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ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS IN "BODAS DE SANGRE"

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NORTHROP FRYE defines "archetype" as a repeated or recurring symbol, which, without being a commonplace, tends to enrich tradition and establish a common basis for both the poet and his reader.¹ The unity of García Lorca's writings, poetry and drama, is best revealed in the repetition of these archetypal symbols. They can be seen within a single work, within his entire canon, and reaching beyond it, to the tradition, popular or literary, to which he belongs.²

Bodas de sangre is mythic in the sense noted by Susanne Langer: "Myth . . . is a recognition of natural conflicts, of human desire frustrated by non-human powers, hostile oppression or contrary desires; it is a story of the birth, passion and defeat by death which is man's common fate. Its ultimate end is not wishful distortion of the world, but serious envisagement of its fundamental truths; moral orientation, not escape."³

But the fundamental myth of *Bodas de sangre*—man struggling against the internal forces of desire and jealousy, and against the external forces of death and sterility—would be nothing were it not clothed in Lorca's rich poetry; and that poetry is woven of elements learned in the poet's apprenticeship which produced *Libro de poemas*, *Canciones*, *Poema del cante jondo*, and especially the *Romancero gitano*. The rhetoric and imagery he created in these books reach their fullest flowering in the final tragedies. Lorca's natural habitat, from his childhood on, was the stage; when that love combined with his great poetic gift, the convergence was one of the remarkable literary events of our time.

Perhaps the most significant features of Lorca's rhetoric are his brilliant metaphors and his use of archetypal symbols. From

Bodas de sangre, I have selected the following archetypes: *navaja*, *caballo*, *luna*, *sangre*, *trigo* and *azahar*. Most of these archetypes appear, as such, in other works by García Lorca.⁴

The play opens and closes with the *madre's* insistence on the image of *navaja* or *cuchillo*.⁵ The knife is whatever kills; it is the most prominent negative symbol in the play. *Madre* thus admonishes *novio* in the first act:

La navaja, la navaja . . . malditas sean todas y el bribón que las inventó.⁶

The knife has taken her husband and first son, in the blood feud with the Félix family. We learn at the end of the first act that the *novia*, engaged to her son, once was on the verge of marrying Leonardo, of the enemy family. That family is described by the *madre* in these words, as Leonardo and his wife arrive at the wedding (Act II, scene 2):

¿Qué sangre va a tener? La de toda su familia. Mana de su bisabuelo, que empezó matando, y sigue en toda la mala ralea, manejadores de cuchillos y gente de mala sonrisa. (p. 1137)

The *novio* and Leonardo kill each other with knives in the third act. The play ends with the moving lament of the *madre*:

Vecinas: con un cuchillo,
con un cuchillito,
en un día señalado, entre las dos y las tres,
se mataron dos hombres del amor. . . .
(p. 1182)

The archetype *cuchillo* appears frequently in the *Romancero gitano*. From "Reyerta":

En la mitad del barranco
las navajas de Albacete,
bellas de sangre contraria,
relucen como los peces. . . .
(p. 356)

The smuggler of "Romance sonámbulo" offers to trade "mi cuchillo por su manta." Antoñito el Camborio is murdered by "cuatro puñales." Although in the *romances*

it is partly a symbol of virility, in *Bodas de sangre* the knife has become, in the mother's eyes, wholly a thing of death and destruction.

The story (or action, in the Aristotelian sense) of *Bodas de sangre* was suggested to Lorca by a newspaper clipping, the bare bones on which he made the flesh of his play. A peasant woman had run off with another man at her wedding. The bride's and bridegroom's families had set off in pursuit, and the two men killed each other with knives. Yet a play of this kind—of murder with knives, and a bereft mother's lament—had long been ruminating in Lorca's mind. The curious "Diálogo del amargo" which comes at the end of *Poema del cante jondo* (1921) is almost a sketch or caricature of *Bodas de sangre*. The dialogue opens with an image which will be incorporated into the later tragedy:

Amargo.
Las adelfas de mi patio.
Corazón de almendra amarga.
(p. 261)

Toward the end of *Bodas de sangre* the mother exclaims:

Que te pongan al pecho
cruz de amargas adelfas . . .
(p. 1181)

Bitter oleander was, in fact, the title of one of the first English translations. *Amargo*, in the dialogue, meets a knife-peddler. There is talk of knives and their uses. He notes ominously the purpose for which his own were made:

Los otros cuchillos no sirven . . . son blandos y se asustan de la sangre. Los que nosotros vendemos son fríos. ¿Entiendes? (Entran buscando el sitio de más calor y allí se paran.). (p. 266)
Amargo is killed by *Jinete*. The final "Canción de la madre del Amargo" is remarkably reminiscent of the *coda* to *Bodas de sangre*:

Lo llevan puesto en mi sábana
mis adelfas y mi palma.
Día veintisiete de agosto
con un cuchillito de oro.
Vecinas, dadme una jarra
de azófar con limonada.
La cruz. No llorad ninguna.
El Amargo está en la luna.
(pp. 269, 270)

In addition to the *cuchillo*, the archetypes *sangre*, *caballo*, and *luna*, as well as two of Lorca's favorite symbols, *cruz* and *adelfas*, also appear in this early work.

The archetype *caballo* is a symbol of masculine strength, force and virility, as is the *caballo garañón* in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Throughout the play Leonardo is associated with *caballo*. When we first meet him, in the second scene of Act I, we learn from the *suegra* that he has been mistreating his horse (on secret visits to the *novia*, as is made clear later):

Pero, ¿quién da esas carreras al caballo? Está abajo, tendido, con los ojos desorbitados, como si llegara del fin del mundo. (p. 1099)

The same scene opens and closes with the lullaby "Del caballo grande . . . que no quiso el agua." This *nana* contains a cryptic description of the basic tragic action.

El agua era negra
dentro de las ramas.
Cuando llega al puente
se detiene y canta.

Las patas heridas,
las crines heladas,
dentro de los ojos
un puñal de plata.

Bajaban al río.
¡Ay, cómo bajaban!
La sangre corría
más fuerte que el agua.

A los montes duros
sólo relinchaba
con el río muerto
sobre la garganta.

(pp. 1094, 1095)

The *caballo grande* is evidently Leonardo, killed by "un puñal de plata." What is the water that he refuses? It may be his wife, the calm and security of his home, rejected in favor of the *novia*; or the scene may be that of his death in the mountains, his head resting in a stream "que el caballo no quiere beber." The songs "Giraba la rueda" and "Madeja, madeja" serve a similar, though less obvious function of relating the tragic dénouement. During the wedding scene the horseman Leonardo refuses to ride with his wife in a cart. The lovers

escape on horseback at the end of the same act; the *novia* saddles the horse herself. When Lorca, in his *Poeta en Nueva York*, felt lost and alone in the maze of the great city, the image of the horse, symbol of strength and virility, appears in his verses. The horse would free him from the "thick moss" that covers his temples:

Yo, poeta sin brazos, perdido
entre la multitud que vomita
sin caballo efusivo que corte
los espesos musgos de mis sienas.

(p. 416)

The horse appears, in a similar fashion, in one of his drawings, a surrealist urban landscape (p. 1665).

There is much evidence to support the theory that the most important divinity in pre-Christian Europe, as well as in the ancient Near East, was the moon goddess.⁷ She was the great mother, the *magna mater*, mother of all life. In the form of Artemis, she was the goddess of the hunt, childbirth and fertility. But at times she took the form of the "Terrible Mother." Hecate, for example, was the goddess of death and destruction; Lorca mentions her in the *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*:

pero las madres terribles
levantaron la cabeza.

(p. 468)

Luna in the pages of our Andalusian poet is nearly always a symbol of death or sterility, closer, therefore, to the Ishtar "terrible mother" or to Hecate than to Diana in her role of goddess of fertility. She appears together with *muerte* as early as *Libro de poemas*, where the moon, old and witch-like, buys "pinturas a la muerte." Her appearance causes the streams to run dry, the fields to wither (p. 193). As noted earlier, Amargo "está en la luna" after his death. Death is one of the great, central themes of Lorca's poetry, as Pedro Salinas has pointed out;⁸ and the moon is its emblem, its external symbol. Though death and the moon do not always appear together, when the moon appears alone she is usually death's harbinger. In both ver-

sions of the "Canción del jinete," in *Canciones*, the moon portends the coming of death (pp. 304, 308). In the "Romance de la luna, luna" (p. 353) the female figure of the moon carries off the Gypsy child; she is hard, pure and cold:

En el aire conmovido
mueve la luna sus brazos
y enseña, lúbrica y pura,
sus senos de duro estaño.

The moon's rays in the "Romance sonámbulo" hold the dead Gypsy girl on the surface of the cistern. In the late poem "Tierra y luna" (1935) the moon represents nothingness and death, as opposed to the earth, which is life, future, hope. In this poem he addresses the moon with her Roman title:

¡Oh Diana, Diana, Diana vacía!
Convexa resonancia donde la abeja se vuelve loca.
Mi amor de paso, tránsito, larga muerte gustada,
nunca la piel ileosa de tu desnudo huído.

Es tierra, ¡Dios mío!, tierra lo que vengo
buscando.

Embozo de horizonte, latido y sepultura.
Es dolor que se acaba y amor que se consume,
torre de sangre abierta con las manos quemadas.

Pero la luna subía y bajaba las escaleras,
repartiendo lentejas desangradas en los ojos,
dando escobazos de plata a los niños de los muelles
y borrando mi apariencia por el término del aire.

(p. 557)

In some way, Lorca foresaw his own premature death. The theme is insistent in these late poems. The moon appears in the background of the prophetic "Canción de la muerte pequeña":

Una muerte y yo un hombre.
Un hombre solo, y ella
una muerte pequeña.
Prado mortal de luna.
La nieve gime y tiembla
por detrás de la puerta.

(p. 538)

The moon appears as a symbol of death also in the *Seis poemas gallegos*. In "Danza da lúa en Santiago" she dances on the occasion of the death of "aquele branco galán":

Deixame morrer no leito
soñando con froles d'ouro.
Nai: A lúa está bailando
na Quintana dos mortos.

(p. 482)

The entrance of the moon in the third

act of *Bodas de sangre* is heralded by the *leñadores*:

¡Ay luna mala!
Deja para el amor la oscura rama.
(p. 1158)

The moon appears in the form of a *leñador joven*, his face whitened with powder. Did Lorca choose a male figure because a female, Hecate, *femme fatale*, a White Goddess representation would have been too obvious for the stage, even ludicrous? We can only conjecture. The fact is that the male (or hermaphroditic) figure of the moon, his powdered face caught by the spotlight, the single object of attention on the stage, reciting, as an incantation, Lorca's magic lines, is a powerful and convincing figure.⁹ The moon was sometimes male in early religion and mythology, and sometimes shared male and female characteristics.

Cisne redondo en el río,
ojo de las catedrales,
alba fingida en las hojas
soy; ¡no podrán escaparse!
(p. 1159)

The moon, like Endymion's lover, desirous of human warmth and blood to fill its emptiness and dispel its cold, seeks out the bodies of Leonardo and the *novio*.

¡Dejadme entrar! ¡Vengo helado
por paredes y cristales!
¡Abrid tejados y pechos
donde pueda calentarme!
(p. 1160)

Death in the form of the *Mendiga* appears to assist the moon and consummate the fate of the rivals. She spurs him on:

Ilumina el chaleco y aparta los botones,
que después las navajas ya saben el camino.
(p. 1161)

The poet reserves one more symbol of death for the impact of this superb scene. After having employed verbal images and the incarnations of *luna* and *mendiga*, Lorca conveys the final act of mutual destruction by the greater abstraction of music: two violins sound before the *mendiga* opens her batlike wings (p. 1171).

As *cuchillo* is the ubiquitous symbol of violence and conflict, the pervasive symbol

of the life-force is *sangre*. Blood is the vital force whose release, to be sure, brings death. But it has many more meanings in this play. Blood is the elemental or mythical force which moves the tragedy; it is the life-force; it may refer to a strong natural propensity; it is a tie between persons and families, as in Cervantes' *La fuerza de la sangre*; it is also used negatively as a litotes: its absence (from the marriage sheets) is a sign of virginity.¹⁰ The *novia*, in her role of virgin and martyr, says to Leonardo:

Llévame de feria en feria,
dolor de mujer honrada,
a que las gentes me vean
con las sábanas de boda
al aire como banderas.
(p. 1169)

In the title, *sangre* has the weight of all these meanings. *Sangre* suggests violence (release of life-force); it refers to the ties which draw together the members of the *novio's* family and cause them to clash with the feuding family; it applies to the ineluctable attraction which binds the *novia* and Leonardo together; it ironically refers to the act of marriage which is not consummated; above all, it applies to the elemental forces which drive men and women to act, for good or for evil.

Although Lorca does not often use *sangre* in the Eucharistic sense, we cannot ignore the unconscious religious associations the word must have for the poet and his people. Blood is the life-force desired by the sterile moon:

Pues esta noche tendrán
mis mejillas roja sangre.
(p. 1159)

Blood is literally the spilled life of the Mother's first son; she would place it, like the consecrated Host, in a sacred vessel:

Me mojé las manos de sangre y me las lamí
con la lengua. Porque era mía. Tú no sabes lo
que es eso. En una custodia de cristal y topacios
pondría yo la tierra empapada en ella.
(p. 1139)

Blood is used to mean "genes" or biological inheritance, as we commonly use it in English:

Eso es de buena casta. Sangre . . .
(p. 1084)

Blood is the strong natural propensity which brings about the tragedy:

Leñador 1°: Se estaban engañando uno a otro y al fin la sangre pudo más.

Leñador 3°: ¡La sangre!

Leñador 1°: Hay que seguir el camino de la sangre.

(p. 1156)

El camino de la sangre is the natural inclination; it is also the vital principle, the *tao*, the way of the life-force. The author suggests, in these lines, that if they had not followed the "way of blood" the outcome may have been worse: a life of re-cremations and suffering. And, of course, *sangre* may stand for violence, death and tragedy, as when, at the end of the second act, at the climax or peripetia of the action, the Mother, impelled by the honor code, calls for that act of violence which she has dreaded all along:

¡Fuera de aquí! Por todos los caminos. Ha llegado otra vez la hora de la sangre. . . .

(p. 1154)

García Lorca was the son of wealthy farmers. "Wheat," "seed" and "grain" were not abstractions for him; rather they were a pungent reality sharpened by his own poetic awareness and by the primitive farm methods still in use: the *labrador* of Fuentevaqueros is not separated from the earth by elaborate machines. When the archetypes *trigo*, *espiga* and *simiente* appear in his work, they always suggest the terrestrial sources of life, its natural manifestations as opposed to the deadly influences of false convention or urban sterility, hope as opposed to despair. *Trigo* as an archetypal symbol doesn't appear until *Poeta en Nueva York* (1930). Lorca was struck by the absence of vegetation, the natural earth-processes which sustain our lives, in the great cavernous city. In this book, referring perhaps to organized religion, he says:

Pero el hombre vestido de blanco ignora el misterio de la espiga.
("Grito hacia Roma" p. 449)

And addressing the metropolis, in his "Oda a Walt Whitman," he exclaims:

Nueva York de cieno . . .
Nueva York de alambre y muerte.
¿Qué angel llevas oculto en la mejilla?
¿Qué voz perfecta dirá las verdades del trigo?
(p. 451)

The same poem concludes with the possibility of salvation through the symbols of the Negro child and the ear of wheat: y un niño negro anuncie a los blancos del oro la llegada del reino de la espiga.

The song of the harvesters, in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, appears briefly, and in the background, to inject a breath of spontaneous life and freedom into the somber jail of Bernarda's five daughters, a song symbolic of the natural joys which tradition and the *qué dirán* have denied them:

Ya salen los segadores
en busca de las espigas;
se llevan los corazones
de las muchachas que miran.
(p. 1396)

Trigo and *simiente* are symbols of the natural life forces throughout *Bodas de sangre*. From the first page, where the Mother speaks of the sexual prowess of the *novio's* grandfather:

Los hombres, hombres; el trigo, trigo. (p. 1084)
to the final scene where she laments:

Benditos, sean los trigos, porque mis hijos están debajo de ellos. . . .

(where *trigo* stands for the life which might have been), the archetype is forcefully repeated. The Father in Act III tells of his need for sons "que hagan brotar las simientes." A symbolic tray of wheat is prepared for the guests before the wedding ceremony (p. 1139). The two lovers, in the forest scene, are compared to two blades of wheat devoured by the flame:

La misma llama pequeña
mata dos espigas juntas.
(p. 1169)

El azahar is first mentioned at the beginning of Act II. The servant places a crown of orange blossoms on the *novia's* head while helping her to dress. The bride throws it to the ground, an act which the *criada* views as a bad omen:

¡Niña! ¿Qué castigo pides tirando al suelo la corona? . . . (p. 1118)

The orange blossom stands for both marriage and virginity, in the same sense as the Greek *hymen*. Later Leonardo, the first guest to arrive at the pre-marriage festivities, asks:

La novia llevará una corona grande, ¿no? No debía ser tan grande. Un poco más pequeña le sentaría mejor. ¿Y trajo ya el novio el azahar que se tiene que poner en el pecho? (p. 1122)

The *novia* is annoyed at this question:

¿Por qué preguntas si trajeron el azahar? ¿Llevas intención?

To which Leonardo replies: "Ninguna." She suspects that his remarks allude to their previous relationship which, though it never, apparently, went beyond the limits of a traditional *noviazgo*, still might suggest a loss of virginity because of the depth and intensity of their love. Indeed, their natural marriage, not a marriage of convenience or of economic compulsion, occurred long before the legal marriage of either. During the wedding party we learn that the orange blossom, a gift of the bridegroom, is artificial (p. 1141); this is a clear reference to the unnaturalness of the union between the *novia* and *novio*. The crown of orange blossom is mentioned once more by the *madre* who castigates the *novia* in the final scene:

¡Floja, delicada, mujer de mal dormir es quien tira una corona de azahar para buscar un pedazo de cama calentado por otra mujer! (p. 1179)

And it is indirectly alluded to by the *novia* in the forest love scene, where it becomes a crown of thorns:

Es justo que aquí muera
con los pies dentro del agua
espinas en la cabeza.

Sangre, *trigo* and *caballo* are the positive archetypes representing life and strength with the variations discussed above. Ranged against them are the negative symbols *navaja* and *luna*, the first suggesting violence, the second sterility. *Azahar* is neutral: it is the marriage which might have been. These archetypes confirm the play's

structure and weave together the various parts of its acts and scenes; their unifying function is similar to that of themes in a work of music.

NOTES

¹ "The symbol in this phase is the communicable unit, to which I give the name archetype: that is, a typical or recurring image. I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. And as the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication." Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton, 1957), p. 99.

² In this essay I am elaborating on various ideas which have been stated previously, especially by Pedro Salinas in his "Drama y teatro en Federico García Lorca" in *Literatura española siglo xx* (México, 1959), and by Gustavo Correa in *La poesía mítica de Federico García Lorca* (Eugene, Oregon, 1957).

³ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York, 1948), pp. 152-53.

⁴ I will be using the terms "archetypal symbols" and "archetypes" as defined above by Northrop Frye, and not in the Jungian sense as projections of the Collective Unconscious.

⁵ The importance of the horse and knife in Andalusian customs and lore, already noted by Salinas (op. cit.) may be confirmed with specific reference to the gypsies in George Borrow's *The Zincali, An Account of the Gypsies in Spain* (London, 1923). Of course, the protagonists of *Bodas de sangre* are not gypsies; yet Lorca the mature dramatist retained some of those themes and symbols which were associated with gypsies in the *Romancero gitano*.

⁶ Federico García Lorca, *Obras completas*, (Madrid, 1957), p. 1081. Subsequent citations of Lorca's works will refer to this edition.

⁷ See M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* (New York, 1937), p. 101ff.; Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London, 1955), Vol. II, pp. 28-9; Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, (New York, 1960), p. 163.

⁸ Pedro Salinas, "Lorca and the Poetry of Death," in *Lorca, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Manuel Durán (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962), pp. 100-7.

⁹ I am thinking of the Cherry Lane Theater's excellent production in New York in 1948.

¹⁰ That is, neither her legal marriage to the *novio* nor her natural, emotional marriage to Leonardo were consummated.