The House of Bernarda Alba Study Guide

The House of Bernarda Alba by Federico García Lorca

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Introduction

The House of Bemarda Alba is Fedenco Garcia Lorca's last play, written the year he was killed at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The play, along with *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma,* forms a trilogy expressing what Lorca saw as the tragic life of Spanish women. These late works Dennis Klein in *Blood Wedding, Yerma, and The House of Bernardo, Alba* called "the most accomplished and mature efforts of the finest Spanish playwright of the twentieth century." If *Blood Wedding* is a nuptial tragedy and *Yerma* the tragedy of barren women, *The House of Bemarda Alba* might be seen as the tragedy of virginity, of rural Spanish women who will never have the opportunity to choose a husband. It is also a play expressing the costs of repressing the freedom of others.

The House of Bemarda Alba finally had its stage premiere nearly a decade after Lorca's death. The play was produced in Buenos Aries in 1945, and was published the same year, in Argentina. The play later had important productions at the ANTA Theater, New York, in 1951 and the Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, England, in 1952. In 1960 it was adapted for American television and in 1963 produced at the Encore Theater in San Francisco. Given the repression of artistic expression in Spain during Franco's regime, it was not until 1964 that Lorca's last play was finally produced in his native country, at Madrid's Goya Theatre. *The House of Bemarda Alba* continues to be revived and read all over the world. Its setting is specific to the values and customs of a rural Spanish people, but the play's appeal is universal rather than national. In the United States, the play has been enjoyed in both English and Spanish productions.

Author Biography

Federico Garcia Lorca was born June 5, 1898 in a village near Granada, Spain, the son of Federico Garcia Rodriguez, a liberal landowner, and Vicenta Lorca, a schoolteacher. (Although by Spanish cus-lom his surname is properly Garcia Lorca, he is more commonly known by his mother's surname.) Lorca produced a body of work that is considered among the greatest in the Spanish language, and which has been enthusiastically embraced by audiences around the world. Although celebrated primarily for his writing about the Spanish countryside, Lorca did not wish to be labeled merely a poet of rural life. His writing is intellectual in its conception and symbolism, but nevertheless touches basic human emotions. Lorca felt acutely the suffering of oppressed people, but avoided direct involvement in politics. Hiding his homosexuality from the public, Lorca felt condemned to live as an outcast, and he frequently struggled with severe depression.

Lorca experienced traditional rural life growing up in the southern region of Andalusia, but was propelled into the modern world when his parents moved to the city of Granada in 1909. As an adolescent Lorca wrote plays which were enjoyed by his family and their servants, but his father tried to influence him to study law and pursue what he considered to be a more responsible career. Lorca attended university in Granada, and later in Madrid, but he was a poor student (although he eventually earned his law degree in 1923). At the same time, however, he was becoming known as a multi-talented artist. Already skilled as a pianist and singer, Lorca wrote his first poems in 1915 and published his first book in 1918, the prose work *Impressions and Landscapes.* In 1920 his first play was produced; *The Butterfly's Evil Spell,* a highly persona! allegory about the doomed love of a cockroach for a butterfly, was an artistic disaster. The setback was minor, however; throughout the 1920s Lorca achieved great success as a poet, writing about the traditional world of his childhood with a blend of traditional and contemporary techniques.

His collections from this period include *Poem of the Deep Song* and *Gypsy Ballads,* Lorca continued to write for the theater, and in 1927 a production of his play *Mariana Pineda* was a success in Madrid. In 1929 Lorca traveled in the United States and Cuba, and from the experience of roaming the streets of foreign cities, he crafted the collection *Poet in New York.* Upon his return to Spain in 1930, his play *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* was produced successfully. Other plays of note followed, including *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding.* Lorca also served as director and producer of plays for a state-sponsored traveling theater group.

La Barraca ("The Hut"). Lorca went on a short lecture tour of Argentina and Uruguay, and was greeted as a celebrity everywhere he went, even by other major writers like Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Lorca wrote *The House ofBernarda Alba,* his last play, in 1936, and in July of the same year left Madrid for Granada. He was one of the earliest casualties of the Spanish civil war, executed by fascist rebels, his body thrown into an unmarked grave.

Plot Summary

Act I

The action opens in a "very white room in Bernarda Alba's house." Bells toll for the funeral of Bernarda's second husband. The housekeeper La Poncia speaks with a maid about Bernarda and her family. La Poncia reports that one of the daughters, Magdalena, fainted during the funeral service. Magdalena is the only one who loved her father, La Poncia explains. Maria Josefa, Bernarda's mother, calls from within, where apparently she has been locked up against her will. La Poncia laments Bernarda's treatment of the servants, cursing her with the "pain of the piercing nail." After La Poncia exits, a beggar woman and a little girl appear, but the maid drives them away. The servant hears the bells tolling and curses Bernarda's dead husband: "You'll never again lift my skirts behind the corral door!" The mourning women begin entering until the room is full. The servants now wail, putting on a show of grief for Antonio's passing. Bernarda and the five daughters enter, and Bernarda says a prayer for her dead husband.

The mourning women depart, and Bernarda curses what she sees as their hypocrisy: "Go back to your houses and criticize everything you've seen"' Bernarda explains to her daughters that they will mourn for eight years, during which "not a breath of air will get in this house from the street." The grandmother calls again, and Bernarda orders a servant to let her out Bernarda strikes Angustias, the oldest daughter, upon learning that she has been looking out the cracks in the door at the men departing the funeral. La Poncia comforts Angustias as Bernarda orders everyone but her maid out of the room. Bernarda questions La Poncia about the men Angustias was watching. La Poncia then expresses concern about the daughters, who are growing older and not finding husbands Bernarda feels she's being protective: "For a hundred miles around there's no one good enough to come near them." Bernarda leaves, ordering her servants to work.

Amelia and Martirio enter. They discuss Martirio's poor health, and the fact that their neighbor Adelaida did not attend the funeral (apparently because her boyfriend will not let her out in public). After speaking more about Adelaida's difficulties, Martirio concludes: "It's better never to look at a man." Magdalena enters, deep in mourning. The three sisters discuss the talk of the town, that Pepe el Romano intends to ask their sister Angustias to marry him. Martirio and Amelia are happy about this news, but Magdalena is more cynical, feeling that Pepe is only interested in Angustias for her money. Adela enters, and hearing the news of Angustias's suitor first grows depressed, then defiant and angry. "I'm thinking," she says, "that this mourning has caught me at the worst moment of my life for me to bear it." Everyone exits at the announcement of Pepe's arrival. Bernarda and La Poncia enter, discussing the division of the inheritance. When Angustias enters, she is chastised by Bernarda for having her face powdered. Bernarda violently removes the powder and sends Angustias out. The other sisters enter, arguing about the inheritance. The grandmother, Maria Josefa, enters after escaping from her room. Yelling at the daughters, "not a one of you is going to marry,"

Maria Josefa expresses a desire to return to her home town and be married herself. The act ends with everyone grabbing hold of Maria Josefa to subdue her again.

Act II

The daughters are seated with La Poncia, sewing. The betrothal of Angustias has brought out bitter jealousy between them. Angustias expresses a hope that she'll "soon be out of this hell." She explains to her sisters how Pepe asked her to marry him. La Poncia contributes stories about her courtship, and the mood grows lighter. Magdalena goes to fetch Adela, and when they return, everyone questions the youngest daughter about what she did the night before. Adela resents this curiosity, and when she and La Poncia are left alone, she resists the maid's insinuations that she has feelings for Pepe. The housekeeper forces the issue, however, and warns Adela, "if you like Pepe el Romano, keep it to yourself." Gradually the other daughters enter, showing off the lace that has just been delivered for Angustias's wedding sheets. A distant chorus is heard, the sound of men singing on their way to the wheat fields. La Poncia and some of the daughters go to watch the men from a window, leaving Amelia and Martirio alone. Martino tells Amelia she thought she heard someone in the yard last night.

Angustias bursts in, furious that a picture of Pepe has been taken from beneath her pillow. The disturbance bnngs La Poncia and the other daughters, followed by Bemarda. She orders La Poncia to search the bedrooms. "This comes of not tying you up with shorter leashes," Bemarda fumes. La Poncia returns with the picture, which she found in Martirio's bed While Martino pleads that she only took the picture as a joke, Bemarda starts beating her. Further argument rages over Pepe. Bemarda, disgusted, sends the daughters away. La Poncia speaks her mind, warning her employer, "Something very grave is happening here." La Poncia insists that Bemarda has never given her daughters enough freedom. Martirio had at one time a suitor, whom Bemarda sent away because his father was a shepherd. To La Poncia this is an example of Bemarda putting on airs, and as a result, denying her daughter a chance to be married. La Poncia tries to convince Bemarda that Adela is Pepe's real sweetheart, the daughter he should be marrying. A servant enters, announcing there is a big crowd gathering in the street Adela and Martirio are left alone, each accusing the other of trying to steal Pepe away from Angustias. Bemarda, the other daughters, and the servants enter, announcing that the crowd outside is calling for the death of a young woman who gave birth to an illegitimate child, and then in her shame, killed and buried it. Bemarda and her daughters join the cry, but Adela, holding her belly, cries out, "No' No!"

Act III

The act opens at night, in a room in Bemarda's house adjacent to the corral. The family and a guest, Prudencia, are eating. Prudencia tells Bemarda that her family is feuding, that her husband has never forgiven their daughter for an indiscretion. "A daughter who's disobedient," Bemarda says, "stops being a daughter and becomes an enemy " Everyone discusses Angustias's impending betrothal, and Prudencia admires the pearl

engagement ring, though she comments that in her day, "pearls signified tears." The church bells toll, and Prudencia leaves to attend the service. Angustias goes off to bed because Pepe is not coming to visit her tonight. The daughters wonder why, and Bemarda explains he is away on a trip; Martirio, however, looks suggestively at Adela and mutters, "Ah!"

The daughters exit; La Poncia and Bemarda continue their discussion about the "very grave thing" which Bemarda insists is not happening in her house. Bemarda goes to bed, and the servants leave to investigate the sound of dogs barking in the yard. Maria Josef a passes through with a lamb in her arms, singing a lullaby. Adela passes through on her way out to the corral. Martirio enters by another door and is confronted by her grandmother. Encouraging Maria Josefa to return to bed, Martino calls out for Adela When she arnves, Martino warns her, "Keep away from him." Adela is defiant: "You know better than I he doesn't love her." Martirio reluctantly admits this is the truth Pepe whistles from the yard for Adela, who runs toward the door, but Martino blocks her way. She calls for Bemarda, who enters quickly. Adela grabs Bemarda's cane and breaks it m two. La Poncia and some of the other daughters enter. Bemarda retrieves a gun, and shoots at Pepe waiting in the yard. Adela runs off after her lover, believing he has been shot. A thud is heard a moment later, and when La Poncia breaks open the door, she discovers that Adela has hanged herself. Bemarda orders Adela's body cut down, insisting, "My daughter died a virgin." The play ends with Bemarda stubbornly maintaining her illusion, ordering her daughters to be silent and defiant in the face of death.

Act 1 Part 1

Act 1 Part 1 Summary

As a church bell tolls, Poncia and a Servant clean the house in preparation for Bernarda's return from a funeral. Their conversation reveals that the funeral is for Bernarda's husband, and that they think Bernarda is tyrannical and demanding, and that her mother is locked up in another room, insane. Poncia also talks about how hard her thirty years of service have been and about Bernarda's five daughters, Angustias by her first wealthy husband and four by the husband that just died. As she inspects the glassware, Poncia finds a glass that still has spots on it. The Servant says that she's scrubbed and scrubbed, but the specks won't come off. Poncia realizes that the bells are tolling to announce the last prayer. She goes to a window to listen and talks about how wonderful a singer the previous Sacristan was. She then goes out.

A Beggar Woman and her child come to the door, saying that they always get the scraps from Bernarda's table, but the Servant tells her to go away, saying that today the scraps are for her. When the Beggar Woman is gone, the Servant comments on how glad she is that Bernarda's husband will never again force her to have sex with him. As Mourners come in from the funeral, the Servant's complaints quickly change to wails of grief. Bernarda follows the mourners in and tells the Servant to be quiet and to get back to work. The Servant runs out, weeping.

Act 1 Part 1 Analysis

This section of the play performs two key functions. The first is exposition, or defining the context and background of the play. In this case, the exposition is provided by the conversation between the two servants. Of all the things the servants talk about, the most important is their description of Bernarda as a domestic and personal tyrant, someone who desires and maintains complete control over all aspects of her life and the lives of the people around her. Her struggle to maintain that control is one of the main sources of conflict throughout the play, and the other is the desire of the people around her for freedom from that control. That such freedom is possible is suggested by the Servant's comments about Bernarda's adulterous husband, which indicate that Bernarda's control isn't as complete as she thinks it is. The dirty glass also represents this ultimate lack of control. It is a symbol of how in spite of Bernarda's best efforts, she cannot control everything, and it foreshadows the rebellions of her daughters later in the play. Another important symbol is the priest referred to by Poncia, the first in a series of illustrations of the revered role that men in general play in the lives of these women.

Act 1 Part 2

Act 1 Part 2 Summary

Bernarda and the Mourners make small talk about the heat, servants and working in the fields. During the conversation, Bernarda orders her daughters not to cry, a little girl not to speak and Poncia to bring in lemonade. She also tells Poncia to take drinks to the men on the patio, but Poncia says they're already drinking. Bernarda tells her to make sure that the men leave the way they came, saying that she doesn't want them coming through her house and dirtying her floor. As the women drink their lemonade, they gossip about a woman in church, and Bernarda says that women shouldn't ever look at any man in church but the priest. She then leads the women in Latin prayers for the dead.

As the women go out, Poncia comes in with a bag of money from the men, collected to pay for masses said for the soul of the deceased. Bernarda tells her to give the men some brandy, orders her daughter Magdalena to stop crying and then complains that the Mourners came to the house just to snoop and criticize. Poncia sets about cleaning up the dirt left on the floor by the Mourners as Bernarda complains again about the heat and asks for a fan. Her daughter Adela gives her a brightly colored fan, but Bernarda throws it aside, saying that she should have a proper black mourning fan. She also says they all need to get used to the heat since the house will be shut up for mourning for eight years, in the same way that it was in her father's day and her grandfather's day. She tells the girls that they should use the time to embroider their hope chests. The daughters argue about whether the embroidery is necessary, with Magdalena in particular saying she knows she's never going to be married. Bernarda tells them all to do as they're told, and Adela goes out to get the linen so they can start.

Bernarda's mother, Maria-Josefa, calls out to be let out of her room. The Servant comes and says Maria-Josefa is all dressed up in her dresses and jewels, wanting to get married. As the daughters laugh, Bernarda tells the Servant to let Maria-Josefa into the courtyard and make sure nobody from the village sees her. The Servant goes out just as Adela returns with the linen and with the information that Angustias was looking at the men on the patio. When Angustias comes in, Bernarda beats her for being irreverent and then angrily sends all the daughters out.

Act 1 Part 2 Analysis

Bernarda is revealed to be as dictatorial and judgmental as the conversation between the servants suggested. She is also obsessed with propriety and determined to live in the way her family has always lived. This indicates that she is unwilling to accept or even consider change, and it foreshadows the way she will fight desperately to prevent change from happening. Adela's offer of the colored fan, however, represents the way that she in particular is prepared to challenge both tradition and Bernarda's authority,

and as such it foreshadows the conflict between her and Bernarda and her suicide at the play's climax.

Angustias also challenges Bernarda by looking out the window at the men, yet another action that foreshadows future conflict and hints at the daughters' desires for everything from freedom to sex. The references to heat symbolize these desires, and the way that all the daughters have desires smoldering within them. Bernarda's comment that they're all going to be sealed inside the house for the official mourning period suggests that those desires will increase in the same way as the heat, and it also foreshadows the explosions of passion, desire and rage that occur later in the play.

Bernarda's mother is also an important piece of symbolism and foreshadowing. In her obsession with marriage, she represents the fact that getting married is the only hope these women have of being free of Bernarda, while her madness foreshadows the near-madness that several of Bernarda's daughters experience when their marriage plans are thwarted and their hopes for freedom are dashed.

Bernarda commands that the women are to remain sealed in the house for the period of official mourning. Because of this, the house itself can be seen as a symbol of the control that Bernarda has, and also of the control that the past and the views of the neighbors have over her. Meanwhile, the way that Bernarda prays in Latin suggests the possibility that her authority also represents the authority of the church, specifically the Roman Catholic Church. This raises the possibility that the play is in fact an extended metaphor for the individual's struggle for freedom against the spiritual, physical and emotional restrictions imposed by institutions in general and the church in particular.

Act 1 Part 3

Act 1 Part 3 Summary

When the daughters are gone, Bernarda asks Poncia what the men on the patio were talking about that Angustias overheard. Poncia tells her they were discussing how a woman was abducted from her home and taken out into the country by a gang of men, returning the following morning with loose hair and wearing flowers. They talk about her being a bad woman, saying that neither she nor the men who abducted her were actually from the village. Bernarda comments on how Angustias always flirts with the men, leading Poncia to comment that all the girls are the right age to be married. When Bernarda angrily tells her that none of the men in the village are good enough for them, Poncia suggests they could have moved. Bernarda reminds her that she's a servant and has no right to have opinions. She orders the Servant to start whitewashing the patio where the men were, orders Poncia to put away the dead man's clothes and goes out to meet with a lawyer to discuss her husband's will.

Two of Bernarda's daughters, Amelia and Martirio, come in. Amelia talks about a young woman they know who used to be sociable and happy but now isn't allowed anywhere by her husband. Martirio says that the real reason the girl doesn't go out is that she's afraid of Bernarda, who knows secrets about her family. Martirio comments on how history repeats itself and how the girl is fated to endure the same kind of loveless marriage as her mother and grandmother. She then talks about how it's better to never even look at a man, saying she's been afraid of men ever since she was a girl. Amelia reminds her that a man was interested in her once. Martirio says that the night she stood at her window waiting for him he never came, and he married someone with more money.

Magdalena comes in, saying that she's been going through some of their grandmother's things and remembering happier times. She also talks about how Adela has changed out of mourning clothes and put on a green dress. Adela still has hopes for getting away. Angustias passes through, and when she's gone Magdalena tells Martirio and Amelia that the whole town is talking about how a man named Pepe is going to ask Angustias to marry him. She says that he's only marrying her for her money, adding that Angustias is the oldest and least attractive of the sisters. Amelia agrees with her, and Magdalena says it would make more sense for him to be interested in Adela.

Adela comes in, and Magdalena suggests that Adela should give her dress to Angustias to wear when she marries Pepe. Adela becomes upset, saying that this is the worst possible time of her life for her to be put into mourning. When Magdalena tells her she'll get used to it, Adela says that she'll never get used to it, and the next day she's going to go into the village in her green dress. The Servant comes in and announces that Pepe is coming up the street. Amelia, Martirio and Magdalena run out to see him. The Servant tells Adela she'll get a better view of him from her room and goes out. After a moment, Adela leaves as well.

Bernarda and Poncia come in discussing how Angustias is going to inherit a lot of money. Angustias comes in wearing heavy makeup. Bernarda insists that she wipe it off in memory of her father, but Angustias reminds her that the man who died was just her stepfather. Bernarda grabs Angustias and forcefully wipes the makeup off. The other sisters come in to see what's going on, but Bernarda insists there's nothing wrong. As long as she's alive, she says, she'll run the house and the girls' lives her way. Maria Josefa comes in, asking Bernarda to give her back her string of pearls. As Bernarda berates the Servant for letting her out, Maria Josefa says again that she wants to marry. She doesn't want to end up like the other women in the house with their longing hearts turning to dust. Bernarda tells the Servant to lock her up and then orders her daughters to help. As they drag her off, Maria Josefa shouts again that she wants to be married.

Act 1 Part 3 Analysis

Two aspects to the symbolic value of men in this play are developed in this scene. One aspect is represented by Poncia's story about the abducted woman and Martirio's story of being abandoned. Both suggest that relationships with men lead to destruction either of reputation or of hope. The reverse aspect, that men are in fact the embodiment of hope, is suggested by the possibilities for freedom that the daughters see in Pepe and that Maria Josefa sees in marriage. Ironically, it is also suggested by the conclusion of Poncia's story, in which describes the woman as coming back happily from her sexually liberating experience. These conflicting perspectives fuel the play's central conflict, with Bernarda clearly defining freedom as a bad thing and the daughters, particularly Adela and Angustias, defining freedom as their ultimate goal.

One of the play's core themes, that history repeats itself, appears again in Martirio's story about the girl afraid to go out because of Bernarda. The story suggests that history repeats itself because people are afraid to challenge control and embrace freedom, a way of life embodied by Bernarda and challenged by her daughters with tragic results.

Act 2 Part 1

Act 2 Part 1 Summary

Amelia, Magdalena, Martirio and Angustias sit sewing with Poncia and talking about Adela. Adela seems unwell, but her unhappiness is no different from what any of them are suffering. Angustias, however, brags about how she'll soon be married to Pepe and free. Poncia reveals that she was up at one thirty that morning and saw Pepe talking with Angustias at her window, adding that she actually heard him leave around four. Angustias says she must have been mistaken. Poncia asks her how Pepe proposed, and Angustias says that it was all very casual, adding that she's embarrassed by these kinds of conversations. Poncia tells how her husband came to her window and proposed by saying that he wanted to touch her. Amelia runs to the door to make sure Bernarda isn't coming. Poncia then talks about how soon after the wedding men find other interests, and that women have to learn to handle the situation. Magdalena goes out to fetch Adela, saying that she should hear this.

Poncia wonders what's wrong with Adela, and Angustias says she's jealous. Magdalena and Adela come in, and Martirio makes a pointed comment about Adela not sleeping well. Adela tells her to mind her own business. The Servant comes in, saying that Bernarda wants to see her daughters. Everyone except for Adela and Poncia goes out.

Adela complains that Martirio is suspicious of her. Poncia says that Martirio is only trying to take care of her, but Adela says that what she does is none of Martirio's business and that her body is hers to do with what she chooses. Poncia slyly suggests that Adela plans on giving it to Pepe, commenting on how she saw Adela sit naked by her window the night before. Adela starts to cry, but Poncia tells her to calm down, saying that after Angustias marries Pepe she'll probably die in childbirth, leaving him free to marry the daughter he really wants to be with. Adela tells her to mind her own business, adding that she'd do anything to put out the fire she feels. Poncia warns Adela not to defy her, but Adela says nothing can stop her.

Martirio and Amelia come in and show Adela the lace for Angustias' wedding sheets and a nightgown for Martirio. Martirio says having nice underwear is one of the few good things she has left in her life. Poncia makes a pointed comment about how nice the lace would be for a baby's clothes, adding that Angustias will be busy running after children soon after she's married.

Act 2 Part 1 Analysis

The two symbolic aspects of men again play a key role in the action. Adela and Angustias focus on the freedom they represent, while Poncia focuses on the way marriage is a trap. At the same time, conflict is both developed and foreshadowed as it becomes clear that Adela has set out to marry Pepe, that Martirio and Poncia suspect

and that Angustias is oblivious. What also becomes clear is the intensity of Adela's feelings. Her desire and desperation are described in terms of fire and heat, a symbol of passionate longing that occurs throughout the play.

Act 2 Part 2

Act 2 Part 2 Summary

A bell rings, summoning the men to work in the fields. The women comment again on the heat inside the house and on the way they'd love to have the freedom that men have to go out and work. Poncia describes how a group of reapers has arrived to work in the fields. They come from far away, and they are beautiful. A woman came to sing and dance for them, and she says men need that kind of entertainment. Adela comments that men are allowed everything, and Amelia says that to be born a woman is the worst possible thing that can happen. Offstage, the reapers sing a song about carrying off women's hearts the same way they carry off ripe wheat. Adela says she'd love to be a reaper, to have freedom to come and go and to forget her troubles. The reapers sing another verse of their song, gradually going off into the distance. Adela, Poncia and Magdalena go out to watch them from an upstairs window.

Amelia asks Martirio what's wrong, and Martirio explains that she heard someone in their yard in the middle of the night, woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. She seems about to say something else, but she changes her mind. Angustias runs in, angrily demanding to know who took her picture of Pepe from under her pillow. Magdalena, Poncia and Adela come back in as Angustias says that one of her sisters must have stolen it. Poncia looks meaningfully at Adela, and Adela looks just as meaningfully at Martirio. Bernarda comes in angrily demanding to know what's going on. When Angustias tells her about the missing picture, Bernarda demands that whoever took the picture speak up. When no one answers, she tells Poncia to search all the girl's rooms. Poncia goes out. Bernarda asks Angustias whether she's sure the picture is missing, and Angustias says she has searched everywhere. Bernarda comments on how she's being made to "drink the bitterest poison a mother knows," and then Poncia comes back, saying that she found the picture between the sheets on Martirio's bed.

Bernarda beats Martirio, as Angustias tries to hold her back. Martirio says it was just a joke, and Adela says it wasn't a joke at all but some other feeling inside her being expressed. As the girls argue, Bernarda tries to get them to be quiet, finally shouting them into silence and saying that she expected this kind of thing to happen but had hoped it wouldn't be so soon. She tells them all to leave, saying she still has control and will not allow the house her father built to be destroyed. All the girls leave, and Bernarda is left alone with Poncia.

Act 2 Part 2 Analysis

Once again men, in the form of the reapers, appear as a symbol of freedom, and once again the women see themselves as being trapped. We also once again see the desperate measures to which one of them will go to set at least some part of herself free. This time it's Martirio, who Adela accurately suggests has taken the picture of Pepe

so that her feelings for him can be expressed. Bernarda attempts to exert her iron control over her family, and once again it's clear that she's desperately afraid of losing that control. She is afraid of the life she learned to lead from her father changing, but that's exactly what's happening. Bernarda's comments about poison and how she's been waiting for conflict like this refer to jealousy. She expected that jealousy of Angustias' good fortune would explode into tension between the un-engaged sisters.

Act 2 Part 3

Act 2 Part 3 Summary

Bernarda comments to Poncia that Angustias will have to get married right away, saying that they've got to keep Pepe away from the house. Poncia asks whether he'll be content to go away, and she wonders what exactly Martirio was doing with the picture. Bernarda says it couldn't have been anything but a joke, but Poncia hints that something dangerous is going on in her family. She asks why Bernarda wouldn't let Martirio marry the man who was courting her. Bernarda angrily says she would never let the blood of their two families mix. She also says the only reason Poncia thinks something dangerous is happening is that she wants something dangerous to happen, and that if anything did happen nobody would ever know because it wouldn't go beyond the walls of the house. Poncia tells Bernarda that it's Adela that Pepe truly loves. Bernarda threatens her, but Poncia stands her ground, saying that she knows Pepe was at the house at four thirty in the morning.

Angustias comes in at that moment, saying that Poncia is lying and that for a week Pepe has been leaving at one. Martirio comes in and says that she heard Pepe leaving at four as well. Adela appears just as Bernarda is asking what's going on. She warns Bernarda not to listen to Poncia, but Bernarda says she'll do exactly what she wants. She adds that from now on she's going to watch the goings on in her house even more closely.

The Servant comes in with news that there's a huge crowd at the top of the street. Everybody but Bernarda and Martirio go out to see what's happening. When they're alone, Martirio and Adela argue about who's going to marry Pepe. Martirio says that she'll kill Adela before she can have him. The others run in, and Poncia reveals that a woman from the village who killed the child she had out of wedlock is being beaten. Bernarda shouts that the woman should be killed, and offstage a woman shrieks. Clutching her belly, Adela shouts that the woman should be freed. Martirio shouts that she should be punished, and Bernarda shouts again that she should be killed.

Act 2 Part 3 Analysis

Bernarda's refusal to consider what Poncia is saying is another manifestation of her desire for control. She believes that if she thinks something is impossible then it is impossible, an arrogant blindness that eventually leads to further confrontation and ultimately Adela's death. Meanwhile, when Bernarda shouts for the woman's death at the end of this section, it again makes the point that part of her desire for control is an insistence upon certain moral standards. Her desire is taken to extremes in this scene, perhaps because in spite of her insistence that she's in control, she feels it slipping away. The specific fate of the village woman is unclear, but the event clearly foreshadows Adela's death. The stage direction saying that Adela holds her belly

suggests the possibility that she is expecting a child by Pepe. She may see the woman's fate as her own.

Act 3 Part 1

Act 3 Part 1 Summary

Bernarda and her daughters eat dinner on their patio. They've been joined by Bernarda's friend Prudencia, who talks with Bernarda about her family's troubles. A loud thumping is heard, and Bernarda says it's the stallion in the stable kicking the wall because he's too hot. She talks about how he'll be taken to the mares in the morning. Adela gets up to get some water, but Bernarda shouts for a pitcher of water to be brought in. She forces Adela to sit back down. Prudencia starts talking about Angustias' wedding, and the conversation reveals that Pepe's family will come for Angustias in three days. Her engagement ring has pearls on it, and pearls traditionally signify tears. Angustias says that things are different now, and pearls represent happiness. Prudencia hears the bells ring at the church and goes out to join in the final prayers of the day.

Bernarda and her daughters get up from the table. Adela says she needs to go for a walk. Amelia and Martirio say they'll go with her, and Adela angrily tells them she can take care of herself. They go out. Angustias clears the table, and Magdalena sits by the wall and rests. Bernarda tells Angustias to patch things up with Martirio. At first Angustias refuses, but when Bernarda insists, the girl finally agrees. They talk about Pepe, and Angustias worries that he's got something other than the marriage on his mind. Bernarda tells her everything's fine.

Adela, Martirio and Amelia come back in, commenting on how dark it is. Adela adds that the white stallion is in the corral, "filling all the darkness." As Angustias goes to bed, saying that Pepe isn't coming tonight, Adela talks about how beautiful the stars are. She says that she wants to stay up all night and watch them. Bernarda tells her and the others to go to bed. Adela remains, and Martirio gives her a sharp look as she goes out.

Act 3 Part 1 Analysis

Another male symbol of freedom appears in this scene, the white stallion. His anger at being both confined and apart from the females combines with the way he stands out in the darkness to suggest that he represents the liberty that all the daughters seek and that Adela and Angustias, for different reasons, both seem close to achieving. In contrast to this symbol, Bernarda clearly continues to try to control life in the house. This is exemplified by the way she orders the pitcher of water and tells the girls to go to bed. The juxtaposition of the angry stallion with Bernarda's controlling manner makes the scene a clear representation of the play's central conflict and foreshadows the climactic confrontation between Bernarda and Adela in the following scene. Foreshadowing of Adela's bid for freedom appears in Angustias' comments that Pepe has something on his mind, and in Prudencia's comment that pearls signify tears.

Act 3 Part 2

Act 3 Part 2 Summary

Poncia comes in. Bernarda tells her that because she (Bernarda) is keeping constant watch, there's no sign of the "something dangerous" she spoke about earlier. Poncia warns her that she can't keep an eye on her daughters' hearts, but Bernarda says there's no reason to be concerned. She goes out, determined to sleep well.

The Servant comes in and helps Poncia clean up. They discuss how proud Bernarda is being, and Poncia talks about how every day it feels like there's a thunderstorm about to break in the house because there's so much tension. They talk about how it's not all Pepe's fault, saying that Adela led him on and let him do more than talk. They discuss how all Bernarda's daughters, but especially Martirio, are angry and jealous, and they conclude by saying that for women without men even the blood ties of family are forgotten. They hear barking dogs, comment that somebody must be passing by and go out.

Maria Josefa comes in, carrying a lamb and singing a song about running away to the seashore, away from Bernarda. She sings two verses and goes out. Adela comes in from her bedroom and then goes out again through the door leading to the corral where the stallion is. Martirio appears and then hides in the shadows and waits. Maria Josefa comes back, and when Martirio confronts her, Maria Josefa tells a long rambling story about how the lamb is her baby. She says she's going across the fields to freedom and that Pepe is going to destroy them all. Martirio forces Maria Josefa back into her room and locks the door behind her.

Adela comes back in, her hair and clothes messy. Martirio confronts her. Adela says that she's gone out to find what she has a right to find, and they argue about who will marry Pepe and whom he truly loves. Adela tries to apologize for hurting Martirio, but Martirio pushes her away. Adela talks again about needing to be free, saying that it will be enough to be Pepe's mistress. She plans to set up a little house for herself where Pepe can visit her whenever he wants. Martirio vows to stop her. Adela starts to run out, and Martirio blocks her. They struggle. Martirio calls for Bernarda, who comes in complaining of how hard it is without a man to help her. Martirio accuses Adela of going out to meet Pepe, and Bernarda goes to Adela to strike her. Adela grabs Bernarda's cane and breaks it in two, saying that nobody but Pepe tells her what to do.

Magdalena, Poncia and Angustias come in just as Adela is saying that she belongs to Pepe. Angustias reacts with shock, and Bernarda rushes out to get her gun. Adela tries to leave, but Angustias holds her back. A shot from offstage is heard. Bernarda comes in, and Martirio shouts that Pepe is "done away" with. Adela runs out, and Bernarda says she just scared him away. Martirio says that she said what she did to scare Adela.

A thud is heard from offstage. Poncia struggles to open Adela's door. As the Servant comes in, saying that all the neighbors are awake, Poncia throws herself against the door. When it opens, she runs in and then screams. Bernarda goes in, sees that Adela has hung herself and orders that she be cut down and dressed in white as though she were still a virgin. Martirio says that she who had Pepe was "a thousand times happy," but Bernarda commands that there will be no weeping. She repeats that Adela died a virgin and shouts again and again for silence.

Act 3 Part 2 Analysis

Two particular symbols recur in this section, adding thematic weight to its action. The first is the image of the house as a source of control or pressure, referred to by Poncia in her comments about the thunderstorm. The second is the image of men as both the inspiration and cause for conflict, dramatized through the role that Pepe plays in both Adela's attempt to escape and her death.

Adela's confrontation with Bernarda is the climax of the play, foreshadowed in this scene by both Poncia's comment about a thunderstorm and the appearance of Marie Josefa. In particular, Maria Josefa's comment about Pepe destroying them all foreshadows the way that the lives of Angustias, Martirio, Adela and Bernarda truly are, in one way or another, ruined because of him.

In spite of everything that's happened, Bernarda's determination to maintain both control and her status with her neighbors remains unchanged. This is evidenced by her attitude at both the beginning and the end of this section. At the end of the play Bernarda's metaphorical house still stands. She is still in control, with the lives of her children controlled physically by the walls of the house and emotionally within the walls built by Bernarda's will. The action of the play can be interpreted as making the thematic statement that selfish, inflexible control leads to unhappiness, desperation and destruction.

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Characters

Adela

Adela, age 20, is the youngest, most attractive, spirited, and rebellious of Bemarda's daughters. As Magdalena says of her, Adela "still has her illusions," and thus has difficulty submitting to the strong will of her mother, who keeps all the daughters under tight reign. As a form of rebellion, Adela puts on a green birthday dress and goes out in the yard shouting "Chickens, look at me!" She craves social interaction and cannot bear to be locked away from the world. She has a deep connection to nature, yearning to be free of the house and breathe the fresh air of the fields. As the conflict with her mother's will intensifies, Adela's defiance is symbolized in her breaking of the walking stick with which Bemarda has beaten her daughters. Ultimately, Adela chooses death as a means of escape from an intolerable life when the only alternative she can envision—Pepe—is no longer available.

Bernardo. Alba

At age 60, she feels out of place in the village, sure that everyone in the town despises her. She feels superior to her neighbors in social station, and will not allow her daughters to be courted by the men of the area, whom she generally finds inferior. She curses "this village full of wells where you drink water always fearful it's been poisoned." Bernarda runs her house with an iron hand; La Poncia calls her a "domineering old tyrant." Her husband, Antonio Maria Benavides, has recently died, and the family has gathered at her house for the funeral. Her domination of the family and servants intensifies the day of her husband's funeral. She is hard on her own daughters out of a sense of what is proper behavior for women in a period of mourning. She plans to keep the house shut up for eight years, and requires the daughters to cover their heads in mourning. She is a vicious and manipulative person who keeps a mental record of every scandal that involves her neighbors so she can use the information as a weapon against them. Bernarda seems unmoved by her daughter Adela's death, more concerned about the perceptions of her neighbors as she orders her daughters to uphold the lie that "She, the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba, died a virgin."

Amelia

Of all the characters, Amelia, Bemarda's third youngest daughter at age 27. perhaps stands out the least as an individual. She is kindhearted and hates to hear her mother speak unkindly. She is concerned about Martirio's health even if Martirio is not. Like Martirio, she feels uncomfortable and embarrassed around men. Like Magdalena, she feels that being born a woman is life's worst punishment. Amelia seems to be afraid of almost everything; unlike Adela who seeks the truth, Amelia would rather close her eyes to it.

Angustias

The eldest daughter at age 39, Angustias is a half-sister to the others because she was bom of Bernarda's first marriage. She is therefore the only one with any inheritance worth mentioning, and thus has a suitor, Pepe el Romano. Bernarda strikes her when she learns that Angustias has been looking out the cracks in the door at the men departing the funeral. Angustias knows that Pepe only wants her for her money, but is resigned to this fact. Near the conclusion of the play, Angustias stands her ground when a hysterical Adela orders her to tell Pepe that Adela will be his. She curses her sister: "Thief Disgrace of this house!"

First Servant

See Maid

La Poncia

She expresses bitterness about Bernarda's treatment of her and the other servants. (Bernarda must have everything perfect, and works her servants hard to get it.) La Poncia, who is 60 years old, is perhaps the most complex character in the play. A mediator, she is all things to all people without being a hypocrite. La Poncia is torn between debt to and hatred of Bernarda. Additionally, her sons work Bernarda's fields, so Bernarda controls the economic fate of the entire family. Nevertheless, La Poncia is extremely frank with her employer, which may be a privilege of age (Lorca is careful to indicate they are exactly the same age). La Poncia provides the daughters with friendly conversation, which they lack, and on occasion defends them to Bernarda. La Poncia persists in trying to make Bernarda recognize there are real problems brewing in the house.

Magdalena

Apparently the only daughter who truly loved her father, Magdalena, 30 years old, faints during his funeral. Realistic to the point of pessimism, she is convinced she is never going to get married Like Martirio, she claims not to care if she lives or dies. She speaks out against hypocrisy when she hears it, and believes women should be strong and not tolerate poor treatment by men. She refuses to contribute a stitch to the making of clothes for the christening of Angustias's future first child Her form of escape is a pleasant memory of the past

Maid

Like the other servants in Bernarda's employ, her life consists of nothing more than cleaning the house until her fingers bleed, without ever earning Bernarda's approval.

When the maid hears the bells tolling for Bernarda's dead husband, she curses him, "You'll never again lift my skirts behind the corral door!" She is 50 years old.

Maria Josefa

Bernarda's mother, 80 years old, is the most poetic character in the play, identified closely with Adela (they share a desire to escape the house and be free). Maria Josefa is a voice of truth, painful to Bernarda who keeps her locked away. What she claims to want—marriage to a virile young man and lots of children—is irrational. But Maria Josefa is also very perceptive, more aware than Bernarda of the dire situation in the house. When she cradles the lamb she knows it is not a real baby, but accepts it as better than nothing.

Martirio

Martirio, Bernarda's second youngest daughter at 24, has been under the care of a doctor but does not express any hope of her condition improving. (Indeed, she takes her medicine more out of routine than any concern for health.) She is in many ways a younger picture of her mother, called "a poisoned well" by La Poncia. Martirio feels that God has made her weak and ugly and that all things considered, "it's better never to look at a man." She hypocritically says having a boyfriend does not matter to her, but she is consumed by jealousy and sexual frustration. She steals the picture of Pepe el Romano so she can at least possess the image of a man. Martirio is the one daughter who reluctantly agrees that Pepe el Romano really loves Adela and not Angustias, to whom he is engaged. Still, she does all she can to keep Adela and Pepe apart.

Prudencia

One of Bernarda's few friends in the area. She is frustrated with her husband, who refuses to forgive their daughter for an incident long in the past. Prudencia is 50 years old.

Themes

Beauty

Beauty—specifically the beauty of Adela, Bernarda's youngest daughter—is a source of conflict in the play. Beauty becomes corrupted, Lorca suggests, in an environment where people are not permitted to pursue their desires and passions. Pepe el Romano is passionate for Adela, but is bound by economic necessity to court Angustias instead. "If he were coming because of Angustias' looks, for Angustias as a woman, I'd be glad too," Magdalena comments, "but he's coming for her money. Even though Angustias is our sister, we're her family here and we know she's old and sickly, and always has been the least attractive one of us!" The daughters are all in such a state of repressed isolation that they will resent both Angustias, for having a suitor, and the beautiful Adela, for possessing Pepe as a lover.

Fate and Chance

The characters' attempts to control their own lives bring them into contact with the inevitable and result in the tragedies that conclude not just *The House of Bernarda Alba,* but each of the plays in Lorca's trilogy. Destiny is intermingled with the repetition of the life cycle; what occurred in the past is often fated to occur again. For example, all the women in Adelaida's family suffered before her, and she is destined to suffer, too. (Martino observes elsewhere in the play, "History repeats itself. I can see that everything is a terrible repetition.") In the scene with Prudencia, several symbols of bad luck appear (spilled salt and an engagement ring of pearls rather than diamonds). All the bad luck predicted in this scene comes to pass. Martirio comments, "Luck comes to the one who least expects it." But good luck does not seem to come to anyone in Bernarda's house, whether they expect it or not. Adela, meanwhile, struggles against her fate and fails. The other sisters are resigned to their fate, lacking Adela's faith that she can control the course of her life.

Death

Each of the three plays in Lorca's trilogy ends with a significant death. Death is a mounting inevitability as the frustration of the characters grows more intense. Death comes to characters in situations with no hope, who are helpless victims of their desttny. Ultimately, Adela chooses death as a means of escape from an intolerable life when the only alternative she can envision—Pepe—is no longer available. Adela seems bound by fate not to survive, but Bernarda brings about tragedy through actions that have the opposite of their desired effect. In this, she appears more like a heroine of Greek tragedy, although she survives, perhaps to make the same mistakes again.

Freedom

The play is formed by Lorca's sense of social justice, warning society at large about the tragic cost of repressing any of its members. Adela's dilemma is Lorca's central concern. She has more to lose than the others in the dashing of her two hopes, men and freedom. Her optimism is irrational because of the isolation in which Bernarda keeps her and her sisters, and because she should be able to see from the society around her that men and freedom are mutually exclusive possibilities for a Spanish woman. But even servitude to a husband would likely provide Bernarda's daughters with more freedom than they have under her tyrannical authority. The land, which produces wealth, also serves as a metaphor for procreative power and other freedoms. The fields are a source of refreshment and escape for Bernarda's daughters. They see the men who work the land as free and independent, as having everything the women who are prisoners in the house do not have.

Honor

Honor is closely related in the play with themes such as status, money, and gossip. Bernarda feels she has a social position to maintain in the town; she won't let her daughters marry beneath this imagined station, and she won't give up her social airs. The tyranny of Bernarda is fueled by her own sense of honor and tradition. The desire to act honorably— to mourn her husband's death for eight years— ruins the lives of Bernarda's daughters. Bernarda's sense of honor is formed by her awareness of the judgmental opinions of her neighbors. However, she has only herself to blame for her fear of what the neighbors think because she has manipulated them by gossip in the past. Adelaida, for example (a character never seen), is afraid of Bernarda because the woman knows her sordid past, and throws it in Adelaida's face every chance she gets. Part of La Poncia's job is to keep Bernarda informed of what is going on in the town. When the neighbors awaken at the end of the play, however, it appears there will be no more controlling them (although Bernarda is desperately trying to keep up appearances).

Sex Roles

Lorca's primary identification was always with female characters, and all the plays in his late trilogy are about the plight of Spanish women. *The House of Bernarda Alba* bears the explicit subtitle "Drama about Women in the Towns of Spain," and there are more frustrated women in it than in any other Lorca play, perhaps than in any other modern play in the world theater. In Lorca's view, men and freedom are mutually exclusive for Spanish women. Although no male characters appear in the play, it is clear that the women's feelings of isolation are largely the consequences of men's actions and attitudes. In depicting sexual frustration, Lorca maintains the masculine mystique by keeping Pepe from appearing. Pepe acts only on instinct, his desires pit mother against daughter, sister against sister. Magdalena curses womanhood if it consists of nothing more than being bound by tradition. A woman has little control in achieving personal

satisfaction and in determining the course of her own life, and therefore must often resort to desperate measures. The three plays of the trilogy dramatize tragic attempts by women to free themselves from impossible situations: the Bride runs off with Leonardo in *Blood Wedding,* Yerma kills her husband, and Adela kills herself.

Wealth and Poverty

Angustias suffers because she knows Pepe is only marrying her for her money, that even when they are together his thoughts are far from her. Land is the source of wealth throughout the three plays of the trilogy, and wealth creates stature. When Bernarda judges the men of the area as unfitfor her daughters, she does so not on their individual merits, but because as shepherds and laborers they are all beneath her economic ideal. In such circumstances, wealth controls fate. Not only does Pepe become engaged to Angustias because of it, but the play is rich with other symbolic battles over money. Prudencia's family, for example, is torn apart by a struggle over money: a disputed inheritance.

Style

Realism and Surrealism

Lorca was a great experimenter with poetic and dramatic form, and was certainly influenced by the variety of new artistic forms developed in his day. Although the term surrealism is specific to the work of a handful of artists at a particular time, it is often used to describe a variety of techniques that seek to express the human subconscious directly, rather than revealing it through external actions, as is the case in realist drama. In writing his last play, Lorca worked against such a technique, trying to reach a more "objective" tragedy by stripping away the overtly poetic elements that had characterized his style before this. His friend Adolfo Salazar noted that as Lorca finished reading each scene he would exclaim, "Notadrop of poetry! Reality! Realism!" *The House of Bernardo Alba* lacks the stylized elements of the other two plays in the trilogy, but never approaches unadulterated realism. Lorca asserted that the play was a "photographic record," suggesting an attempt to capture rural Spanish life in a naturalistic manner. The language of the play is carefully shaped to expose elements of character, however; it is poetic without overtly sounding like poetry. Similarly, while the play's settings appear naturalistic, evocative of a real house in the Spanish countryside, they are also stylized, with the white walls evoking purity but also the sterility and monotony of life in Bernarda's house.

Classical Tragedy

As Dennis Klein noted, Lorca wanted his theater to "capture the drama of contemporary life and inspire passion as classical drama did," Lorca stated that his purpose in writing his tragic trilogy was to follow the Aristotelian canon for tragedy. He departed widely from this goal, however. *The House of Bernardo, Alba* moves closer to the structure of classical tragedy than the other two plays, but still differs significantly. Lorca is true to the spirit of classical tragedy without rigorously applying the rules, such as the unities of time, place, and action. The breaking of the unities is consistent with the history of the Spanish theater, and indeed Lorca's drama was rooted as much in the traditions of the Spanish Golden Age, and those of European puppet farce, as in classical precedent. The plays of Lorca's trilogy are all structured as dramatic crescendos with a key event around which the rest of the action revolves. In this respect *The House of Bernarda Alba* has a classical structure. The play is also reminiscent of Greek tragedy in its focus on a household or lineage, its powerful sense of fatalism, and the cathartic quality of the final scenes. Additionally, Lorca did make subtle use of the classical technique of the chorus that comments on the action of the play. Each of the plays in the trilogy has a chorus; in *The House of Bernarda Alba* the function of the chorus is served both by the neighbors in act one, and the other daughters besides Adela.

Dramatic Structure

Eliminating most of the details of telling a story, Lorca designed his plays to be skeletal so he could concentrate on other theatrical elements. *The House ofBemardaAlba* is episodic in structure, and almost perfectly circular. The play starts with Bernarda returning from one funeral and ends with her arranging another. She appears to have learned nothing from the experience of losing her youngest daughter, for she exerts the same repressive control against which Adela rebelled with such tragic results. With the repetition of Bernarda's "Silence!" the command has an authoritarian ring at the beginning of the play, but a hollow one at the conclusion.

Folklore

Known primarily for his works about peasants and gypsies, Lorca drew extensively on his familiarity with rural Spanish life. Edward Honig observes that "Lorca was rebelling against the realistic middle-class drama, which in Spain had succeeded in shutting off from the stage the rich atmosphere of folk speech and imagination." Lorca's work succeeds as a blend of surrealistic imagery and popular folklore. Lorca achieved a very personal style by relating with a modern sensibility and a variety of techniques his understanding of a folk world. Folk elements are crucial to a play like *The House of Bernarda Alba,* but Lorca does not romanticize rural life as did many of his contemporaries.

Among folk elements, the lullabies of Andalusia were especially important to Lorca; he once gave a lengthy lecture on these songs. Singing is employed throughout the trilogy, although the other two plays employ more poetry than does *The House of Bernarda Alba.* Maria Josefa's lullaby to the lamb, for example, allows her to express her maternal instincts and her feelings about her daughter.

Poetic Devices

Lorca is usually treated as a poet who happened to turn to theatre because he found lyric poetry inadequate. His brother argues against this interpretation, explaining how theatre and theatricality were important to Lorca as a child, and thus throughout his entire life. "I would say that, just as someone called him 'poet by the grace of God,' he was dramatist by the same grace. We need to say, then, that his dramatic expression was as pressing in him as the need for lyric expression." While writing *The House of Bernarda Alba* Lorca was intent on keeping it free of poetry, to eliminate the special effects and metaphorical characters that he used in the other two plays. Yet the touch of the poet is present, there is poetry even if there is no verse.

Symbolic elements such as one associates with poetic verse abound in the play. The characters are all fully realized individuals, with specific names, a transition from the allegorical characters of Lorca's other plays. Yet the characters also function symbolically through the use of onomastic imagery (attributing character traits through

the names). Angustias suggests anguish, for example; Martirio, martyrdom; and Prudencia, prudence. Water is another important symbol for Lorca, suggesting sexual potency. Bernarda's daughters drink water not just to quench their thirst but to lessen their sexual frustration. At the same tune, however, water can come down in torrents; the trouble in Bernarda's house is referred to metaphorically as a storm. Weather m general is symbolic, the heat suggesting intense sexual frustration. Since the men are outside, they are cooler on the patio (i.e., they do not suffer from sexual repression). By using these and other symbolic images (animals are especially important referents), Lorca retains a poetic quality to his writing in this otherwise prosaic play.

Historical Context

Spam at the time of Lorca's youth was experiencing a lengthy crisis of confidence spurred by the country's defeat by the United States in the War of 1898, during which Spain lost its remaining colonies Political life was torn between a desire on one hand to strengthen traditional values and revive past glory, and the need on the other to move progressively forward, to foster intellectual inquiry and learn from the example of modernized nations. The split between these positions grew more acute m the 1930s. Lorca resisted efforts to recruit him for the communist party, but at the same time his social conscience caused him to be outspoken in his criticism of Spanish conservatives.

In 1936 civil war broke out as conservative army officers under General Francisco Franco revolted against the liberal Spanish government. Lorca was living in Madrid at the time and decided to wait out the conflict at his parents' home in Granada. His decision turned out to be disastrous, as Granada was filled with coup sympathizers, and quickly fell to rebel forces. Many liberal politicians and intellectuals in the area were executed, including Lorca. In the years of civil conflict which followed (In many ways a prelude to the war that was soon to rock all of Europe), the attention of the world was focused on Spam. Men and women of many nations traveled there to fight against fascism in international brigades. Franco's forces were victorious, however, and by 1939 he controlled all of Spain. Franco's regime never accepted responsibility for Lorca's death, but Lorca remained a forbidden subject for years.

Franco's victory stalled the flowering of the arts in Spam, which had been ongoing for several decades. Previously, Spain's Golden Age in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the highpoint of its creativity in the theatre and the other arts. Pedro Calderon de la Barca, Felix Lope de Vega, and others created a dramatic canon that has stood as a standard for centuries. Lorca was born in the year of, but too young to be a part of, the literary Generation of 1898, which examined Spain's past and the problems that caused the country to fall from international power. Lorca was part of the second Spanish literary movement of the twentieth century, the Generation of 1927, an erudite group using cerebral imagery and believing in a code of Art for Art's sake.

Lorca's generation challenged audiences with its daring techniques and often controversial subject matter. This was a period of artistic liberation and the development of new artistic forms. Surrealism and Dadaism exerted influence over a number of arts, inspiring works that sought through imagery to pierce the human subconscious Spain at the time was moved by the films of Luis Bunuel, and the painting of Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso. Lorca's work is similarly sophisticated and shares a complex awareness of human psychology. While other artistic innovators appealed primarily to the intellect, however, Lorca was concerned with addressing basic human emotions and needs. Lorca championed the plight of the Andalusian gypsies, who were accorded the worst possible social position in the region. He was also passionate about the injustices done to Spanish women: the personal stigma associated with not being married, and a woman's inability to marry the man she loves.

The House of Bernarda Alba finally had its stage premiere nearly a decade after Lorca's death. It was produced in Buenos Aries in 1945, near the end of World War n, during which Argentina had maintained an uneasy neutrality. The play was published the same year, also in Argentina. Given the repression of artistic expression during Franco's regime, it was not until 1964 that Lorca's last play was finally produced in his native Spain, at Madrid's Goya Theatre.

Critical Overview

By the time of his death, Lorca was widely considered one of the greatest poets of the modern era, perhaps of all time. Since *The House of Bernarda Alba* differs from Lorca's other works in his attempt to employ a more realistic style, critics have differed in their assessment of the play's value in Lorca's canon. Most have found it a work of real theatrical power, demonstrating Lorca's versatility as a writer. A minority, however, have suggested that the work pales in comparison to Lorca's more lyric poetry and drama.

Lorca's assassination was a shocking tragedy not only to his Spanish audience, but to lovers of his writing all over the world. Some critics were particularly indignant about the circumstances surrounding Lorca's death. "Lorca was assassinated, and his books burned," wrote William Rose Benet in a 1937 review of Lorca's *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter,* "but his burning words live on in the present book, beyond the reach of the bloody ape [i.e., Franco]." Benet praised the "fierceness" in Lorca's poetry, calling some of his images "staking and beautiful." Eulogizing Lorca a year after "his criminal and stupid murder," Rolfe Humphries praised Lorca's versatility and his ability "to write both simply and subtly at the same time." While dwelling on the lasting value of Lorca's poems, Humphries also praised Lorca as a total artist, saying that "in achieving a synthesis of all that... he had received from the world of dance and painting, music and theater, he abandoned nothing of value, and was able to work his erudition down into the substance of his art." The American poet William Carlos Williams observed in the *Kenyon Review* that Lorca "belonged to the people and when they were attacked he was attacked by the same forces." Williams praised the reality and immediacy of Lorca's verse, his skill at "invoking the mind to start awake."

At the time of Lorca's death, Humphries and other critics have noted, Lorca's work was not widely available in English. This fact has certainly been remedied in subsequent decades, but translation of Lorca's writing continues to be a tricky issue. Some critics have claimed that qualities of Lorca's style, especially his feel for the sound of language, are impossible to capture in translation. These critics suggest that the strength of Lorca's plays, meanwhile, is limited to their language. Others, however, have pointed out the quality of Lorca's stagecraft, suggesting the plays remain dramatically viable in translation. (This is especially true for a prose work like *The House of Bernardo. Alba.)* There is merit to both perspectives, and unsurprisingly, while Lorca's plays are respected by the English-speaking public, they retain their greatest impact in their original language.

The House ofBernarda Alba finally premiered in Argentina nearly a decade after Lorca's death. Critics there hailed the work, comparing Lorca's drama to the works of the great Golden Age playwrights of Spain. A reviewer in *La Nation* identified Lorca's work with that of Calderon de la Barca, who also focuses intensely on issues of honor. This same critic, according to Dennis Klein, observed that in the present play, Lorca as strong realist dominates over Lorca the poet. Another critic, writing in the publication *Blanco y Negro,* traced patterns throughout the trilogy of plays about the lives of Spanish women.

While praising both *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma,* this critic, according to Dennis Klein, concluded that "the tragic inspiration of Garcia Lorca reaches its summit in this work."

Not all critics have been as enthusiastic about Lorca's last play, however. Reviewing the 1960 production for the American television series "The Play of the Week," John P. Shanley noted in the *New York Times* that Lorca's "talent for poetic imagery" was demonstrated in selections from his poetry read as an afterpiece to the telecast. The play itself, however, Shanley thought was "better dismissed as an experimental diversion of limited appeal " While the play "abounds with sounds of grief and anguish" in a manner suggestive of the later works of Tennessee Williams, it "lacks the range and compassion of Mr. Williams' better efforts " Edwin Honig commented in his 1963 study of Lorca that "the personal dilemma .. prevents Lorca's folk dramas as well as his other plays from rising so often out of pathos to real tragedy." Other American critics have found much wider appeal in Lorca's last play. Reviewing a production by the Actors' Workshop of San Francisco, Stanley Eichelbaum, as quoted by Dennis Klein, wrote that the play was "superbly atmospheric to the eye and gloriously affecting to the ear."

The House of Bernardo. Alba has continued to be produced and read extensively, both in Spanish and in translation. Literary critics, meanwhile, have found much of interest in the complex themes of the play. Given the transition in Lorca's style at the time he wrote *The House ofBernarda Alba* (moving to a more prosaic and realistic style of drama), many critics have sought to contextualize the play in terms of Lorca's poetry. Warren Carrier, for example, concludes that *The House ofBernarda Alba* "is so stark as prose, it is so essential in language and feeling, it stares so directly into the heart of the characters, that it may be said to be more poetic than many of the more patently poetic plays." In *The Contemporary Theatre: The Signigicant Playwrights of Our Time,* Allan Lewis shows himself to be among critics who have focused on the elements of folklore both in *The House ofBernarda Alba* and other plays of Lorca. Lewis observed, "Lorca's plays are atnbal theatre of primitive power, ancient in form but shaped by a sophisticated modern mind." John Gilmour in *Religion in the Rural Tragedies* has surveyed the importance of religion and religious imagery in the three plays of Lorca's trilogy. "Lorca's principal characters," Gilmour commented, "are tormented souls who, despite their strict Catholic upbringing and proud sense of honour, are incapable of displaying the Christian virtues of love and forgiveness." Of course, given the theme of Lorca's last plays, many critics have studied his complex portrayal of gender roles in Andalusian society. Julianne Burton in *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols* has grounded Lorca's rural trilogy in a social and historical context, suggesting that his depiction of the lives of Spanish women demonstrates "Lorca's commitment to a more egalitarian, humane, and personally fulfilling society."

Criticism

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- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Intertwined with other complex images and themes, Bernarda's house serves on a number of levels as the central image in The House of Bernarda Alba.

In order to arrive at an understanding of the complex images and themes in Federico Garcia Lorca's last play, *The House of Bernarda Alba,* one must start with the title. Lorca did not call his play *Bernarda Alba,* or even *The Family of Bernarda Alba.* (The latter would have been especially appropriate given that, like many of the great tragedies of classical Greece, the play focuses on a lineage and the impact of characters' actions on subsequent generations.) The title, *The House of Bernarda Alba,* draws attention both to Bernarda's "house" in the sense of her household or lineage, and to the physical space of the house itself, which serves as the central image of the play.

From his experience directing a production of the play, Eric Bentley discovered the paramount importance of the house, observing the significant role of windows and doors that serve as both barriers and bridges. The symbolism of what is inside the house and what is outside could not be more important to the themes of the play. To the daughters, the outside represents freedom and possibility, as well as romantic and sexual fulfillment. Throughout the play the daughters run repeatedly to the windows to observe the outside world: the crowd departing the funeral, the men going to work in the fields, and the arrivals and departures of Pepe el Romano. Bernarda upbraids Angustias for looking out through the cracks of the back door, becoming so angry that she strikes her daughter. To Bernarda, the outside of the house represents only negative possibility: corruption from which she wants to protect her daughters, and prying neighbors from whom she wants to keep her secrets.

The house is a self-contained society which Bernarda rules with an iron hand. "To Bernarda's way of thinking," wrote Dennis Klein in *Blood Wedding, Yerma, and The House of Bernarda Alba,* "virginity is decency and sex corruption." Therefore, it is understandable that when Adela commits suicide, Bernarda's first thought is to make the world believe her daughter died a virgin. Bernarda's rule also means that sexual activity always takes place outside the house: Pepe and Adela meet in the corral, and the maid speaks of Bernarda's husband lifting her skirts behind the corral. The story of Paca la Roseta, who spends a night with some local men deep m an olive grove, is to Bernarda a perfect example of the corruption which runs rampant outside her domestic space. The displacement of sexual activity to the outside is reflected in the symbolism of the weather. The daughters suffer in the heat of a house which is shut up tight for a period of mourning, during which, Bernarda explains, "not a breath of air will get in this house from the street. We'll act as if we'd sealed up the doors and windows with bricks." The heat in the house thus serves as a symbol for the sexual frustration of the daughters. The men of the town, meanwhile, are of course free to move about outside. They are cooler on the patio and in the fields, suggesting symbolically that they do not suffer from sexual repression.

The heat inside may be what causes Angustias to describe Bernarda's house as hell, and the ongoing torment of all the characters within it suggests the accuracy of her metaphoric description. (Interestingly, in her desperation at the end of the play, Angustias reverses herself and adopts her mother's proud rhetoric, cursing Adela: "Disgrace of this house!") Bernarda's house is also referred to as a house of war, again reminiscent of the lineages of Greek tragedy. Hell is perhaps the strongest lingering image of the house, but other locations of confinement are suggested throughout the play. In his study of the religious imagery in Lorca's trilogy, John Gilmour in *Religion in the Rural Tragedies* refers to Bernarda's house as "convent-like," observing that Lorca uses the funeral in the first act to establish an important theme for the remainder of the play. "A theatre audience," Gilraour wrote, "could not fail to be struck by the sheer number of women, all in mourning, filling the stage, and by their slow, processional entry in a hundred pairs. It is as though they were members of a religious house filing into chapel for their communal worship." If the house does function as a convent, it is only in the sense of deprivation and without, it seems, any genuine religious devotion. Bernarda raises a compelling point of contrast when she chastises La Poncia: "How you'd like to see me and my daughters on our way to a whorehouse!"

La Poncia highlights the dominant sense of confinement in the house when she comments to Bernarda: "Your daughters act and are as though stuck in a cupboard." If larger than a cupboard, the house does function extremely well as a prison. Maria Josefa is most explicitly a prisoner, for Bernarda keeps her locked in a room and relies on the assistance of family and servants to keep her there. Bernarda also imprisons her daughters, saying to them at one point,' T have five chains for you, and this house my father built." The house, the audience knows, has extremely thick walls and bars on the windows through which, for example, Angustias watches Pepe depart. When Adela defies Bernarda near the conclusion of the play, she highlights her mother's role as warden, saying: "There'll be an end to prison voices here." While it is Bernarda's mother, daughters, and servants who are most explicitly imprisoned in the house, the play suggests that Bernarda is herself a prisoner. Although she commands power over others, she is so confined by her own sense of honor and proper appearance that she cannot act any more freely than the rest.

In the settings of each of the three acts of *The House of Bernarda Alba,* there is a symbolic penetration deeper and deeper into the house, which reflects the gradual exposing of the family's secrets. The first act is set in a room near the entrance hall, appropriate for the public nature of the funeral and the visitation of neighbors, which Bernarda must endure. In the second act, the setting moves to a more intimate room near the bedrooms, bringing the audience deeper into the hearts and motives of the various characters. The final act moves to a room adjacent to the corral, which is the site of sexual liaison and the symbolic source of conflict in the play. Bernarda's desire to keep the secrets of the family deep within the house may prove impossible now that the neighbors have awakened. With her desperate cry of "Silence!" Bernarda can merely, as the old saying has it. close the bam door after the horse is out.

Lorca described the structure of the play as a "photographic document," and the imagery of the house supports this theme. Photographs in Lorca's day were of course in

black and white, and the stark whiteness of the house's walls is contrasted perfectly with the black mourning clothes of the women in the first act. The uniform whiteness of the walls suggests a sense of purity which Bernarda would like to maintain. The color also suggests a whitewash of hypocrisy, which dominates the household, as well as the sterility and monotony of life for Bernarda's daughters in the house. The stark black and white patterns of the play are modified later when the walls appear tinged with blue, suggesting evening. (Ironically, it is in the dark cover of night rather than in stark light of day that the secrets of the family are "brought to light.") The blue tones suggest the doubt that now tinges the purity and decency which had previously prevailed. The green dress of Adela is the only other color which appears in the play, contrasting the white walls of the house not only in hue but also in theme, for the color is symbolically associated with nature, hope, jealousy, sex.

Bemarda's house thus functions as a central symbol in Lorca's final play, in the use of color and other elements of scenic design, in metaphoric references to prisons and convents, and in providing a physical structure to the layers of secrecy within which Bernarda wraps her family life. Since theater is an art form based on the physicality of performance, it is fitting that a great modern work of drama like *The House of Bernarda Alba* should make use of a setting that is both visually striking and serves so well to develop the images and themes contained in the play.

Source: Christopher G. Busiel. for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Freedman elaborates on the theme of passion in Lorca's dramatic work, examining the conflict between individual character's emotions and the morals of the society portrayed.

With Lorca we enter an altogether different landscape in the modern drama, the landscape of passion. His three great tragedies—*Blood Wedding, Yerma, The House of Bernardo. Alba—are* stripped nearly bare of the details of setting and time, that sense of locale we need for Ibsen, Wilde, Shaw, or O'Casey. Yet we do not leave the area of reality, as we do with some of Strmdberg and of Pirandello. Lorca empties his drama of nearly all forces but passion. Even his settings always seem nearly barren, simply all whites or all blacks, so that only the colors emerge that are evoked by the action and the characters. The motivation and energy for plot are in passion; the definition of character is through passion. There is no "thought," no "idea" of any significance.

Lorca is preeminently the playwright of passion in the modern theater although we can find elements of Lorca in Williams, Osborne, O'Neill, and Genet; but in each of these there is a significant admixture of other thematic material. Lorca's passion is not related to a program, as in D. H. Lawrence, or in Williams, or m Genet. Lorca's "blood consciousness" is a consciousness of what is, already; of what must be observed, acknowledged, assimilated, lived with, understood, and, finally, even forgiven. Lorca's passion is rooted in an established social context. The tragedy in his plays comes from the tension between passion, which is necessarily always entirely individual and personal and whimsical, and the society in which the individuals move, which defines them and also gives a particular value and shading to passion and its manifestations. In Lorca, the conflict is between passion and honor, where passion is the mark of the personal (willful and private and powerful in its needs) and honor that of the social (rigid and public and equally powerful in its rules and taboos, the denial of needs)....

In *The House of Bernardo. Alba,* we have what amounts to a nunnery and all that implies of the suppression of passion- nunneries are refuges from the usual passion of the world. Bernarda Alba is sadistically compulsive about order, pathological about cleanliness. As in *Yerma,* in which the two old maids spend all their time keeping their house spotless, so the barrenness, immaculateness of Bernarda Alba's establishment are related to sterility; her house is not merely a denial of passion but a denigration of it. Bernarda, loudly: "Magdalena, don't cry. If you want to cry, get under your bed."

We remember that in *Blood Wedding,* Leonardo lives a "disordered" life: he cannot hold down a job, he is hot-tempered and impatient, he comes from a line of murderers. He is thematically equated with a wild stallion. But none of this is pejorative, merely descriptive; Leonardo is of that world where violence alone is heroic. The Bridegroom represents order, cleanliness, and wealth. Bernarda Alba is rich and viciously opposed to irregular emotions "Hot coals in the place where she sinned," she screams horribly about the local girl who has given herself to a number of men. As we hear the threat of the galloping stallion in *Blood Wedding,* threatening the orderly arrangement of events,

so one hears the hoofbeats of the caged animal in *Bernarda Alba,* a tattoo of threatening disaster again.

Bernarda Alba is an extreme distillation of social honor; she exemplifies a passion that has gone too far in excluding the mortally impulsive, irrational, emotional, self-indulgent. It has become in its extremity antipassion. When one daughter says, "I should be happy, but I'm not," Bernarda Alba replies, "It's all the same." (Of course, it's not all the same, not even for Bernarda, as her frenzy to undo things at the end of the play testifies.) In effect, Bernarda is a Satanic spirit, living in an atmosphere of death, perversion, and denial. The play starts with a funeral and ends with a suicide; between we have sadism, insanity, onamsm. There are black curtains on the windows. Sexual passions are outside this territory: the stallion drumming in his stall; the village escapades. No men appear on stage. The setting is on the edge of action. The only action that occasionally can burst out in Bernarda Alba's house is the poultrylike squabbling of the sisters, a parody of life.

In *The House of Bernarda Alba,* then, we get an extended examination of the pathology of social passion, of an honor that is contemptuous of the individually human, that is, finally, self-defeating. Bernarda Alba did bear five children, but we are to gather that this was in the cause of social honor; that whatever pnvate passion she might have begun with has attenuated into nothingness, been distorted into self-hatred. She hates her daughters. Bernarda Alba's passion is exercised in the extinguishing of passion: the sadist can only have definition through the masochist, his diametrical opposite. As the play opens, we see Bernarda Alba finally retiring into the "ideal" existence, waiting primly for death, her social duties done, indifferent to the suppressed but smoldering vitality of the unattached daughters. Bernarda Alba fears and hates sex hi any form, for sex means only life.

The conclusion of *Bernarda Alba* crystallizes earlier thematic hints and motifs. Adela hangs herself on learning, mistakenly, that her lover "has been killed. In a veritable hysteria, Bernarda Alba shrieks that Adela died a virgin, forbids tears except m private, and calls for silence, silence, silence, as the curtain descends. Cleanliness, purity, silence, defining marks of death itself, envelope Bernarda Alba's house. "Death must be looked at face to face," she pronounces as Adela's body is cut down....

Bernarda Alba climaxes this trilogy of the tragedy of passion by seeming to assert that it is "honor," passion perverted by a sense of the social that excludes the human, which somehow survives and even triumphs, however abominably, over the personal passion. We may thus read these tragedies as concluding on a pessimistic note: the world of Bernarda Alba is one in which human impulses may not range freely, must be constrained, even expunged, even at the risk of the ugliest consequences, of perversions of passion and of life, including madness, self-stimulation, torture, suicide. But the very extremity of this view suggests its own rebuttal; Bernarda Alba's mode cannot sustain itself except by a restlessly conscious, eternally remorseless exercise of death-dealing. Even as Bernarda Alba is hysterically improvising her sterile stagecraft for the future, managing the appearance of Adela's suicide ("Take her to another room and dress her as though she were a virgin"), arranging to face death daily, another

daughter, Martirio, mutters: "A thousand tunes happy she, who had him." The personal, physical passion continues to assert its independent power. Honor may finally turn to antipassion, as in Bernarda Alba, certainly with its own power, but the primal force is personal passion.

Lorca's tragedy, then, resides in the domain of passion: passion destroys itself and its possessors, the personal can ultimately only come in conflict with the social, the social enlarges itself into vengeance or into death-serving sterility. Life and fulfillment may reside in passion alone, but precariously, never without risk, not casually. Humans cannot truly be alive without passion, but with passion they must wage a running, alert, and subtle battle with those guerilla forces intent on its destruction. It is the classic opposition between life and death itself; and death, of course, as Freud not least has sadly indicated, is an expression, a wish, of life itself. But to celebrate passion is to celebrate hie, living, feeling, reaching, erring: vitality, vivacity, whimsicality, impulsiveness, energy of every sort. There is a final lightness about Lorca's characters who strive toward goals that define them as they live, as there is about Oedipus, and to fail is simply—and greatly—to be human.

Source: Moms Freedman, "The Morality of Passion: Lorca's Three Tragedies" in his *The Moral Impulse. Modern Drama from Ibsen to the Present,* Southern Illinois University Press, 1967, pp. 89-98

Critical Essay #3

In this review of an English language production of Lorca's play by the American National Theatre and Academy, Watts offers a positive critique of the material while finding the translation somewhat lacking.

Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish playwright who was murdered by his country's Fascists in 1936, is a figure of international literary importance, and the American National Theatre and Academy was fulfilling one of its proper functions when it offered his most famous drama, *The House of Bernarda Alba,* as the fourth item in its subscription season at the ANTA Playhouse last night. It must be added, however, that the production provided additional evidence that the theatre of Spain does not fit any too snugly into the American stage and presents barriers that it is not easy to cross.

The House of Bernardo Alba is a somber and brooding tragedy about a family of girls ruled over by a grim and tyrannical matriarch who seeks to suppress their natural instincts in the interest of her own stern social code. With the father dead, the mother drives the young women into a lengthy period of mourning in which they are to be cut off completely from association with men, with the not altogether surprising result that they are rilled with bitterness, hatred and general unrest and the youngest of them commits suicide after it had been discovered that she was having a secret love affair with the eldest daughter's fiance.

The conflict between natural instincts and the forces that try to suppress them seems to be one of the dramatist's favorite themes, and there is no denying that, in *The House of Bernarda Alba,* he goes about his story with a single-minded intensity that is capable of engendering considerable dramatic power. Although on the English-speaking stage there appears to be a certain artificiality in the theatrical style of Garcia Lorca, it is still evident that he is a playwright of authentic tragic force. There are moments in the play that are highly impressive in their concentrated emotion.

The mood of ominous impending doom that hangs over the unhappy household of savage old Bernarda is captured in both the writing and the production with effective skill and presents the most successfull feature of the drama. But the tragedy itself, it seems to me, is made less moving and believable than its materials should make it through a kind of artificial stylization that may be eloquent and hauntingly lyric in the original Spanish but is a little flat and unpersuasive in its English translation. The final effect, which might have been devastating, is somehow far from overwhelming.

For me, one of the troubles with the play's effectiveness is the acting of Katma Paxinou as the matriarch. I have now seen Miss Paxinou on the stage in *Hedda Gabler* and on the screen in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Mourning Becomes Elec-tra,* and I must confess that her art continues to escape me. There is something about her highly mannered style that seems to me grotesque and extravagant, rather than powerful and moving, and this struck me as being all the more noticeable last night because that style happened to be contrasted with the less ornate playing of the other members of the cast

Such interesting young actresses as Ruth Ford, Helen Craig, Mary Welch and Kim Stanley are prominent in the all-woman cast, and they all play skillfully, but I couldn't escape the feeling that they were in a different play from the one m which Miss Paxinou was appearing. The set and the costumes by Stewart Chaney and the direction by Boris Tumarin are of help in creating the mood that is the most successful feature of *The House of Bernarda Alba,* and I certainly agree that the tragedy was worth doing But I am also sure that Garcia Lorca must have been a finer playwright than he seems in the American theatre.

Source: Richard Watts, Jr., "The Grim House of Bernarda Alba" in the *New York Post,* January 8,1951

Adaptations

The House of Bernarda Alba was produced on American television in 1960 for the "Play of the Week" series, translated and adapted by James Graham-Lujan and Richard O'Connell. Anne Revere starred as Bernarda Alba, with Eileen Heckart as La Poncia, and Suzanne Pleshette as Adela.

In 1990, the play was adapted as a Spanish film, directed by Mario Camus (Gala).

A British television production of the play premiered in 1992, directed by Nuria Espert and Stuart Burge (Channel 4)

Topics for Further Study

Following Adela's suicide, do you think Bernarda will continue to maintain such tight control over her surviving daughters? Do you think she will be successful at keeping the circumstances of Adela's death a secret from the town? Explain.

Research the social status of women in Spain in the 1930s. Based on historical records, how successful does Lorca seem to have been at depicting the issues faced by women of this time?

Examine the ways in which La Poncia serves as a mediator for the various conflicts in Bernarda's house. Why is she ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the tragic outcome of the play?

Research the impact of Francisco Franco's regime on Spanish culture. Why do you think *The House of Bernarda Alba* did not premiere in Spain until 1964?

Research Lorca's poetic and dramatic technique in the last years of his life. Why was he so adamant about achieving a more realistic style in *The House of Bernarda Alba* (so much so that he described the play as a "photographic document")?

Compare and Contrast

1936: The values and traditions of rural society remain strong in Spain, despite the influence of various modernizing forces.

Today: While rural communities survive, in Spain and elsewhere traditional ways of life have largely disappeared. As populations migrate to urban areas to seek work, television and other media bring urban issues back to rural areas in ways that were not possible before.

1936: The rights of women are highly circumscribed, and their economic dependence upon men holds them in traditionally subordinate gender roles.

Today: Women, in Spain and elsewhere, have achieved important rights but many still continue to struggle against perceptions of their "proper" role in society, which often does not include success in a professional realm.

1936: Spain is in the throes of a civil conflict brought about by economic inequalities which are felt more acutely in a depressed economy.

Today: Spain has diversified and strengthened its economy to some extent, but the country continues to struggle with high levels of unemployment and is one of the poorest member nations of the European Union. Assassinations and other actions by rebel groups like the ETA in the Basque region suggest that many social and political issues remain unresolved

1936: Lorca is arrested and executed by rebels who support General Francisco Franco's fascist coup. Lorca and his works will be a forbidden subject in Spain for years to come.

Today: Since Franco's death in 1975, Lorca is understood and appreciated on his own terms. He is openly admired in his homeland as one of the century's greatest poets, a status he never lost elsewhere.

1936: Believing in a communist ideal of shared ownership of the land and other resources, brigades of Spanish Republicans and international sympathizers fight passionately against Franco's military forces.

Today: Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the effectiveness of the American embargo against Cuba, communism is widely viewed as a failed political experiment. Support for the concept of shared ownership is not considered a valid political position in the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

Blood Wedding (1932) is the firstplay of Lorca's tragic trilogy about life in rural Spain. It concerns a man and a woman who are passionately attracted to each other but enter loveless marriages out of a sense of duty to their relatives. At the woman's wedding feast, the lovers elope. The play uses many more poetic and allegorical devices than *The House of Bernardo. Alba.*

Yerma (1934) is the second play of the trilogy. Yerma is a woman who duti&lly allows relatives to arrange her wedding. When she discovers her husband does not want children, she is torn between her desire for a baby and her belief in the sanctity of marriage. Her frustration grows uncontrollable, with tragic results.

The Poetical Works of Fedenco Garcia Lorca (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1991). Students may be interested in reading some of Lorca's more lyrical works about rural Spain, such as the poems originally included in the collections *Gypsy Ballads* and *Poem of the Deep Song.*

Life Is a Dream. The most famous play by Pedro Calderon de la Barca, a seventeenth-century playwright whose works, together with those of the older Lope de Vega, dominated Spain's Golden Age. Like Lorca, Calderon saw life in terms of a symbolic formula, and he was concerned with the traditional Spanish respect for honor. This play examines the conflict between free will and predestination.

The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War by Gerald Brenan. (Cambridge UP, 1974) is a rigorous study of Spanish history from 1874 to 1936. Ian Gibson's *The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca* (W.H. Allen, 1979) provides a comprehensive examination of the political and other circumstances surrounding Lorca's death.

Further Study

Colecchia, Francesca, Editor *Garcia Lorca: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography of Criticism,* Garland (New York City), 1979, *Garcia Lorca- An Annotated Primary Bibliography* Garland, 1982.

Extensive bibliographies with many useful listings for researchers One volume covers scholarship on Lorca's plays, the other Lorca's works in Spanish and in translation

Klein, Dennis A *Blood Wedding, Yerma, and The House of BemardaAlba Garcia Lorca"s TragicTrilogy,* G.K Hall& Co (Boston), 1991

The first full-length critical study devoted to Lorca's tragic trilogy, which the author calls "the most accomplished and mature efforts of the finest Spanish playwright of the twentieth century," Klein works through the original Spanish texts (providing quotations in his own English translations), examining the trilogy both in the larger context of Lorca's career as a poet, playwright, director, and visual artist, and in the social context of Spain in Lorca's era.

Lima, Robert. *The Theater of Garcia Lorca,* Las Americas (New York City), 1963

A critical study surveying all the plays of Lorca's available in print at the time of its publication.

Londre, Felicia Hardison. *Fedenco Garcia Lorca,* Ungar (New York City), 1984.

Examines Lorca's artistry by emphasizing a synthesis of approach to his poetry, drama, music, visual art, and stage direction. Includes a full chapter devoted to what Lorca called his "unperformable plays " *The House of Bernardo. Alba* is treated in detail, pp 172-180, and discussed elsewhere in the work

Newton, Candelas *Understanding Fedenco Garcia Lorca,* University of South Carolina Press (Columbia), 1995 Newton provides her audience with an understanding of the Andalusian region where he was born, as a basis for appreciating his writing She establishes connections between Lorca's works to illustrate the variety of approaches that Lorca employed Contains an annotated bibliography and other resources for the student researcher

Twentieth Century Literary Criticism, Vols 1, 7, 49, Gale (Detroit), 1978,1982,1994.

This resource compiles selections of criticism, it is an excellent beginning point for a research paper about Lorca The selections in these three volumes span Lorca's entire career Also see Volume 2 of Gale's *Drama Criticism.* For an overview of Lorca's life, see the entry on him in Volume 108 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,*

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BOOKRAGS

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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:

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