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FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

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to achieve this crystallisation, this reduction of his work to 'values of strict dramatic poetry' (*3Trs*, 12). The implied distinction between 'lyricism' and 'dramatic poetry' is an important one. For all their differences, Lorca's last complete plays, *Doña Rosita* and *Bernarda Alba*, are comparable in so far as in both of them he seems to be striving to achieve a more naturalistic representation of social and individual reality. But these final plays are no less poetic in their conception and execution, however, simply because their 'lyric branches' have been trimmed. A common element in both – despite their substantial difference in tone – is Lorca's use of precise details of staging both for their documentary and their allusive and symbolic qualities. *Doña Rosita* and *Bernarda Alba*, written within a year of one another, can both be seen as part of a single experiment by Lorca which involved the refinement of surface naturalism to the point where it would simultaneously serve a poetic or symbolic function in these plays. The dramatic text is still a concentrated and structured illusion whose final purpose is not to reproduce natural speech and activity, but to reveal or to allude to the inner lives of the play's characters and their relations to one another and to the world. Moreover – and this is where Lorca discovered the crucial intersection of poetic and theatrical art – the dramatic text and its realisation on stage must provoke in the spectator a response that is at the same time an intellectual as well as an emotional understanding of the action that is represented.

'Blood Wedding' (1933)

A marriage is negotiated according to custom between two eligible young people who are designated in the playscript simply as the Bride and the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom's

mother consents although she has serious reservations about her son's future wife who was once courted by Leonardo, a member of the Félix clan. This clan was responsible for the murder of the Bridegroom's father and older brother. The Bridegroom dismisses this as something better left forgotten; the Mother's apprehensions only increase with time. The Bride's consent in the marriage arrangement is also accompanied by deep anxiety; she is still secretly in love with Leonardo, who is now married to another woman. On the day of the wedding, the Bride and Leonardo flee together and are pursued by the Bridegroom and his family. There is a duel with knives in which both the male rivals die. The play ends with the women – the Bride, the Mother and Leonardo's wife – mourning their lost men.

The crisis of this drama is centred in the contradictory movement and clash of the two principal lines of action: one toward the celebration of the socially sanctioned union between the Bride and the Bridegroom, and another toward the consummation of an illicit and erotically driven relationship between the Bride and Leonardo. These opposed movements of the dramatic plot correspond to the collision of two principles by which men and women are brought into relationships with one another: the first is the marriage union by which the society guarantees continuity within families and classes, and assures the increase and regular transfer of material property; the second obeys only the volatile demands of erotic desire and recognises no restrictions of social class or material circumstances. The first is a principle of order and coherence, and it has the authority of a moral absolute; the second is a force that threatens that authority with the chaos of passion, and the energy of rebellious defiance of social boundaries and moral strictures. The Bride is the character who suffers this dissonance and contradiction most acutely; her struggle

becomes a focal point of dramatic interest as the opposed movements of the action – one actual, the other potential – contend within her throughout the second act.

The Mother is the other focal point of dramatic interest. She has lost both her husband and her son to a violent confrontation with members of the Félix clan. She has an obsessive horror of weapons and fears more than anything else the thought of losing her last son as she lost her other two men. At the same time, she is obsessed with the thought that the murderers have not suffered sufficiently for their acts:

> MOTHER: Can anyone bring me your father back? Or your brother? Then there's jail. What do they mean, jail? They eat there, smoke there, play music there! My dead men choking with weeds, silent, turning to dust. Two men like two beautiful flowers. The killers in jail, carefree, looking at the mountains. (*3Trs*, 35)

The Mother suppresses what seems to be an irrational uneasiness about the Bride's suitability for her son, and she consents to the marriage in the interest of his happiness. But having consented, she discovers that the Bride's mother, now dead, had been beautiful and proud, and it was rumoured that she did not love her husband. The solitary and mysterious personality of the Bride only gives more weight to the Mother's intuitive apprehensions. Though the Mother tries to quell her subjective dread of the marriage, her expressions of rage against the rival clan and the killers of her men, and her suspicious treatment of her son's betrothed, establish early in the play a sense of impending crisis.

The three scenes of the first act occur in distinct locations, and each one sets in motion the conflicting forces

that suggest the play's tragic potential. The first scene, between the Mother and the Bridegroom, her son, reveals her complex emotions concerning the proposed marriage, in contrast with her son's lighthearted optimism. The second scene takes place in Leonardo's house, where his wife and her mother are singing a lullaby to a sleeping infant. Leonardo appears, and the news of the Bride's impending marriage provokes a sullen and angry mood in him. He responds with hostility to his Mother-in-law's questions about his long, unexplained absences from home, and finally, he storms out of the room, waking the baby as he goes. The scene begins and ends with a lullaby, but one whose imagery of frustration, apprehension and obstruction is as portentous as Leonardo's intense anger. The final scene of act one takes place at the distant and isolated cave-house of the Bride. The formal negotiations of the wedding agreement are held between the Bridegroom's Mother and the Father of the Bride. The personal qualities that the Father praises in his daughter are actually those of a household servant and a bearer of offspring. The Bride then enters, solemn and quiet, and stands with her hands fallen 'in a modest pose' and with her head bowed. She responds laconically and obediently to the Mother's stern interrogation:

> MOTHER: . . . do you know what it is to be married, child?
> BRIDE (*seriously*): I do.
> MOTHER: A man, some children and a wall two yards thick for everything else.
> BRIDE: I'll know how to keep my word. (*3Trs*, 51–2)

The Bride is submissive and dutiful in the presence of the Mother, her Father and the Bridegroom, but the final segment of the scene includes only the Bride and her

Maidservant, and it reveals in the Bride a repressed strength of body and will that profoundly contradicts her behaviour only moments before. She bites her own hand in anger and frustration, and physically struggles with the servant who picks up one of the wedding gifts out of innocent curiosity. Finding herself the target of the girl's hostility, the servant elicits from her the confession that she is visited at night by Leonardo, and Lorca closes the act with the sound of the lover's horse approaching in the distance.

The second act's opening scene brings the two lovers together on the morning of the Bride's wedding day. The servant is preparing the Bride's wedding costume and brushing her hair, but her chatter about the life of a married woman provokes only hostile and tense reactions from the Bride. The dialogue is abruptly cut off as Leonardo appears in the entryway. The illicit nature of the lovers' relationship is dramatised now by the servant's horror at Leonardo's bold intrusion into the Bride's house, and by the Bride's defiant appearance before him dressed only in her petticoat. The scene between the two is filled with bitter accusations against one another for their respective marriages, and at the same time it is charged with an erotic energy that makes their separation seem unbearable and unnatural.

The rest of the act takes place outside the Bride's house during the wedding celebration. The opening scene has released the erotic current that will flow steadily beneath the surface of the entire act, finally inundating the stage at the end and sweeping all the characters towards the play's catastrophic denouement in the third act. Lorca calls for the wedding guests to fill the stage with traditional singing and dancing as the community innocently and gracefully honours the new husband and wife. Nothing is left to

chance under Lorca's direction of this scene, even down to the meticulous orchestration of the singers' voices.[2] All of this carefully co-ordinated activity serves to objectify the primary momentum of the play's action towards the consummation of the conventional union between Bride and Bridegroom. At the same time, the dialogue among the principal characters is punctuated by indications of the Bride's tense anxiety and the Mother's growing apprehension that this union is doomed to disaster. The festival serves as an increasingly ironic background to what is now becoming the most compelling movement of the dramatic plot, that is, towards an action that will in some way resolve the lovers' desperate situation. Leonardo appears and disappears, always on the periphery of the activity; the Bride's inner struggle becomes increasingly acute as she shows herself to be abstracted from what is going on around her and unable to respond appropriately to any of the good wishes and frivolous chatter of the guests. She at last begs to be excused from leading off the dancing with her husband and takes leave of the festivities to lie down. Shortly thereafter, when the servant cannot find where the Bride has gone, the inevitable course of events is set in motion, and the dramatic pace accelerates precipitously. Questions are asked and anxious suspicions are raised. Then Leonardo's wife enters crying out that she has just seen her husband and the Bride, 'on his horse, with their arms around each other [riding] off like a shooting star!'

Throughout the act, Lorca has maintained the primary movement of the action towards the accomplishment of the marriage. All the while, he has been building beneath the surface the potential contradictory movement of the action to the point where it finally overwhelms the main momentum and replaces it with a new and fatally doomed movement towards the union of the two lovers.

Once the flight of the lovers has taken place, the Mother is confronted with the discovery that her deepest fears about this marriage have all proved true. Her family has once again been affronted by the rival clan and the requirement for revenge suddenly encounters within the Mother her most serious dread, which is that of losing her son to violence. 'Go! After them!' she cries to her son, and then, 'No! Don't go. Those people kill quickly and well . . .' and then, '. . . but yes, run, and I'll follow! . . . the hour of blood has come again' (*3Trs*, 77–8). The scene ends as the men move off in pursuit of the fugitive lovers.

The final movement of this act is an instance of Aristotelian *peripeteia*, that is, the transformation of one state of affairs into its exact opposite through a necessary or probable sequence of happenings. Lorca had a clear sense of dramatic necessity and of the spectacular effect that could be achieved by building this pattern in a tragedy.

The flight of the Bride and Leonardo is the action that precipitates the violent denouement, as the third act is largely an intense playing out of the inevitable. As the moment of the death of the two male protagonists approaches, however, Lorca moves the representation on to an altogether new plane of theatricality. When the curtain rises on the third act, Lorca has abandoned the stylised realism of the first two acts in favour of a supernatural exploration of the symbolic terms of the drama. The opening set: '*A forest. It is nighttime. Great moist tree trunks. A dark atmosphere. Two violins are heard. Three Woodcutters enter*' (*3Trs*, 79). This scene was a rather daring move on Lorca's part. At risk is the loss of all the dramatic tension built up in the previous act, but it seems that Lorca wished to build up a tension now on an entirely different level. The Woodcutters comprise the conventional tragic chorus and their severe dialogue

orients the spectator's emotions to the exact terms of the tragic action about to take place. The opposed principles of the drama are now articulated from the perspective of the lovers, constituting an important insight into the tragic essence of the action about to be witnessed:

2ND WOODCUTTER: You have to follow your passion. They did right to run away.
1ST WOODCUTTER: They were deceiving themselves, but at last blood was stronger.
3RD WOODCUTTER: Blood!
1ST WOODCUTTER: You have to follow the path of your blood.
2ND WOODCUTTER: But blood that sees the light of day is drunk up by the earth.
1ST WOODCUTTER: What of it? Better to be dead with the blood drained away than alive with it rotting
(*3Trs*, 79)

The Moon appears onstage dressed as a young woodcutter with a white face, illuminating the forest with blue light; he sings a ballad of death, and when he disappears, an old Beggar Woman, Death in disguise, comes on to the wooded scene calling for the moonlight to return so that she can seek out her victims. The transposition of the drama on to a plane of poetic symbolism causes the spectator now to see the tragic action purely as a consequence of the collision of antagonistic forces that are inevitably in opposition. Death has now entered the drama as the ultimate antagonist, as the indifferent power that will nullify everything. Nor does Lorca merely isolate this symbolic scene and return again to the formerly established level of representation. The Death figure appears before the Bridegroom and considers him as her prey, and she closes the death scene with the

opening of her black cape as the stage is engulfed in darkness. She appears again in the final scene of the play, no longer in the fantastic setting of the forest, but on the doorstep of a dwelling which is also of a design full of symbolic suggestion, where the women gather at the end to lament the deaths of the young men.

Adding to the intensity of the symbolic forest scene is the breathless dialogue between the fleeing lovers. This is a scene of erotic rapture played out almost literally in the shadow of death. The lyric poetry of their final scene is at once a celebration of the lovers' erotic passion and a eulogy to its inevitable termination in death. As they exit in an embrace, the Moon enters very slowly, and the Beggar-woman appears as the stage is lit with blue light again; two shrieks are heard, and the Beggar woman '*stands with her back to the audience . . . opens her cape and stands in the center of the stage like a great bird with immense wings. The Moon halts. The curtain comes down in absolute silence*' (*3Trs*, 90).

The final scene is almost another act in itself. It opens with a second choral passage where two young girls dressed in dark blue are winding a skein of red yarn against a background of stark white walls. The setting is the Mother's house, but it is meant now to suggest a church, a place where ritual is appropriate: the walls are white as are the stairs, the archways and the floor; '*this simple dwelling*', the stage directions tell us, '*should have the monumental feeling of a church. There should not be a single gray nor any shadow, not even what is necessary for perspective.*' The girls are speaking in a chanting rhyme, speculating to one another about what may have taken place after the wedding; a third girl appears to announce the approach of the women, and of the men bearing the bodies. The Beggarwoman from the forest scene now appears and

she confirms to the girls the deaths of the two young men.

From this point on, the scene is purely elegiac, as the women come together after the killings have taken place. But it is also a scene of symbolic resolution as the three women ironically are united in their grief. The Mother's hatred of the Bride is expressed most devastatingly in her initial physical attack on the girl, and then in her refusal to expiate the Bride's guilt by inflicting further punishment; nor will she acknowledge the helplessness of the Bride to have resisted the course of her passion. The women mourn together, but they are ultimately isolated from one another by their own individual experiences of the tragedy. The Mother's deepest dread has been realised at the same time that she has been swept along by an honour code of violence and revenge. Her son has now followed his brother and father in violent death. Her anticipated peace is tragically ironic: 'I want to be here [in her house]. Here. In peace. They're all dead now: and at midnight I'll sleep, sleep without terror of guns or knives. Other mothers will go to their windows, lashed by rain, to watch for their sons' faces. But not I' (*3Trs*, 95). The Bride's loss, though less ironic than the Mother's, is as striking in terms of the tragedy as a whole; both these women must live out the consequences of drastic and irreparable reverses of fortune. Leonardo's wife has foreseen the tragedy as her marriage disintegrated in mounting tensions and mistrust. She is now a widow with an infant son and another child yet unborn.

The three women brought together at the end on this glaring white stage symbolically become one. The Mother is at the end of her life, alone; the Bride, in the beginning of her womanhood and widowed on her wedding day, is also alone, but neither a wife nor a mother; Leonardo's wife is at

a stage of life intermediate to that of the Bride and the Mother, and she has been 'cast off' by her husband who was restless, careless of her feelings and in love with another woman. As a widow she will repeat the pattern of the widowed Mother, but with added shame. Mother, wife, lover/mistress and bride: all these female roles are symbolically concentrated in this mourning group at the end. The focus of the suffering on the three women, and at last, on the two antagonists, the Bride and the Mother, suggests no resolution. All that is suggested is the uniformity of the destiny of women in the society that is carefully depicted in the first two acts. They are subordinated to men, as daughters and as wives, and without their husbands, fathers and sons, they are nothing. Lorca sees them as the tragic victims, therefore, as those who suffer most acutely from the turbulence and contradictions of a time when principles and emotions are in crisis, and when actions produce the opposite of that which they envisioned or intended.

The repeated allusions to 'blood' in this play call for some explanation of its semantic range in the work. Blood refers to that which relates individuals as groups of kin, as families in a blood line; blood also refers to the inevitable violence of the conventions of honour and revenge in this society where clan justice still prevails. The chorus in act three suggests as well that blood refers to an elemental, instinctual force of life (erotic passion) that draws two individuals together with a compulsion that is as natural as it is fatal; and in the context of the wedding of the second act, blood refers to the breaking of the virgin bride's hymen as the union is consummated. The confluence of these metaphors is dramatically forced where blood is the deadly price that may be exacted for an illicit erotic liaison, where the crime of passion is punished by the violent assertion of the society's retributive code of revenge. The title, 'Blood

Wedding', therefore becomes a metaphoric distillation of the dramatic conflicts that are depicted in the play. Each specific aspect of this symbolism of union – family, kinship, erotic love – discloses through the action of the tragedy its diametric opposite. One set of symbolic meanings for 'blood' undergoes a transformation that is essential to tragedy into a diametrically opposed set of meanings: 'blood', symbolising that which relates and unites and expresses the force of elemental life, becomes a symbol of that which divides, generates antagonism and brings violence and death into human affairs. This aggregation of opposed meanings constitutes the symbolic nucleus of the tragedy.

The premiere of *Blood Wedding* on 7 March 1933, caused a sensation among those who saw the performance. The first act riveted the audience's attention, but the scene in act two with the nuptial celebration, the festive songs and dances, and the growing dramatic tension, provoked an ovation that interrupted the drama and brought a surprised Lorca out for a bow. In fact he was also called out to acknowledge the applause that followed each of the play's three acts.

The critics immediately recognised *Blood Wedding* as a work of innovation for its adventuresome use of an unusually broad range of the theatre's resources. Also impressive was its consistent high seriousness, and its almost classical delineation of the tragic conflict. What people were least prepared for was the mixture of realism and poetic symbolism. Lorca had established the tragic potential of the action during the first two acts in an identifiable social context where specific dissonances and contradictions were driving the action towards a tragic crisis. One critic observed that the elegiac tone of the third act was possibly too intense to carry over such a length of

time, particularly when, for the unaccustomed viewer, the other acts, with their poetic passages, might seem overly long as well. Another critic thought that the third act was simply too morbid and lugubrious after the exalted level of tragic tension that had been accomplished in the first two acts. In any case, Lorca's symbolist third act with its elaboration of the tragedy on the level of a clash of the forces of nature and of the human psyche provoked the only reservations that were expressed by contemporary critics.

The more general problem of mixing prose and poetry throughout the play had been an overriding concern of Lorca's in rehearsals, and he tirelessly worked with the cast to maintain a single principle: to make the transitions from prose to poetry as natural as possible by avoiding the declamatory style of acting in verse drama that was the dominant technique on the stage at the time. He had his own vision of the balance that should be sought:

> [*Blood Wedding* is] . . . no more than a dramatic work put together with the rhythmic hammer blows of verse from the first to the last scenes. Free and solid prose can attain high levels of expressiveness, allowing us an outpouring that would be impossible within the rigidity of metrical forms. Poetry is welcome at those moments where the development and the tension of the theme require it. Never at any other time. In accord with that formula, you can see in *Blood Wedding* that up until the epithalamic scene, verse does not appear with any of the breadth and intensity one might expect, and it dominates absolutely the scene in the forest and the drama's final scene.

When asked what he would call the most gratifying part of

the drama Lorca said, 'The one where the Moon and Death intervene as elements and symbols of fate. The realism that predominates the tragedy up to that point is broken and disappears to give way to poetic fantasy where I naturally feel as comfortable as a fish in water' (II, 910–11).

'Yerma' (1934)

Yerma is the second play of Lorca's projected trilogy of the Spanish earth. 'My earliest emotions are bound to the earth and to the labours of the fields', Lorca had said,

> . . . without this love of the earth I could never have written *Blood Wedding*. Nor could I have begun my next work, *Yerma*. I find in the land a profound suggestion of poverty. And I love poverty above all other things. Not sordid and famished poverty, but poverty that is blessed, simple, humble, like black bread.

This vision of Spain's rural people, romanticised though it may be, conveys what Lorca saw and admired, and defines what he made the underlying substance of his rural dramas. The simplicity he speaks of has to do with the elemental level of material life that is represented in these plays, less as a reality than as an ethos that was being lost. Such a view of these dramas overlooks, as Lorca was prone to do, the considerable stylistic sophistication and complexities of realisation that the dramas entail. The sophistication and the complexities are all, of course, demanded by the need to produce the illusion of the greatest simplicity and naturalness of production. What we know of Lorca's work with the casts of these two plays points invariably to his meticulous concern with the details of delivery and sound production, and the co-ordination of individual voices and

4. The Granada Plays

1. Rodrigo, *García Lorca en Cataluña*, p. 373.
2. Rodrigo, pp. 64–5.
3. Rodrigo, p. 65.
4. Rodrigo, p. 100.
5. I have slightly changed the verse translation of this poem that was published in the Graham-Luján and O'Connell *Five Plays*, p. 136.
6. The Spanish word *cursilería* indicates pretentious and affected taste, particularly when vulgar and overstated; it is associated especially with the socially ambitious but unrefined petty-bourgeoisie in Spain.
7. García Lorca, Federico, *Three Tragedies by Lorca*, tr. by James Graham-Luján and Richard L. O'Connell (New York: New Directions, 1955), p. 13. To be cited parenthetically in text as *3Trs*.
8. The verse translation is slightly changed from the Graham-Luján, O'Connell version, *5 Plays*, p. 171.
9. Allen, R. C., *Psyche and Symbol in the Theater of Federico García Lorca* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974). The best psychological (Jungian) study of Lorca's work.

5. The Three Rural Dramas

1. García Lorca, Federico, *El público y Comedia sin título*, R. Martínez Nadal and Marie Laffranque (eds) (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1978), p. 19. To be cited in text as *Nadal*.
2. García Lorca, Federico, *Bodas de sangre* (Barcelona: Aymá, 1971), p. 66.
3. Sánchez, Robert, *García Lorca* (Madrid: Jura, 1950), p. 68.
4. Rubia Barcia, J., 'El realismo mágico en *La casa de Bernarda Alba*', in *Federico García Lorca*, Ildefonso-Manuel Gil (ed.) (Madrid: Taurus, 1975), p. 383.
5. This aspect of Lorca's life and work is clearly outlined by the poet's late brother Francisco in *Federico y su mundo*, by Francisco García Lorca (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1980), 'The Human and Political Commitment of García Lorca', pp. 401–18.

6. Innovation and Experiment

1. García Lorca, Federico, *From Lorca's Theater: Five Plays*, tr. by Richard L. O'Connell and James Graham-Luján (New York: Scribners, 1941). p. 79. To be cited in the text as *FLT*.

2. Translations from the text edited by Martínez Nadal are my own.
3. Translations from the text edited by Marie Laffranque and published in the Martínez Nadal volume are my own.