashes); from the vegetable kingdom the flowers, weeds, wheat, bread with which the fathers and sons of men are identified (Man is a "mirror of the earth"); and from the animal kingdom the man himself, inseparable from his horse; the woman associated with the serpent; the birds. The supreme image of the play is blood, with its analogue and opposite water. Both blood and water are ambivalent symbols, as are many of the images of the play that connote both life and death (the knife and the Moon, male and female symbols of fertility as well as of coldness and death; the serpent, a symbol of fertility and of treachery; the bird the luminous dove associated with the Bridegroom, traditional Catholic symbol of the Holy Spirit, divine instrument of fecundation, and the "great bird with immense wings" that is Death).

This ambivalent imagery presents the life-death opposition as a process in which the polar extremes appear as a single experience. In the moment of most intense life man is aware of his doom, and in death he becomes an instrument of life. Although most of the images of decay and death are drawn from the mineral kingdom as those connoting life are drawn from the vegetable and animal kingdoms, the categories of being are merged in many metaphors that identify or associate plant, animal, and mineral (as knife with snake and fish, man with water, flower, and ashes). Honig has noticed in Lorca's imagery this "compulsion of one element or quality of nature to become another and to throw off its own inevitable form to live vicariously in one of its own choosing."

Such shifts of identity are eminently "poetic," for the linking of antagonistic "worlds" is fundamental in all metaphoric expression. And they are eminently fitting in a play which shows man's experience of life to be one with his experience of death and man himself to be one with Nature. But the unity of man with external nature does not diminish his integrity as man, and man's awareness of death only clarifies and intensifies his longing for life (Passion and Pride). The imagery of Blood Wedding is sufficient evidence that Lorca was master of an important unifying principle in a work of art. As Frye has lucidly put it, "All poetry . . . proceeds as though all poetic images were contained within a single universal body. Identity is the opposite of similarity or likeness, and total identity is not uniformity, but a unity of various things."

As the blood-water opposition forms the nucleus of the symbolism of life-death, it becomes the focal image of the related themes of honor, pride, and passion. Good blood in the sense of one's family heritage means not only men who produce many sons, it means men of honor. The Mother refers to the Bridegroom's family as men of "good stock; good blood. Your grandfather left a son on every corner. That's what I like. Men, men; wheat, wheat." And later when the Bride's Father says of Leonardo, "He's not of good blood," the Mother replies: "What blood would you expect him to have? His whole family's blood. It comes down from his great-grandfather, who started in killing, and it goes on down through the whole breed of knife wielding and false smiling men." It is interesting that here in the Mother's single-minded remarks about Leonardo's heritage the ambivalence of blood is apparent to the reader in the allusion first to the begetting and then to the destroying of life. This technique of symbolic suggestion, which produces in the reader a response to the symbol beyond that of the character speaking is one which Lorca uses consistently and with increasing subtlety throughout the play. It is most effective in references to fertility symbols such as blood, the knife, and the serpent.

From the Mother's point of view the heritage of the Bride is also suspect. What could be hoped from a girl who, as her Father said, resembled her mother "in every way"? For the Bride's mother "didn't love her husband" although "her face glowed like a saint." The "dishonorable" passion of the lovers is expressed in references to blood and water. Leonardo is "hot-blooded"; he is described by the Bride as "a dark river," and the Bride herself had been too indecent to throw herself into the water: "decent women throw themselves into the water; not that one." Here water is both purifying and destructive. The reference to Leonardo as "a dark river" links the themes of passion, honor, and life-death. The connection is very clear if one reads the whole speech of the Bride, in which she refers to the fatal force of the dark river in contrast to the "little bit of water [the Bridegroom] from which [she] hoped for children. ..."

The themes of honor and passion are similarly linked with that of life-death in many passages in which recurrent images of water and blood are the unifying principle, as, for example, in the passage just cited when the Mother says, "There are two groups here. My family and yours. . . . The hour of blood has come" and in the scene by the arroyo where the blood is spilled and "two great torrents are still at last." The Woodcutters anticipate the spilled blood and link it with the tainted passion of the lovers.

SECOND WOODCUTTER. You have to follow your passion....

FIRST WOODCUTTER. They were deceiving themselves but at last the blood was stronger.

THIRD WOODCUTTER. Blood!

FIRST WOODCUTTER. You have to follow the path of your blood.

SECOND WOODCUTTER. But blood that sees the light of day is drunk up by the earth.

FIRST WOODCUTTER. What of it? Better dead with the blood drained away than alive with it rotting.

Here again the association of blood with both life and death is clear. The forest "wedding" of the lovers is the first blood wedding; the second (the death of the men) is inherent in the first. The concept of "tainted nature" ("the fault is the earth's"), the emphasis on chastity, even the suggestion of purification by water and blood are as much a part of the play's cultural Christianity as the serpent and the dove and the "sweet nails / cross adored / sweet name / of Christ our Lord." And they focus a dimension of the imagery fully as rich as that of its pre-Christian sub-structure.

The imagery of Earth, then of Earth as the plenum of existence reconciles opposites and thus strengthens the ambivalent force of blood in respect to honor, passion, and the life-death continuum. Viewed from the perspective of their imagery, the lyrics function as a matrix of thematic development. They focus the dominant images, which recur somewhat in the manner of a complicated tapestry or an intricately wrought mosaic, and control the tone of the play. They function, in short, both visually and aurally and give to Blood Wedding some of the effects of both painting and music. Stage settings and color symbolism also contribute to these effects. But much of the pleasure of reading the play as opposed to witnessing it on the stage comes from perceiving the marvelous organization of its imagery. It is the pattern of image, symbol, and motif that constitutes the "musical structure" of the play, and it is chiefly the lyrics that give it movement and variety. A conscious awareness of the complexity of this structure is the reward of a close reading of the text, as a grasp of the subtleties of the sonata form results from analysis of the score.

With respect to the episodes the three acts of Blood Wedding might be called Betrothal, Wedding, and Blood Wedding (Death which is a "wedding, " hence the promise of life and a "wedding "which is Death and hence the frustration of life). The lyric movement begins in Scene Two with the Lullaby of "the big horse who didn't like water." This scene, which has sometimes been regarded as an interlude, not only occupies a key position in the sequence of incidents in Act I, it also prefigures the central event and the dominant images of the entire play. The Lullaby, rendered antiphonally by Leonardo's Wife and the Mother-in-law, introduces the blood-water opposition, recalls the (phallic) knife (now a "silvery dagger") which entered the play in Scene One, and anticipates the entry of Leonardo's horse, whose hoof-beats are heard as Act I comes to a close.

Hence the song is a preparation for the "blood wedding" of Act III in both senses of the term.

That the horse in the Lullaby is to be identified with Leonardo's horse and his wounds with the fate of Leonardo is indicated by the action accompanying the song. In the midst of the singing Leonardo enters, and the Wife and Mother-in-law begin to question him about his horse. It becomes obvious that Leonardo has been riding his horse out to the mountainous wasteland where the Bride lives. There is talk of the approaching wedding and the Wife's jealousy flares up when she is reminded that the Bride was once a sweetheart of Leonardo's. When, after her quarrel with Leonardo, the Wife resumes the Lullaby, she moves "as though dreaming" and her weeping increases to the end of the song. In view of Leonardo's unsuccessful effort to resist his passion for his former sweetheart and the Wife's sense of being abandoned after she and Leonardo discuss the coming wedding, certain lines in the Lullaby take on new possibilities of meaning: "Go away to the mountains ... that's where your mare is" and, after Leonardo leaves, the Wife's variation of the refrain from "The horse won't drink from the stream" to "the horse is drinking from the stream."

The tone of the Lullaby is portentous, foretelling the fatal wounds and the grief to come. And the "black water," the "snow wound," the "silvery dagger," and the singing stream itself are echoed in subsequent references to Leonardo's fate. In the love-duet between Leonardo and the Bride, for example, Leonardo says, "But I was riding a horse / and the horse went straight to your door. / And the silver pins of your wedding / turned my red blood black." Later the Beggar Woman refers to the teeth of the dead men as "two fistfulls of hard-frozen snow" and the Bride calls Leonardo "a dark river, choked with brush, that brought near me the undertone of its rushes and its whispered song." Compare the words of the Lullaby: "The water was black there/ under the branches. / When it reached the bridge/ it stopped and it sang."

In Act II the songs (one in each scene) are prothalamia sung by the Bride's servant and the wedding guests. They are part of the two phases of the nuptials introduced into the action: the ceremony of preparing the Bride for the church and the festivities preceding the entry of the Bride and Groom into the bridal chamber. Both lyrics employ the now familiar imagery of flower, branch, and stream and both make visible another thread of imagery that is to become increasingly prominent as the themes of pride and passion move toward their ultimate resolution in the theme of death. It is the imagery of fire. As water is both life-giving and life-destroying, so fire is symbolic of life as well as of death. The marriage songs are ambivalent both in imagery and tone, the irony of each poem increasing as the action moves toward the climactic elopement of the Bride and Leonardo at the end of Act II.

In the first poem the Bridegroom is a "flower of gold" and the Bride is a "mountain flower" whose bridal wreath is to be borne along by "all the rivers of the world." The poem is linked to the Lullaby by the contrasts of motif and tone. Note the recurring "Go to sleep" (*Duermete*) of the Lullaby and the "Awake" (*Despierte*) of the "wedding shout." ("Like a bull the wedding is rising here!") The bull, an ancient symbol of fertility, is to the Spanish mind one of the chief means of the contemplation of death. And here there is a

dark undertone. The design of the entire scene, including the stage effects, is a kind of counterpoint of light and dark. As the scene opens it is night. The Bride and her servant are dressed in "white petticoats ... and sleeveless white bodice." They talk of the wedding and the Bride hurls her orange blossom wreath away, saying that "a chill wind cuts through [her] heart." The servant begins the wedding song, but it is interrupted by Leonardo (as the Lullaby is interrupted in Act I). In spite of her desire to forget Leonardo, the Bride acknowledges the power he has over her. ("It pulls me along and I know I'm drowning but I go on down.") As Leonardo goes out, daylight comes and the guests arrive, singing of the "white wreath," the "white bride," and the "maiden white":

As you set out from your home and to the church go, remember you leave shining with a star's glow.

But the Bride herself is "dark" and she appears wearing a black wedding dress. The "star's glow" which was to accompany the Bride to church stimulates only bitterness from Leonardo's Wife ("I left my house like that too.") and later when she announces the elopement of the lovers she ironically echoes the imagery of the marriage song: "They' ve run away! They've run away! She and Leonardo. On the horse. With their arms around each other, they rode off like a shooting star." In Act III the star imagery is given further development, but the immediate consequence of the elopement is expressed, at the end of Act II, in images of blood and water: "Decent women throw themselves in water; not that one.... The hour of blood has come again. Two groups! You with yours and I with mine."

Ironically, the blood has been a part of the wedding festivities. It is introduced in the second lyric of Act II, a soliloquy of the servant. This lyric also anticipates the blood, water, and fire imagery of Act III:

the wheel was a-turning

and the water was flowing,

for the wedding night comes....

Elegant girl...

Hold your shirts close in

under the Bridegroom's wing

and never leave your house,

for the Bridegroom is a firebrand

and the fields wait for the whisper

of spurting blood.

When the Mother enters, she unconsciously echoes the language of the song as she voices her obsession with blood spilled on the ground: "A fountain that spurts for a minute, but costs us years." The reference to the Bridegroom's breast as a firebrand prepares for the Woodcutter's seeing the Bridegroom set out "like a raging star. His face the color of ashes" an especially meaningful description that captures the ambivalence of fire. The "raging star" and the "shooting star" link the two men metaphorically as they are linked in the play's action, in their passion for the Bride and in their death. Leonardo tells the Bride that his proud effort to quell his desire for her only served to "bring down the fire" and later the Bride and Leonardo exclaim about the "lamenting fire" that "sweeps upward" in their heads. She tells Leonardo that she is "seared" by his beauty, and he answers her, prophetically associating himself with the Bridegroom in death: "The same tiny flame will kill two wheat heads together." The fire is associated with the theme of honor as well as with the themes of passion and death, for the Bride is willing to submit to the test of fire to prove to the Mother that she is chaste. ("Clean, clean as anew-born little girl. And strong enough to prove it to you. Light the fire. Let's stick our hands in; you for your son, I, for my body. You'll draw yours out first.")

The lyric impulse of the play culminates in Act III, where the themes of honor and passion are absorbed in the theme of death that paradoxically is life. The play's double perspective on death is suggested in the dual manifestation of Death. In one image Death is an Old Woman demanding "a crust of bread" (and thus echoing both the exclamation of the Mother, "Men, men; wheat, wheat," and the description in the Skein Song of the thread of Destiny "Running, running, running / and finally to come to stick in the knife / to take back the bread"). In another image Death is the white-faced Moon longing for life and seeking in the death of the men "a heart," the "crest of the fire," and "red blood" for his cheeks. Death as an aged person is a familiar figure in literature (one thinks of Chaucer's caitiff). The Moon is one of the "concrete things which speak of death to Spanish minds" mentioned by Lorca in a lecture given in Cuba in 1930. In the same listing he includes the chopping knife and the clasp knife. In Blood Wedding both the knife and the Moon are agents of Death as well as sexual symbols, male and female ("The Moon sets a knife abandoned in the air"), but the Moon is also identified with Death, as the chant of the Woodcutters indicates: first, "O rising moon!. .. O lonely moon! . . . O evil moon! . . . O sorrowing moon! ..." and then, after the Moon's song, "O rising Death!. . . O lonely Death! ... O sad Death! ... O evil Death!" As an agent of Death the Moon will "light up the horse/ with a fever bright as diamonds," will "light up the waistcoat" so that the "knives will know the path." In this cluster of images the wind assists the Moon, "blowing hard with a double edge." The linking of wind with the knife has been made earlier by the Bride ("A chill wind cuts through my heart.") and by the Mother ("Men are like the wind. They're forced to handle weapons."). It is interesting that the blood which the knife produces is now associated with the knife itself in a curious metaphor that recalls the "serpent knife" of the opening scene. The Moon says: "But let them be a long time a-dying. So the blood / will slide its delicate hissing between my fingers." In a sense it is man's blood that betrays him his heritage. Woman, too, is involved in the treachery. "You snake!" cries the Mother to the Bride when she sees her after the knife has done its work..

The dialogue of the lovers in the forest prior to the bloody wedding of the men to the Earth is a kind of love-death for the Bride too. She longs for actual death with her lover. ("It's fitting that I should die here / with water over my feet / with thorns upon my head. And fitting the leaves should mourn me / a woman lost and virgin.") And after her emergence from the forest she is in a sense dead, since she had followed the lover instead of the Bridegroom the lover who, she acknowledges, "sent me against hundreds of birds who got in my way and left white frost on my wounds, my wounds of a poor withered woman, a girl caressed by fire." In another sense, of course, she is alive only when she is with Leonardo. The birds-frost-fire sequence constitutes an especially rich cluster of the symbols of life and death fused in a manner characteristic of Lorca. The imagery of the love-duet recalls that of the Lullaby and brings to a climax the identification of the animate and inanimate worlds.

The final scene is a recapitulation of this imagery of Earth and a lyric epilogue which contemplates man's destiny. Death, which is ordained for every man ("Over the golden flower, dirty sand... an armful of shrivelled flowers ... a fading voice beyond the mountains now.. .aheapof snow....") is at last found to be a "fitting" end. And though the flesh must be violated (it remains "astonished" as the knife penetrates cleanly to the "dark root of a scream"), the Earth is kind: "Blessed be the wheat stalks, because my sons are under them; blessed be the rain, because it wets the face of the dead. Blessed be God, who stretches us out together to rest." This is the Mother's reconciliation to Death, the final insight of the play. The Skein Song and the Dirge are choral odes which juxtapose the pagan and Christian attitudes toward death implicit in the symbols of the play. If the pre-Christian concept appears to dominate the imagery, it is significant for a complete reading of Blood Wedding that the final scene takes place in a simple dwelling that "should have the monumental feeling of a church" and that the closing invocation to the "sweet name of Christ our Lord" ("May the cross protect both the quick and the dead") mitigates the tragedy. Without becoming explicitly doctrinal, the Christianity of the play points to the recognition of Death as a paradox and is thus an appropriate context for the development of Lorca's major theme. The Dirge finally establishes the tone of the play and completes the pattern of image, symbol, and motif by which Lorca has conveyed his meaning.

Source: Eva K. Touster, "Thematic Patterns in Lorca's Blood Wedding," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 7, No. 1, May, 1964, p. 16.

Adaptations

Blood Wedding was adapted into a film in 1981. The film, directed by Carlos Saura, tells the story through a stylized form of flamenco dance (a flamenco troupe was used in the film). The film is in Spanish, but subtitled versions are available in the United States.

Topics for Further Study

Research the Symbolist movement in literature. Which elements of Lorca's play suggest symbolist influences?

Metaphors, similes, and symbols are words in a literary work which refer to other things. Using Blood Wedding as your sample text, demonstrate the difference between these three literary devices. How, for example, does a symbol function substantially differently than metaphors and similes?

Compare and contrast the role of the chorus in a Greek tragedy you have read and in Blood Wedding.

Explore the role of setting in Lorca's play.

Examine the rise of fascism in the 1930s in Europe. How do historians account for the popularity of leaders such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco? What were these leaders' governing political convictions?

Research the international battalions of the Spanish Civil War, especially the Abraham Lincoln brigade from the United States.

Research the drama project, Labarraca, of which Lorca was artistic director. What were the aims of the project?

Compare and Contrast

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What Do I Read Next?

Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter and Other Poems (1962). A short volume of selected poems, translated and introduced by A.L. Lloyd.

The House ofBemarda Alba (1936) is the final play of Lorca's so-called "rural trilogy"; it was completed in the last year of his life. It was first staged in 1945, in Buenos Aires. Bernarda Alba is a stern matriarch whose household stifles the lives and desires of her children.

Antigone (late 440s B.C.E.), by the Greek dramatist Sophocles, concerns the tragedy of Antigone who acts against royal decree in order to fulfill funeral rites for her brother. She is condemned to death for her actions.

Romeo and Juliet (1595) is William Shakespeare' s most enduring play of love and passion. The lovers of the drama's title meet their deaths in an attempt to escape the nets of a family feud, which would otherwise keep them apart.

A Street Car Named Desire (1947), by the U.S. playwright Tennessee Williams, is a drama of elemental passions in which a vibrant couple is set against the febrile decline of an unstable heroine.

Further Study

Eisenberg, Daniel, "A Chronology of Lorca's Visit to New York and Cuba," in The Kentucky Romance Quarterly, 24 (1975): 233-50.

An excellent accompaniment for the student studying *Lorca's* Poet in New York poetry collection.

Gerould, Daniel, *Doubles, Dreamers, and Demons: An International Collection of Symbolist Drama, Performing Arts Journal Publications*, 1985.

A collection of symbolist plays for the student wishing to examine the forms and types of symbolist drama. This collection includes an introduction by Gerould.

Gibson, Ian, *The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca*, Penguin Books, 1983.

An exploration of the circumstances leading up to and surrounding Lorca's political murder, by a writer who has published extensively on the author (Gibson has written a well-known biography on Lorca).

Jackson, Gabriel, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1939*, Princeton University Press, 1966.

A history of the turbulent 1930s in Spain.

Stainton, Leslie, *Lorca: A Dream of Life*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

The most recent biography of Lorca to be published in English.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535