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THEMATIC PATTERNS IN LORCA'S *BLOOD WEDDING*

LORCA HAS BEEN WIDELY PRAISED for the achievement in *Blood Wedding* of a tragic form the distinctive features of which are the fusion of lyric and dramatic impulses; the skillful integration of a musical pattern in the drama's structural design; the thematic relevance of songs, stage effects, and recurrent images—in short, for the assimilation of the Spanish folk and classical traditions in a poetic drama that is modern, sophisticated, and authentic. But some questions remain to puzzle the reader, especially the reader of an English version of the play:¹ How does *Blood Wedding* fit our current concept of poetic drama? In what sense is the organization of the play musical? What is the function of the lyrics in the development of action and theme? Is there a comprehensive structure of imagery defining the tonality and modulations of the play, and supporting themes perhaps resting upon and therefore nearer to the surface of the text than those more profound echoes of vegetation gods and human sacrifice which the archetypal symbols² of the play suggest? The following essay is an attempt to explore some aspects of these questions.

I.

Our concept of modern poetic drama has been formed largely on the theory and practice of Yeats and Eliot, yet no one has been willing to call either Yeats or Eliot a dramatist of the first rank. The consensus seems to be, as Francis Fergusson implies, that Yeats is "cultish" and Eliot "middle-brow Ersatz." But either label would be inaccurate if applied to Lorca. It is true that his range is limited, even that he speaks primarily to a Spanish audience, but, as Fergusson says, "he writes the poetry of the theater as our poets would like to do."³ Yeats, Eliot, and Lorca are all fundamentally lyric

¹ *Three Tragedies of Garcia Lorca*, translated by James Graham-Lujan and Richard L. O'Connell (New York, 1955). All quotations from the English text will be from this translation. The Spanish text used in the preparation of this paper is Garcia Lorca, *Obras Completas*, I (Buenos Aires, 1938).

² Ronald J. Dickson, "Archetypal Symbolism in Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre*," *Literature and Psychology* X, 1961, 76-79.

³ "Don Perlimplín: Lorca's Theater-Poetry," in *The Human Image in Dramatic Literature* (New York, 1957), pp. 96-97.

poets working toward the drama. In their use of myth, ritual, and symbol they cut across the barriers of national cultures, but only Lorca has cut across intellectual class lines to appeal to both the naive and the sophisticated in his own culture (as Shakespeare did in his day). Perhaps in the modern world this could happen only in Spain, where class lines are not drawn on the basis of speech habits.

What is the source of this appeal? Perhaps it is "poetic drama." Although Eliot is far from being satisfied with his own plays—and I suspect that he would not be satisfied with Lorca's—there are some features of *Blood Wedding* that should please him. Not, certainly, the medium. Eliot is opposed to a mixture of verse and prose unless, as in Shakespeare, the author wishes to produce a jolt, to "transport the audience violently from one plane of reality to another." But Lorca has come near achieving that "ideal toward which poetic drama should strive": the expression of a range of sensibility not possible to prose drama (the kind of feeling almost but not quite conveyed in the plays of Chekhov and Synge). In Eliot's terms the ideal poetic drama would be "a design of human action and of words, such as to present the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order . . . without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms. . . ." ⁴ The real problem, then, for the writer of poetic drama is not versification, but the resolution in a single work of two principles: that of decorum (a synthesis of incidents, character, and theme) and that of associative rhythm, which may be more verbal than metrical. In his essay on "The Music of Poetry" Eliot makes the point that a musical design can be observed in several of the plays of Shakespeare, "a music of imagery as well as sound."⁵ In *Blood Wedding* Lorca has created such a design without violating the principle of decorum which underlies dramatic action. And he has remained sufficiently close to the world in which the audience lives so that the poetry is acceptable on the stage.

Although the plot was suggested by a newspaper account of an incident that occurred in Almería, the play is as far removed from the realism that characterizes folk drama as it is from the urbanity of Eliot's own dramatic dialogues. Its highly stylized medium conveys authentic folk emotion; and if its lyrical passages do not reproduce the speech rhythms of the Spanish folk, its images "come from the speech people of the Andalusian countryside use in emotional moments, describing their passions and half-comprehended

⁴ "Poetry and Drama," in *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), pp. 86-87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

thoughts in ageless, occult metaphors, as though in magic formulas."⁶ It is this quality in *Blood Wedding* that brings it close to being Eliot's ideal poetic drama. And it is this quality rather than the versification that is preserved in the English text of the play.

II.

It is worth noting that Lorca called *Blood Wedding* simply a tragedy, whereas he designated *Yerma* "a tragic poem." The labels might have been reversed. I say this because, although both plays conform to Kenneth Burke's description of the tragic rhythm (from purpose to passion to perception), it is in *Blood Wedding* rather than in *Yerma* that the theme is embodied in the play not primarily by the logic of character, but by the rhythm of its imagery. *Blood Wedding* is indeed a tragic poem, a meditation on life and death in which the characters (all are nameless except Leonardo) are victims of a collective and inevitable destiny. Leonardo and the Bridegroom meet violent death, but the Mother is the real incarnation of the tragedy. She is the most vital person of the play, the chief interpreter of the human situation as well as the chief victim of the tragic circumstances. If it is the Bridegroom who affirms the "purpose" and Leonardo and the Bride who supply the "passion," it is the Mother who furnishes the "perception" of the play. And she speaks for all women frustrated in their love and haunted by the fear of extinction. The response to *Blood Wedding* is, as Northrop Frye asserts the response to all tragedy properly is, "this must be" rather than "what is the cause?"⁷ It has already been observed that in *Blood Wedding* "a knife can be drama's final reason."⁸ Here, as in Greek tragedy, the event is of first importance; the explanation—other than in Fate or Destiny—is secondary.

The generic affinity of *Blood Wedding* with Greek drama is a valuable directive and illuminates as many features of the play as does the comparison generally made with the dramas of Lope de Vega and Calderon. The ceremonial and spectacular content as well as the lyric chorus are conventions of Greek drama recognizable in *Blood Wedding* however they have been adapted to a contemporary situation and theme. Lorca's "hero" is scarcely a dying god, although associations with the autumn fertility ritual enhance the play and place it in the larger context of literature dealing with fecundity and death as reconcilable opposites in a natural process.

⁶ Arturo Barea, *Lorca*, translated from the Spanish by Ilsa Barea (New York, 1949), p. 39.

⁷ *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p. 284.

⁸ *Three Tragedies*, p. 29.

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

III.

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

The imagery throughout is that of the Earth itself, of the fundamental categories of existence: the knife and associated images from the mineral kingdom (the silver dagger stuck in the horse's eyes, the pins from the bridal wreath, the glass splinters stuck in the tongue of the Bride, the nails, the metal chain, the frost and snow, the Moon, the ashes); from the vegetable kingdom the flowers, weeds, wheat, bread with which the fathers and sons of men are identified (Man is a "mirror of the earth"); and from the animal kingdom the man himself, inseparable from his horse; the woman associated with the serpent; the birds. The supreme image of the play is blood, with its analogue and opposite water. Both blood and water are ambivalent symbols, as are many of the images of the play that con-

note both life and death (the knife and the Moon, male and female symbols of fertility as well as of coldness and death; the serpent, a symbol of fertility and of treachery; the bird—the luminous dove associated with the Bridegroom, traditional Catholic symbol of the Holy Spirit, divine instrument of fecundation, and the “great bird with immense wings” that is Death).

This ambivalent imagery presents the life-death opposition as a process in which the polar extremes appear as a single experience. In the moment of most intense life man is aware of his doom, and in death he becomes an instrument of life. Although most of the images of decay and death are drawn from the mineral kingdom as those connoting life are drawn from the vegetable and animal kingdoms, the categories of being are merged in many metaphors that identify or associate plant, animal, and mineral (as knife with snake and fish, man with water, flower, and ashes). Honig has noticed in Lorca's imagery this “compulsion of one element or quality of nature to become another and to throw off its own inevitable form to live vicariously in one of its own choosing.”⁹

Such shifts of identity are eminently “poetic,” for the linking of antagonistic “worlds” is fundamental in all metaphoric expression. And they are eminently fitting in a play which shows man's experience of life to be one with his experience of death and man himself to be one with Nature. But the unity of man with external nature does not diminish his integrity as man, and man's awareness of death only clarifies and intensifies his longing for life (Passion and Pride). The imagery of *Blood Wedding* is sufficient evidence that Lorca was master of an important unifying principle in a work of art. As Frye has lucidly put it, “All poetry . . . proceeds as though all poetic images were contained within a single universal body. Identity is the opposite of similarity or likeness, and total identity is not uniformity, but a unity of various things.”¹⁰

As the blood-water opposition forms the nucleus of the symbolism of life-death, it becomes the focal image of the related themes of honor, pride, and passion. Good blood in the sense of one's family heritage means not only men who produce many sons, it means men of honor. The Mother refers to the Bridegroom's family as men of “good stock; good blood. Your grandfather left a son on every corner. That's what I like. Men, men; wheat, wheat.” And later when the Bride's Father says of Leonardo, “He's not of good blood,” the Mother replies: “What blood would you expect him to have? His whole family's blood. It comes down from his great-

⁹ Edwin Honig, *Garcia Lorca* (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1944), p. 206.

¹⁰ *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 125.

grandfather, who started in killing, and it goes on down through the whole breed of knife wielding and false smiling men." It is interesting that here in the Mother's single-minded remarks about Leonardo's heritage the ambivalence of blood is apparent to the reader—in the allusion first to the begetting and then to the destroying of life. This technique of symbolic suggestion, which produces in the reader a response to the symbol beyond that of the character speaking is one which Lorca uses consistently and with increasing subtlety throughout the play. It is most effective in references to fertility symbols such as blood, the knife, and the serpent.

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

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

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

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

THIRD WOODCUTTER. Blood!

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

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

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

Here again the association of blood with both life and death is clear. The forest "wedding" of the lovers is the first blood wedding; the second (the death of the men) is inherent in the first. The concept

of "tainted nature" ("the fault is the earth's"), the emphasis on chastity, even the suggestion of purification by water and blood are as much a part of the play's cultural Christianity as the serpent and the dove and the "sweet nails/ cross adored/ sweet name/ of Christ our Lord." And they focus a dimension of the imagery fully as rich as that of its pre-Christian sub-structure.

The imagery of Earth, then—of Earth as the plenum of existence—reconciles opposites and thus strengthens the ambivalent force of *blood* in respect to honor, passion, and the life-death continuum. Viewed from the perspective of their imagery, the lyrics function as a matrix of thematic development. They focus the dominant images, which recur somewhat in the manner of a complicated tapestry or an intricately wrought mosaic, and control the tone of the play. They function, in short, both visually and aurally and give to *Blood Wedding* some of the effects of both painting and music. Stage settings and color symbolism also contribute to these effects.¹¹ But much of the pleasure of reading the play as opposed to witnessing it on the stage comes from perceiving the marvelous organization of its imagery. It is the pattern of image, symbol, and motif that constitutes the "musical structure" of the play, and it is chiefly the lyrics that give it movement and variety. A conscious awareness of the complexity of this structure is the reward of a close reading of the text, as a grasp of the subtleties of the sonata form results from analysis of the score.¹²

IV.

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

¹¹ For analysis of Lorca's use of color in *Blood Wedding* see Robert Barnes, "The Fusion of Poetry and Drama in *Blood Wedding*," *Modern Drama*, II (1960), 395-402.

¹² The relationship of music and poetry is given much illuminating discussion in Frye, *op. cit.*

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

That the horse in the Lullaby is to be identified with Leonardo's horse and his wounds with the fate of Leonardo is indicated by the action accompanying the song. In the midst of the singing Leonardo enters, and the Wife and Mother-in-law begin to question him about his horse. It becomes obvious that Leonardo has been riding his horse out to the mountainous wasteland where the Bride lives. There is talk of the approaching wedding and the Wife's jealousy flares up when she is reminded that the Bride was once a sweetheart of Leonardo's. When, after her quarrel with Leonardo, the Wife resumes the Lullaby, she moves "as though dreaming" and her weeping increases to the end of the song. In view of Leonardo's unsuccessful effort to resist his passion for his former sweetheart and the Wife's sense of being abandoned after she and Leonardo discuss the coming wedding, certain lines in the Lullaby take on new possibilities of meaning: "Go away to the mountains . . . that's where your mare is" and, after Leonardo leaves, the Wife's variation of the refrain from "The horse won't drink from the stream" to "the horse is drinking from the stream."¹³

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

In Act II the songs (one in each scene) are prothalamia sung by the Bride's servant and the wedding guests. They are part of the two phases of the nuptials introduced into the action: the ceremony of preparing the Bride for the church and the festivities preceding the entry of the Bride and Groom into the bridal chamber. Both lyrics employ the now familiar imagery of flower, branch, and stream and both make visible another thread of imagery that is to become

¹³ A more literal translation: "The horse won't drink" and "The horse is beginning to drink." (*que el caballo no quiere beber* and *que el caballo se pone a beber*).

increasingly prominent as the themes of pride and passion move toward their ultimate resolution in the theme of death. It is the imagery of fire. As water is both life-giving and life-destroying, so fire is symbolic of life as well as of death. The marriage songs are ambivalent both in imagery and tone, the irony of each poem increasing as the action moves toward the climactic elopement of the Bride and Leonardo at the end of Act II.

In the first poem the Bridegroom is a "flower of gold" and the Bride is a "mountain flower" whose bridal wreath is to be borne along by "all the rivers of the world." The poem is linked to the Lullaby by the contrasts of motif and tone. Note the recurring "Go to sleep" (*Duermete*) of the Lullaby and the "Awake" (*Despierte*) of the "wedding shout." ("Like a bull the wedding is rising here!") The bull, an ancient symbol of fertility, is to the Spanish mind one of the chief means of the contemplation of death. And here there is a dark undertone. The design of the entire scene, including the stage effects, is a kind of counterpoint of light and dark. As the scene opens it is night. The Bride and her servant are dressed in "white petticoats . . . and sleeveless white bodice." They talk of the wedding and the Bride hurls her orange blossom wreath away, saying that "a chill wind cuts through [her] heart." The servant begins the wedding song, but it is interrupted by Leonardo (as the Lullaby is interrupted in Act I). In spite of her desire to forget Leonardo, the Bride acknowledges the power he has over her. ("It pulls me along and I know I'm drowning—but I go on down.") As Leonardo goes out, daylight comes and the guests arrive, singing of the "white wreath," the "white bride," and the "maiden white":

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

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

blood has come again. Two groups! You with yours and I with mine."

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

the wheel was a-turning
and the water was flowing,
for the wedding night comes. . . .
Elegant girl . . .
Hold your shirts close in
under the Bridegroom's wing
and never leave your house,
for the Bridegroom is a firebrand
and the fields wait for the whisper
of spurting blood.

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

The lyric impulse of the play culminates in Act III, where the themes of honor and passion are absorbed in the theme of death that paradoxically is life. The play's double perspective on death is suggested in the dual manifestation of Death. In one image Death is an Old Woman demanding "a crust of bread" (and thus echoing both the exclamation of the Mother, "Men, men; wheat, wheat," and the description in the Skein Song of the thread of Destiny

"Running, running, running/ and finally to come to stick in the knife/ to take back the bread"). In another image Death is the white-faced Moon longing for life and seeking in the death of the men "a heart," the "crest of the fire," and "red blood" for his cheeks. Death as an aged person is a familiar figure in literature (one thinks of Chaucer's caitiff). The Moon is one of the "concrete things which speak of death to Spanish minds" mentioned by Lorca in a lecture given in Cuba in 1930.¹⁴ In the same listing he includes the chopping knife and the clasp knife. In *Blood Wedding* both the knife and the Moon are agents of Death as well as sexual symbols, male and female ("The Moon sets a knife abandoned in the air"), but the Moon is also identified with Death, as the chant of the Woodcutters indicates: first, "O rising moon! . . . O lonely moon! . . . O evil moon! . . . O sorrowing moon! . . ." and then, after the Moon's song, "O rising Death! . . . O lonely Death! . . . O sad Death! . . . O evil Death!" As an agent of Death the Moon will "light up the horse/ with a fever bright as diamonds," will "light up the waistcoat" so that the "knives will know the path." In this cluster of images the wind assists the Moon, "blowing hard with a double edge." The linking of wind with the knife has been made earlier by the Bride ("A chill wind cuts through my heart.") and by the Mother ("Men are like the wind. They're forced to handle weapons."). It is interesting that the blood which the knife produces is now associated with the knife itself in a curious metaphor that recalls the "serpent knife" of the opening scene. The Moon says: "But let them be a long time a-dying. So the blood/ will slide its delicate hissing between my fingers." In a sense it is man's blood that betrays him—his heritage. Woman, too, is involved in the treachery. "You snake!" cries the Mother to the Bride when she sees her after the knife has done its work.

The dialogue of the lovers in the forest prior to the bloody wedding of the men to the Earth is a kind of love-death for the Bride too. She longs for actual death with her lover. ("It's fitting that I should die here/ with water over my feet/ with thorns upon my head. And fitting the leaves should mourn me/ a woman lost and virgin.") And after her emergence from the forest she is in a sense dead, since she had followed the lover instead of the Bridegroom—the lover who, she acknowledges, "sent me against hundreds of birds who got in my way and left white frost on my wounds, my wounds of a poor withered woman, a girl caressed by fire." In another sense, of course, she is alive only when she is with Leonardo. The *birds-frost-fire se-*

¹⁴ Barea, p. 85.

quence constitutes an especially rich cluster of the symbols of life and death fused in a manner characteristic of Lorca. The imagery of the love-duet recalls that of the Lullaby and brings to a climax the identification of the animate and inanimate worlds.

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

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