

for
Francisco Mena Soto
with gratitude for his friendship
and belief in his poetry

◆ **L O R C A** ◆

◆ THE GAY IMAGINATION ◆

◆ PAUL BINDING ◆



First published in October 1985 by GMP Publishers Ltd,
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Binding, Paul
Lorca: the gay imagination.
1. Garcia Lorca, Federico—Criticism and
interpretation 2. Homosexuality in literature
I. Title
861'.62 PQ6613.A763Z/
ISBN 0-907040-37-3
ISBN 0-907040-36-5 Pbk

Cover art by Christopher S. Brown
Typeset by MC Typeset, Chatham, Kent
Printed and bound by Billing & Sons Ltd, Worcester

Falangist Right, indeed the Right of any strong leadership, doesn't much care for plurality.

1930 to 1936 were, for all the external turmoil, years of a truly wonderful activity for Lorca; and the *Romancero gitano* excepted, all the work by which he has been best known came from that period – a period in which, in social and personal life, his old character had quite returned, ebullient, sensitive, friendly, full of plans and schemes, an amazing number of which he carried out (his visit to Argentina and Uruguay of 1933–34, for example), but with that awareness of his own *raíz andruga* which we have already noted.

The major part of my task has been done. I have shown how the crisis of 1928–29 forced from Lorca – especially when it took him to America with all its bewildering confusions – a recognition of the complexities of his own homosexual nature. I have tried to show that homosexuality had, in fact, animated his previous productions, being often responsible for what is most alive and disturbing in them, and that after his period in New York – during which he confronted it in a different way – he was able to use it to create works of major emotional and intellectual reference which have still not been accorded their full due. This balance I have attempted to put right.

On the other hand volumes already exist on the major achievements of the Thirties – achievements in which at first sight homosexuality plays little part. In the next section I look at these famous works but strictly from this point of view: that the homosexuality which we have seen so dominant in Lorca's imaginative, artistic life does not disappear from *Bodas de sangre* (1932), *Yerma* and the 'Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías' (1934), *Doña Rosita la soltera* (1935) and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936). Rather it can be seen again as a figure in the carpet, and I hope that my revelation of this can be helpful and can make some contribution to further acknowledgement of just how richly worked and complex these achievements are. Even at the time they enjoyed great acclaim, and no wonder, because they speak to so many regions of the personality.

Contemporaneous with these so public achievements are the private ones which are the subject of the last section of my book: the poems of the *Diván del Tamarit* and, later, the *Sonetas del amor oscuro* (*Sonnets of the Dark Love*). These last return to the subject of homosexual love, or rather visit the subject again and in an even bolder way, since they are written in *propria persona*. The two collections of poems amount, in my view, to Lorca's most advanced and visionary work. Once again I hope that my organisation of this discussion of Lorca's work, as imposed by my theme, can assist in a revaluation of the poet, and that these remarkable performances can begin to be given their full due, which in my opinion they have not yet quite received.

PART TWO

The Classical Masterpieces

1

Lorca had found the story of *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) some years before he wrote the play itself – in newspaper accounts of the elopement, on her wedding day, of a bride in Almería and her former lover.¹ The groom pursued the pair, and the two men proceeded to fight to the death. The play Lorca came to write ends with a choral account of this tragic conclusion to the story:

Vecinas: con un cuchillo,
con un cuchillito,
en un día señalado, entre las dos y las tres,
se mataron los dos hombres del amor.

Neighbours: with a knife,
with a little knife,
on an appointed day, between two and three,
the two men of love killed themselves.²

'*En un día señalado*': this phrase is crucial to the work. The events in Almería had composed themselves in Lorca's mind, not as a history of a crime and its repercussions, but as a terrible doomed sequence of irresistible compulsions. The Bride's lover exclaims at the play's climax:

Que yo no tengo la culpa,
que la culpa es de la tierra. . . .
Oh, it isn't my fault –
The fault is the earth's. . . .³

and, addressing the girl he loves:
Clavos de luna nos funden
mi cintura y tus cadenas.

Nails of moonlight have fused
my waist and your chains.⁴

Lorca's rejection of both socio-psychological and moralistic views of the incidents went hand in hand with a literary rejection of any naturalistic treatment of them. For the naturalistic is a collusion with beliefs in the supremacy of the rational and in the possibility of apportioning blame in, and finding solutions to, intricate human problems. *Bodas de sangre* is of Lorca's three great tragedies the most defiantly non-naturalistic. It is, as the lines just cited should make plain, the fruit of Lorca's absorption in Greek tragedy: it is also, this being no contradiction, a distinctly expressionist work. Such a fusion of classical and expressionist can be found also in the work of a dramatist ten years Lorca's senior, the American Eugene O'Neill. Stark and haunting achievements of his like *Desire Under the Elms* (1925), *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1936) provide interesting points of comparison with Lorca's major dramatic work, and embody the same cultural impulse: to clear the theatre of the clutter and *trompe l'oeil*, *trompe l'oreille* devices of the realistic drama, and to return to something purer, more atavistic and closer to drama's origins as a 'mystery' relating to the well-springs of human behaviour. Classical and expressionist features of *Bodas de sangre* are the rite-like *tableaux* that replace expected confrontations between characters, the discarding of prose for verse at high points of the play, the use of minor characters as a chorus, and the denial of names to all the characters except one, Leonardo, the Bride's old lover and present seducer.

It is the third act, however, which shows us most plainly the ritual and expressionist intentions of Lorca. Where the unsuspecting boulevard theatre-goer might anticipate a scene in which the wronged Bridegroom catches up with Leonardo and the Bride, we are presented with a masque of symbolic figures, none of whom has appeared before, speaking to us from a nocturnal forest as much a domain of the psyche as the actual place to which the guilty pair have fled. These figures are two Woodcutters, the Moon (in the guise of a Woodcutter) and an aged Beggarwoman – Death's acolyte and Death in person – both from Lorca's private but already much-projected mythology. Their exchanges and speeches show the people, their community, and the land in which it stands in the appropriate ontological context – one in which *un día señalado* is the most significant feature and everything is immanent with *duende*. These figures indicate to us that *Bodas de sangre* is, above all else, a rite-like progression towards acknowledgement of Death's supremacy.

This is also evidenced by Lorca's carefully thought-out, firmly insisted upon and wholly expressionist allotment of a colour to each scene, a paradigm of colours thus evolving. We move through

yellow, rose, silver, and a general darkness to, first, an 'intense blue radiance' which the stage must take on for the advent of the Moon, and then the 'shining white' – with 'not a single grey nor any shadow, and not even what is necessary for perspective' – of the final scene. It is therefore drenched in the frightening purity of an absolute and shadowless white that the Mother stands to deliver her last, gnomic lines:

Y esto es un cuchillo,
un cuchillito
que apenas cabe en la mano;
pez sin escamas ni río,
para que un día señalado, entre las dos y las tres,
con este cuchillo
se queden dos hombres duros
con los labios amarillos.
Y apenas cabe en la mano,
pero que penetra frío
por las carnes asombradas
y allí se para, en el sitio
donde tiembla enmarañada
la oscura raíz del grito.

And this is a knife,
a tiny knife
that barely fits the hand;
fish without scales, without river,
so that on their appointed day, between two and three,
with this knife,
two men are left stiff,
with their lips turning yellow.
And it barely fits the hand
but it slides in clean
through the astonished flesh
and stops there, at the place
where trembles enmeshed
the dark root of a scream.⁵

These lines about the power of the knife must remind us of the 'Diálogo del Amargo' in which the Amargo was offered by the Rider 'knives . . . that go in looking for the hottest spot'. In fact the kinship between the close of *Bodas de sangre* and the Amargo poems was first perceived and commented on by Lorca himself. In his lecture on the *Romancero gitano* Lorca would read the last couplet of the 'Canción de la madre del Amargo' (see above, p. 54) and add: 'at the end of my tragedy *Bodas de sangre*, they [women] weep again, I don't know why,

over this enigmatic figure.⁶ So – *Botas de sangre* is yet another emanation of the Amargo, another attempt to grapple with and contain him, and our conclusions from reading the Amargo poems must be highly pertinent to our consideration of this, Lorca's first dramatic masterpiece.

But who in the play stands for the Amargo? It is, after all, a pair of men that the women are weeping over in the final tableau, the Bridegroom and Leonardo.

It is tempting to see the latter as the Amargo's embodiment. He is both violent and a producer of violence; he, like the Amargo as we have already encountered him, is sullen, cussed, anti-social, yet burning with intense feeling. 'Why do you always have to make trouble with people?' his mother-in-law asks him, and his wife, bemusedly: 'What idea've you got boiling there inside your head??' The Bride makes it clear to us that she believes herself to have chosen the rougher, the less virtuous of the two men. Like the Amargo in Lorca's childhood vision Leonardo offers the anti-domestic lot to her, beckons to her on behalf of the wild instinctual life beyond windows and walls. He is one with the horse that he rides so often and so ruthlessly during the course of the play, and on which he places the Bride for seduction:

Pero montaba a caballo
y el caballo iba a tu puerta.
Con alfileres de plata
mi sangre se puso negra,
y el sueño me fue llenando
las carnes de mala hierba.

But I was riding a horse
and the horse went straight to your door.
And the silver pins of your wedding
turned my red blood black.
And in me our dream was choking
my flesh with its poisoned weeds.⁸

His concept of love and of love-making is at variance with the vision of these implicit in the wedding service. Leonardo can lead us – as the Amargo would do – to an appreciation of the full, the double irony of the title Lorca gave his play:

Vamos al rincón oscuro,
donde yo siempre te quiera,
que no me importa la gente,
ni el veneno que nos echa.

Let's go to a hidden corner
where I may love you for ever,
for to me the people don't matter
nor the venom they throw on us.⁹

'*Que no me importa la gente*' – the line is rich in Lorquian ambiguity; he is both critical of and sympathetic to such a notion, such a wish.

By contrast the Bridegroom would appear to embody the kindly virtues of domesticity: he is a good son to his widowed Mother, he works the vineyards well, he longs for nothing more than to live, uninterruptedly, side by side with the girl who so stirs him physically and who touches his heart. 'I'll hug you for forty years without stopping,' he says to the Bride before they are married.¹⁰ Yet when he learns of her elopement he knows no tame hesitation or doubt. 'Let's go after them!' he cries, 'Who has a horse?''¹¹

The impassioned verse exchanges of Leonardo and the Bride in the forest reveal that they are both prepared for a *liebestod* – ecstasy and union in death. But in fact it is Leonardo and the Bridegroom who achieve a kind of *liebestod*: carried away by their love they plunge knives into each other. And it is *here*, in my view, that the Amargo can be found. He is the *knife* – no matter which of the two men is its owner – as it mortally enters the other's flesh. And the knife is the penis which thrusts and enters where it lists. *This* is what the women are weeping over, tragically bathed in the harsh whiteness – the Amargo, the knife, the cock, responsible for dark rapture and spilled blood alike.

Leonardo himself says:

To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest
punishment we can bring on ourselves.¹²

The penis, it must never be forgotten, can instruct the heart.
Together how can they not defy and annihilate reason's repressing
admonitions?

What good was pride to me – and not seeing you, and letting you
lie awake night after night? No good! It only served to bring the
fire down on me! You think that time heals and walls hide
things, but it isn't true, it isn't true! When things get that deep
inside you there isn't anybody can change them.¹³

His homosexual recognition of desire's might makes Lorca able to empathise with women in the grip of anti-conventional desire. Listen to the Bride's confession to the Bridegroom's mother:

I was a woman burning with desire, full of sores inside and out, and your son was a little bit of water from which I hoped for children, land, health; but the other one was a dark river, choked with brush, that brought near me the undertone of its rushes and its whispered song. And I went along with your son who was like a little boy of cold water – and the other sent against me hundreds of birds who got in my way and left white frost on my wounds, my wounds of a poor withered woman, of a girl caressed by fire. I didn't want to; remember that! I didn't want to. Your son was my destiny and I have not betrayed him, but the other one's arms dragged me along like the pull of the sea, like the head toss of a mule, and he would have dragged me always, always, always – even if I were an old woman and all your son's sons held me by the hair!¹⁴

Mutatatis mutandis this (like Leonardo's speech) could be the cry of a young man who, after courtship, engagement, a wedding, after all the business of orthodox sexuality and home-planning, surrenders to his deeper and stronger drives and realises (in both senses of that word) what he has been evading and denying for so long a time.

The classical (and expressionist) nature of *Bodas de sangre* does not prevent Lorca from giving in it an entirely convincing delineation of Spanish country life and its suffocating socio-sexual mores. Indeed, as in *La zapatera prodigiosa* with its villagers, a veritable Devil's Bible could be built up from the precepts on the comparative behaviour of the two sexes delivered throughout the play, particularly by the Mother:

MOTHER [to her son, the Bridegroom]. I'd like it if you were a woman. Then you wouldn't be going out to the arroyo now and we'd both of us embroider flounces and little woolly dogs.¹⁵

MOTHER [somewhat proudly]. It's twenty years since I've been up to the top of the street.¹⁶

FATHER [about his daughter, the Bride]. No need to tell you about my daughter. At three, when the morning star shines, she prepares the bread. She never talks: soft as wool, she embroiders all kinds of fancy work and she can cut a strong cord with her teeth.¹⁷

MOTHER [to her future daughter-in-law]. 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.

BRIDEGROOM. Is anything else needed?
MOTHER. No. Just that you all live – that's it!¹⁸

The young Woodcutter who is the Moon (where, we recall, sits the Amargo after death) provides us – literally – with the appropriate light in which to view these dicta of the prison-house. His lines make it quite clear that his rays are also knives and cocks which not only crave but joyfully force entries everywhere, entries illuminated and illuminating:

No quiero sombras. Mis rayos
han de entrar en todas partes,
y haya en los troncos oscuros
un rumor de claridades. . .

I want no shadows. My rays
must get in everywhere,
even among the dark trunks I want
the whisper of gleaming lights. . .¹⁹

However animated by the unconscious, the phallic imagery here is, it hardly need be said, completely intentional and conscious. The light of the Moon – which shows us Life-and-Death as Siamese twin reality – shines into vagina and anus alike, and makes nonsense of the kind of conventions that the Mother and all her fellow-upholders of the law are pleased so continually to remind us of.

2

Yerma takes us into the same world as *Bodas de sangre*, a Spanish rural community coffin-narrow with prescription. Its story contains no scenes of escape, no moon-irradiated forest; and it culminates in a horrific act that only increases the sense of claustrophobia engendered by both setting and characters. For this reason the play eschews many of the expressionist devices that made *Bodas de sangre* so rich a work; Lorca wishes form to be mimetic of the subject-matter – frustration in a restricted society. *Yerma* is a relentlessly concentrated study, intent on its two central characters with a fixity of purpose proper to the classical drama (of France and Spain as well as of Greece and Rome). Paradoxically it is of far wider emotional reference than *Bodas de sangre* and, shot through with ambiguity, offers us complexities that are difficult indeed. To an even greater extent than was the case with its predecessor we find that *Yerma*'s power is inextricably linked to its creator's sexuality. Even an account of its situations and action can make that evident.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. 'A Poet in New York', *Deep Song and Other Prose*, p. 93.
2. 'Norma y paraíso de los negros' ('Norm and Paradise of the Blacks'), *Obras completas*, p. 457.
3. 'A Poet in New York', op. cit., p. 96.
4. *ibid.*, p. 95.
5. 'On the Gypsy Ballads', *ibid.*, pp. 105 and 117.
6. *Obras completas*, p. 460.
7. *ibid.*, p. 459.
8. Rafael Martínez Nadal, *Lorca's The Public* (Calder & Boyars, 1974), p. 98.
9. *Obras completas*, p. 461.
10. *ibid.*, p. 460.
11. Alianza edition of *Romancero gitano*, pp. 154-7.
12. *Obras completas*, p. 462.
13. *ibid.*, p. 525.
14. *ibid.*, p. 526.
15. *ibid.*
16. *ibid.*, p. 527.
17. Madison Jones in conversation with the author. Paul Binding, *Separate Country*, (Paddington, 1979), p. 60.
18. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, p. 504.
19. 'Starting from Paumanok', *ibid.*, pp. 50-1.
20. *ibid.*, p. 53.
21. 'For You O Democracy', *ibid.*, p. 150.
22. 'We Two Boys together Clinging', *ibid.*, p. 162.
23. 'Starting from Paumanok', *ibid.*, p. 63.
24. *Obras completas*, p. 528.
25. *ibid.*
26. *ibid.*, p. 529.
27. *ibid.*
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, p. 153.
31. *ibid.*
32. *Obras completas*, p. 531.
33. *ibid.*
34. *ibid.*, p. 530.
35. Matthew Arnold, *Poems* (Penguin, 1985), p. 181.
36. *Obras completas*, p. 532.
37. See introduction by Rafael Martínez Nadal to *Aulógrafos*, vol. II.
38. *Obras completas*, pp. 1067-79. Translated by J.L. Gili in *Selected Poems*, pp. 127-39.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. *Aulógrafos*, vol. III, p. 15.
2. Gwynne Edward, *Lorca: The Theatre Beneath the Sand* (Marion Boyars, 1980), pp. 93 ff.

3. Reed Anderson, *Federica García Lorca* (Macmillan, 1984), pp. 134 ff.
4. T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets* (Faber, 1959), p. 13.
5. *Aulógrafos*, vol. III, p. 85.
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. Stephen Spender, *The Generous Days* (Faber, 1971), p. 1.
9. *Aulógrafos*, vol. III, p. 99.
10. *ibid.*
11. *ibid.*, p. 129.
12. *ibid.*, p. 123.
13. *ibid.*, p. 189.
14. *ibid.*, p. 67.
15. *ibid.*, p. 69.
16. *Obras completas*, p. 531.
17. *ibid.*
18. *Aulógrafos*, vol. II, p. xv.
19. *ibid.*, p. xvi.
20. *ibid.*, p. xv.
21. *ibid.*
22. William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence'.
23. *Aulógrafos*, vol. II, p. xxl.
24. *ibid.*, p. lv.
25. *ibid.*, p. xxxiv.
26. *ibid.*
27. *ibid.*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.
28. *ibid.*, p. xxvi.
29. *ibid.*, p. xxlv.
30. Rafael Martínez Nadal, *Lorca's The Public*, p. 61.
31. *Obras completas*, p. 264.
32. *Aulógrafos*, vol. II, pp. liii-lv.
33. 'Theory and Function of the Duende', *Selected Poems*, p. 127.
34. *ibid.*, p. 128.
35. *ibid.*, p. 136.
36. *ibid.*, p. 133.
37. *ibid.*, p. 135.
38. *ibid.*, p. 139.

Notes to Part Two

1. In *A.B.C.*, 25-28 July 1928. See *Bodas de sangre* (Alianza edn), 'Apéndice I', p. 175.
2. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 171. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 95.
3. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 156. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 83.
4. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 158. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 85.
5. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 171. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 96. In versions anterior to that established by Lorca in *Buenos Aires*, this concluding speech is divided between the Bride and the Mother.
6. 'On the Gypsy Ballads', *Deep Song and Other Prose*, p. 121.
7. *Three Tragedies*, p. 45.

8. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 156. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 83.
9. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 157. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 84.
10. *Three Tragedies*, p. 62.
11. *ibid.*, p. 74.
12. *ibid.*, p. 57.
13. *ibid.*
14. *ibid.*, p. 93.
15. *ibid.*, p. 34.
16. *ibid.*, p. 37.
17. *ibid.*, p. 49.
18. *ibid.*, p. 50.
19. *Bodas de sangre*, p. 148. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 78.
20. *Three Tragedies*, p. 100.
21. *ibid.*
22. *ibid.*
23. *ibid.*, p. 123.
24. *ibid.*, p. 146.
25. *ibid.*, p. 147.
26. *ibid.*
27. *ibid.*, p. 99.
28. *Yerma* (Novelas y Cuentos edn), 1974, p. 26. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 100.
29. *Yerma*, p. 62. c.f. *Three Tragedies*, p. 126.
30. *Suites*, ed. André Belamich, pp. 204.
31. In conversation with the author.
32. *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 1575.
33. *Obras completas*, p. 553.
34. *ibid.*, p. 555.
35. *ibid.*
36. *ibid.*, p. 556.
37. *ibid.*, p. 558.
38. *ibid.*
39. *ibid.*
40. *ibid.*, p. 552.
41. *ibid.*, p. 554.
42. *ibid.*, p. 555.
43. *ibid.*, p. 557.
44. *ibid.*
45. *ibid.*, p. 558.
46. *Five Plays: Comedies and Tragi-Comedies*, p. 185.
47. *ibid.*, p. 186.
48. *Dona Rosita la soltera* (Novelas y Cuentos edn), p. 203. c.f. *Five Plays*, p. 138.
49. *Three Tragedies*, p. 201.
50. *ibid.*, p. 191.
51. *ibid.*, p. 155.
52. *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 1599–1602.
53. Ian Gibson, *The Assassination of Federico García Lorca* (Penguin, 1983), pp. 119 ff.
54. Cited by J.L. Gili in *Selected Poems*, p. xxii.

Notes to Part Three

1. Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition* (Hogarth, 1964), vol. XXIII, p. 243.
2. 'Deep Song', *Deep Song and Other Prose*, pp. 36–7.
3. *Obras completas*, p. 573.
4. *ibid.*, p. 591.
5. *ibid.*, p. 576.
6. *ibid.*, p. 577.
7. *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 1583–9.
8. *Obras completas*, p. 574.
9. *ibid.*, p. 575.
10. *ibid.*
11. Mario Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation* (Gay Men's Press, 1980), p. 169.
12. *Obras completas*, p. 579.
13. *ibid.*, p. 581.
14. Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (Chatto, 1983), p. 111.
15. W. B. Yeats, *Selected Poems*, pp. 104–5.
16. *Obras completas*, p. 591.
17. *ibid.*, p. 593.
18. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Penguin, 1957), p. 182.
19. *Obras completas*, p. 589.
20. *ibid.*, p. 598.
21. Cited in Federico García Lorca issue of *Europe (revue littéraire mensuelle)*, August–September 1980. ('Chronologie' by Charles Martilly and 'L'apollitisme de Lorca' by Ian Gibson.)
22. *Sonetos*, p. 9.
23. *ibid.*, p. 15.
24. Stephen Adams, *The Homosexual as Hero in Contemporary Fiction* (Vision, 1980), p. 65.
25. *Sonetos*, p. 18.
26. *ibid.*, p. 12.
27. *ibid.*, p. 10.
28. *ibid.*, p. 16.
29. *ibid.*, p. 13.
30. *ibid.*, p. 11.
31. *ibid.*, p. 9.
32. *ibid.*, p. 19.
33. Stephen Spender, *Collected Poems* (Faber, 1955), p. 77.