

## LORCA'S *BLOOD WEDDING*: A MANIFESTATION OF SPANISH FOLKLORE

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### Abstract

Culture has been an important factor in the production of literary works throughout the world. The Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca maintained a lifelong interest in the music and folklore of Spain, a fascination that heavily influenced one of his most acclaimed tragedies, *Blood Wedding*. The repressive social norms of the rural town are often contrasted with the raw, emotional state of nature in which the characters desire to live. In Lorca's countryside, heritage and violence are inextricably linked. The shallow and restrictive town, then, can be seen as a response and overreaction to the chaotic, bleak fate that man faces in nature. In approaching *Blood Wedding*, we should also be aware of the many cultural influences that fed into the play, notably the dramatist's familiarity with classical, flamenco and traditional Spanish music, and with Greek tragedy. All of them combined to transform a real life event into high art. The play resonates with an incredible passionate, tragic, beautiful love. The whole idea of the inevitability of love and death, which is present at the core of the Spanish culture, beats at the heart of the play, so strongly and so intensely.

An attempt is made in this article to trace the impact of rural Spanish culture and folklore in Lorca's tragic play, *Blood Wedding*.

**Keywords:** Blood Wedding, Folkloric, Spanish, Culture

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Those who study about Lorca know the complexities associated with his work and the controversies that have arisen around Lorca the playwright and his private life. Nevertheless, little comment has been made on the myth of Lorca or the Lorca that people are presented with when they meet the playwright's work or life (for example,

details about the poet's life in the media and academia). The figure of García Lorca has had many masks placed on him before and since his death in 1936. That is to say, that those who have had great power over Lorca's image have placed these different masks on the figure of the playwright. The playwright was indeed, to use a line from one of his own plays, 'a man devoured by the mask', although this results with the figure of Lorca being surrounded by conflicting images: that of the national icon, the Civil War victim, the Romantic figure, and finally the gay icon. These images have been so embedded in the minds of Spanish people that they have leaked through in the productions of Lorca's plays, especially in his famous rural trilogy. It seems it is impossible to write anything about rural Spain without first discussing the overwhelming myth that envelops Lorca in the minds of the Spanish people. Because, after all, it is the myth of Lorca that has lived on until today and which has carried the weight of these different images.

According to Barthes, "it is the motivation which causes the myth to be uttered" (Barthes, 2000, p. 118). Due to the issue of memory in Spain (which will be discussed in the following chapter), Spanish society gives justification and motivation for this Lorca myth; however in their minds it is not read as motive but reason. By doing so, it makes the Lorca myth seem natural, myth 'transforms history into nature' (p.129), giving it a sense of immortality and the eternal: "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity that is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (Barthes, 2000: 143).

As the *Concepts* are weak and poor (as they contain only a knowledge of reality), a rather incomplete image is given which is ideal as 'a complete image would exclude myth' (Barthes, 2000:127). Therefore, the fact that Lorca's body has never been found and the circumstances surrounding his assassination and homosexuality are unclear makes strong foundations for the Lorca myth. The myth of Lorca has been used to justify interpretations of his work and his personal life.

The myth of Lorca also influences the 'Author Function' as it presents critics and audiences with a predetermined but false image of the poet. According to Foucault's theory on the Author, 'the author is not spontaneous but constructed by the reader' (Smith, 1989, p.106); this is linked by Paul Julian Smith to Lorca: "García Lorca is perhaps the most extreme case of proprietorial authorship in Spanish literature: it seems impossible to approach his texts without acknowledging his person, and it is almost an article of faith amongst critics that in Lorca literature and life are one" (p.107).

Lorca's fame has been extended to different parts of the world; it is not limited to Spain. His plays have been performed in countries with cultures as diverse as Japan, France and Greece, and have been translated into languages. Lorca's *Blood Wedding* has been the most popular and produced play, followed by *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Yerma*. Plays from outside the rural trilogy have also been of great importance.

## 2. LORCA'S STATUS UNDER FRANCO'S GOVERNMENT

In July 1936, ignoring his friends' warnings and turning aside travel offers to Colombia and Mexico, Lorca left Madrid to spend the summer in Granada. A political crisis was already engulfing the Second Republic. Two days after he traveled to Andalucía, the Spanish Civil War broke out, occasioned by the revolt in Spanish Morocco of an army garrison under General Francisco Franco. Within two days, the Granada garrison followed suit, the first army installation on the Iberian mainland to join the coup. Two weeks later, Lorca's brother-in-law, the mayor of Granada, was arrested by the Fascists.

After a fortnight in custody, he was executed. The same day, August 16, Lorca himself was arrested. He had already been threatened by armed extremists at the family farm and gone into hiding in Granada with a friend whose family was influential in the Flange. Lorca was confined for several days, and then taken out with another man, a one-legged schoolteacher from a nearby village, and shot. They were buried in an unmarked grave in a grove of olive trees. There is no clear reason for Lorca's execution. It was seemed that his family was known locally as sympathizers and supporters of the leftist Popular Front. Lorca himself was decidedly

antifascist, with a viewpoint that was drifting leftward and writings that showed an increasing focus on social issues. He commonly answered questions about his political affiliation by saying. He sympathized with the poor, but he hated politics and political parties. He said only a month before his death that he was a revolutionary because there were no true poets that were not revolutionaries. The Fascists, on the other hand, were truly political. They were embarked on a wave of sectarian violence, a social purge, which would kill some 4500 citizens of Granada alone in the next four years.

Under Franco Spanish identity was based on 'ethno-cultural elements of Spanishness' (Herzberger, 2007, p.13), that is to say, elements like Catholicism which in turn points to heritage. Herzberger states:

For Francoist Spain, the ethno-cultural model was crucial, especially because the regime represented itself as "la coronación de un proceso histórico", which in turn allowed it to offer itself as a cynosure for Spanishness. But equally important, this same ethno-cultural model demanded exclusion from Spanishness for all aspects of the past that might rupture continuity. (p. 14)

Franco also played with the notion of 'Otherness', particularly in the 1960s. When it came to the Spanish transition after Franco's death, there was an attempt to move away from the old-fashioned views of Francoist Spain, in a way, a search for a new Spanish identity. However, folkloric Spanishness and identity are unable to escape from historical exclusion, disremembering, and remembering. There is an inevitable association between folkloric identity and Spanishness. Herzberger concludes his essay: '...an understanding of time in contemporary Spain supports ethno-cultural as well as civic claims to Spanishness, and this same understanding opens identity-making to a dynamic and transformative proliferation of times and voices' (p. 20). The notion of Spanishness is loose and dependant on time, therefore Herzberger's quote of 'essential Spanishness' lacks foundation and context.

Although at the beginning of and during the Civil War Lorca was seen as an enemy of the state, by the time of the mid-1940's, his work was being selectively banned for different reasons, and gradually the ban began to lift when Lorca's popularity flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. The ban after the Civil War is unsurprising due to the use of Lorca's work on the Republican side during the war. After Lorca's assassination in 1936, his theatre group 'La Barraca' (even though 'Lorca's aims for La Barraca were avowedly apolitical' (Byrd, 1991, p.205)) started providing entertainment for the Republican troops: According to Byrd: "It is a fitting tribute to García Lorca that, in the early days of the conflict, the Republican government quickly reactivated La Barraca to serve as force to boost the morale of their troops in the bitter struggle for survival" (p. 205).

Lorca's rural trilogy was affected by censorship, for example, *Blood Wedding* was seen to 'be both politically and morally innocuous' (O'Leary, 2005, p. 47) when it was first performed in the 1930s. However, by the 1940s the government's attitude towards the play changed. With the government's allowance of Lorca's work to be put into print again and gradually appeared on the Spanish stage again in the 1950s, the media started to remember Lorca fondly as one of the best Spanish writers of the century. Not only had this but the media elevated Lorca to a high cultural status. The memory of Lorca as a victim of the Civil War and therefore a victim of the fascist government had to be eradicated from people's minds. By excusing Lorca's assassination as a mistake, Franco's government attempted to put forward this new image of the poet, one that shed the Civil War connotations of the past and promoted dictatorship in Spain.

Garcia Lorca was also a citizen of a wider world, the Mediterranean, shaped by the rich heritage of Hellenic Greece and the socio-religious culture of *the Old Testament*. In his first identity, he manifests the folklore and traditions of his native region; in the second avatar, he demonstrates his inheritance of a cultural tradition founded on both the worlds of the classical tragedians and of the compilers of the *Old Testament* texts. These are the elements in Lorca's stages that are rooted so deeply in people's past that is inseparable from the spirit of Spain.

### 3. DISCUSSION

Lorca's major plays -- *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, as well as *Mariana Pineda*, *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife*, and *Doña Rosita the Spinster* – are among the most woman-centered plays in dramatic history. In these plays, the pivotal characters are women. Women are the ones who suffer from desire and pass through conflict to tragic or comic resolution. Most of the scenes take place in women's spaces, the domestic interiors which they rule and from which men are estranged (or, as in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, completely prohibited). The female characters reveal themselves most easily and deeply in conversations with other women. The poetry which erupts at moments of emotional intensity usually comes from the mouths of female characters. Especially in the three great tragedies that are known as his "trilogy of rural life," Lorca chooses women to exemplify the human life that is crushed by Spanish customs and social life.

*Blood Wedding* is the first and most enigmatic of Lorca's trilogy of rural Andalusian tragedies and has been widely praised by the critics for the achievement of a tragic form. Its distinctive features include the fusion of lyric and dramatic impulses, the skillful integration of a musical pattern in the drama's structural design, the thematic relevance of songs, stage effects, and recurrent images (such as the horse, water, blood, knife, earth, the Moon, flowers)—in short, the assimilation of the Spanish folk and classical traditions in a poetic drama that is modern, sophisticated and authentic.

The play was inspired by a newspaper account of a real event that occurred in Almería in 1928. Artistically re-elaborated by Lorca, the story was a simple and an old one: the rivalry within a family, and the rivalry of two men for a woman who struggles between the attraction of a fiancé, who offers her wealth and peace of mind, and the more powerful attraction of her ex-lover, Leonardo. However, having been abandoned by Leonardo, the fiancée finally decides to get married (for her pride). The preparations of the wedding are clouded by premonitions. The wedding takes place in an atmosphere full of bad omens; there is the presence of Leonardo, now married to another woman, the flight of the lovers, and the death of the rivals after a pursuit and a frantic struggle in the forest. At the end, we find the three women, the Bride, the Mother, and Leonardo's Widow, expressing their hatred, their sorrow and their loneliness when confronted by death, among the lamenting chorus of the neighbors.

Structurally, the play is divided into three acts, with three scenes in each act. The settings include the farm homes of the groom and Leonardo in Act I, the Bride's cavern in Act II, and the damp, primeval forest in Act III. Lorca postulated a broken engagement between the Bride and Leonardo. Yet these complications only arouse the primal passions of the Bride and Leonardo, leading to the explosion of repressed emotions manifested at the wedding. With respect to the episodes, thus the three acts of *Blood Wedding* can be called Betrothal, Wedding, and Blood Wedding. Here death and wedding are associated. The title of the drama also plays on the ironic meaning of "blood weddings" (*Bodas de sangre*), on the one hand as a violent aftermath (i.e. the death of the bridegroom after the wedding) and, on the other, as a *true* "blood" marriage in the play, namely that between the bride and Leonardo.

In *Blood Wedding*, Lorca's story oscillates between the two magnetic poles of the Mother moreover, the Bride. The Mother has internalized the constrictions of her harsh, rural world. She is strict about money and marriage and contemptuous of feelings. She is deeply conservative about gender roles; she believes that men belong in the fields, women belong in the house. She seems to be conservative about relations between the sexes ("I looked at nobody-I looked at your father, and when they killed him I looked at the wall in front of me"). Therefore, there is no surprise when the Mother defines marriage for the Bride: "A man, some children, and a wall two yards thick for everything else."

Small wonder that the Bride rebels against this confining society, which stifles her voice as well as her sexuality. After the formal interview with her novio and his mother, she suddenly bites her hand and cries "Ay-y-y!" in inexpressible rage and desire. Clearly, she desires Leonardo, but why? Does her need spring from love or lust or the frustration of a life with no choices and no control? In the moments surrounding the wedding, she shuns physical contact and struggles to deny her thwarted passion. Only after she has run away with Leonardo-

while alone in the forest with her lover and then grieving with the bereaved Mother—can she unleash torrents of poetry, harsh and vivid images of her love and liberation and eventual tragedy. We can make out from the scenes that Lorca had a special sympathy for oppressed, powerless groups and individuals, especially women.

An important issue, which has persisted in the Spanish culture, and turns out to be a manifestation of folkloric tradition, is the rite of sacrifice. The themes of honor and passion are linked with that of life-death in many passages in which recurrent images of water and blood are the unifying principle, as, for example, in the passage cited when the Mother says, “There are two groups here. My family and yours... The hour of blood has come” and in the scene by the arroyo where the blood is spilled and “two treat torrents are still at last”. The woodcutters anticipate the spilled blood and link it with the tainted passion of the lovers. (Scene 1, Act III, pp. 78-79) As the inheritor of an ancient dual tradition of blood sacrifice, and just as in *the Old Testament* and Greek religious life sacrifice was the most important religious act; Lorca becomes the purveyor of new thrusts in the same direction. The question of his motivation remains, however. The Old Testament rites of sacrifice and their counterparts in ancient Greek culture no doubt were taken by Lorca to be still exemplary of the mental disposition of the people around him, largely Mediterranean in descent, and thus the playwright found in them inherent dramatic values similar to those their people represented for the Greek tragedians.

But Lorca seeks his own path among the brambles of the lives he portrays on his stages. The bloodiest of encounters leading to immolation occur in *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*, 1933), where the two pretenders to the Bride's hand— Leonardo and the Bridegroom—fight to the death in a rite beyond the norms of the traditional duel. There are no rules of combat here, no seconds to serve as witnesses, no doctor to stem the flow of blood should a combatant fall wounded. This is to be a duel to the death. The ritualistic nature of the combat is marked by the presence first of the Woodsmen, a chorus in the style of Greek tragedy, then by the Moon, incarnate in a young Woodcutter with a white face, and lastly by the Beggar Woman, who is Death personified. And it is the Beggar Woman who instructs the Moon: “Shine on the vest and spread apart buttons, and afterwards knives know the path well.” And the Moon, enthused by the promise of a blood rite, responds:

Moon: Let me come in! Oh, let me!  
 No shadow. My rays  
 must shine everywhere,  
 and in dark of the trees  
 spread a rumour of dawn,  
 so my cheeks this night  
 will be stained with red blood,  
 and the reeds clustered  
 in wide swathes of air.  
 Who's that hiding! Speak out!  
 No! There's no escape!  
 I'll make the horse gleam  
 with a fever of diamond.  
 Nevertheless, may they take a long time to die. Let blood  
 course through my fingers with delicate wheezing.  
 See how my valleys of ashes awaken expecting  
 that fountain of shuddering flow. (III: 1)

The Moon further acknowledges the rite of the dead, and retorts:

But let them die slowly. Let the blood seep  
 slow through my fingers, a delicate whisper.  
 Already my ashen valleys are stirring  
 they yearn for that fount, its quivering flow!  
 (III: 1)

The ritual of death is to be a sacrifice to the Moon, whose shafts of light (fingers) will receive the blood that the combatants are fated to shed. When the Beggar Woman re-enters and spreads her cloak, it is a sign that Death has triumphed. The Beggar woman describes the scene of the dead bodies in this way:

Beggar Woman: I saw them: they come: two torrents  
quiet at last between the great stones,  
two men between the horse's hooves.  
Dead in the beauty of night.  
Dead, yes, dead.

First Girl: Silence, old woman, silence!

Beggar Woman: Crushed flowers their eyes, their teeth  
like two fists of hardened snow.  
Both of them fell, the bride returned  
her hair, her dress dyed with blood.  
Covered with blankets they come  
on the shoulders of handsome lads.  
It is so; that's all. It was just.  
On the golden flower, black sand. (III: 2)

After the two men have fallen in the duel of knives, there remain other victims—The Bride, Leonardo's Wife, the Bridegroom's Mother—three women left alone by their men, each mourning for her own reason. They are women who will lead empty lives thereafter, like the titular characters in Euripides' great tragedy, *The Trojan Women*. Despite their blood not having been spilt, they too have been sacrificial victims. Theirs will be living deaths. The Bride is the first of these victims, asking mother to kill her:

Bride: No more. No more! Take your revenge; here I am! Look how tender  
my throat is; it would cost you less effort to cut it than to cull a dahlia in  
your garden. But, what you say is not so! I'm as chaste and pure as a new - born  
babe. And with the power to prove it. Light a fire. Let's put our hands into its  
flames; you for your son, I, for my body. You'll be the first to withdraw. (III:2)

*Blood Wedding* is the first drama of the trilogy. It is a tragedy where "love is in conflict with realities and social customs and tradition" (Gharah Baghi, 2002, 195). In writing his poems and play, Lorca made use of the real events.

It can be argued that Lorca served as a symbol for different people, whether it be political or social. With this function come certain preconceptions which Smith discusses:

First, Lorca is often presented as being at once universal and particular: the great man transcends his socio-historical limitations but must be called to account, none the less, for his political and sexual convictions. Second, this juridical assessment is historically specific: the anti-fascism and homosexuality repressed or condemned by early critics are proclaimed and celebrated by later ones. Third, the image of Lorca as author does not arise spontaneously, but is actively constructed by critics. (Smith, 107)

These preconceptions together with the notion of the Lorca myth have helped create the Lorca that is presented to us today; this Lorca, since his assassination in 1936, has sprouted from the minds of the Republicans who mourned him, the fascist dictatorship which tried to censor and then celebrate him, and from the pens of those who are attempting to revive and reveal the private side of the playwright after so many years of silence. Of course, there are many sides to Lorca, but today the media are saturated with only a few of these images, and each of these selected images has in turn been used to serve a purpose. Lorca as a national icon was used by

both the Nationalists and the Republicans after the Civil War for their own means, whether it was to promote a positive image of Spain or to use his fate as an example and a reminder of the atrocities of the past.

One interpretation of *Blood Wedding* views it as a drama of the soil, with the Groom representing water and the Bride the arid lands. Another interpretation, emphasizing socio-economic factors, postulates an indictment of arranged marriages based on property rather than on mutual attraction (true love). Still another views the work as a re-enactment of mythic patterns described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, the marriage and death cycle repeated endlessly.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to conclude a piece of work that has opened up so many questions about a man who has been represented in so many ways. It is equally difficult to conclude when the future of the image of Lorca and his work is reasonably unpredictable and has so many aspects depending on it, namely the type of productions that will be created in the future and any new aspects of his life that come to the surface. Audiences, critics and those involved in the theatre are unable to detach themselves from Lorca's charisma and, as the image of Lorca still remains incomplete, it is likely that the myth of the poet will continue to thrive. The only possible break from this myth will be if the image of Lorca is completed, although his assassination has made this almost impossible.

The recognition of people's thoughts and minds of people can be determined only through a clear analysis of that people's culture. Literary works in particular play important roles in manifesting people's cultural and social conditions. Lorca was one of such writers who voiced their concern over social shortcomings. He was a patriot, but at the same time hated those who worshiped their countries blindly, because he believed that there are many good people around the world. He considers himself one with the rest of the world.

The authors in this article have been able to show how Lorca has represented his own contemporary society, and Spanish tradition and culture.

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