Sterility: A study of theme in three plays by Federico Garcia Lorca

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STERILITY: A STUDY OF THEME IN THREE PLAYS

BY FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

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I.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Federico Garcia Lorca in the modern theatre can hardly be underestimated. He gave the theatre of Spain some of its best plays since the days of the Golden Age and was an important part of the renaissance in Spanish literature that took place in the early part of the twentieth century. Stark Young, the noted American critic, says of Lorca:

Since the first World War there has been no more beautiful mind in the theatre than Lorca's. It was a mind at the same time passionate, complex, and natural and, as the theatre, must be contagious and friendly.1

For these reasons there is a definite need for more study and research on Lorca in English. The bulk of the scholarly work on him is done in Spanish and, therefore, unavailable to the majority of the English-speaking world.

The major premise of this study is that Lorca uses in his three tragedies — Blood Wedding, Yerma, and The House of Bernarda Alba — a theme of sterility that stems from a strict code of honor and sex that is so much a part of Spanish social mores. This theme is expressed primarily through the women in these plays for it is on them that the burden of the codes are placed. This theme underlies much of his drama but is particularly dominant in these three plays. This sterility leads to a frustration and desperation in the women and leads them to tragedy.

The major critics of Lorca will all admit the presence of this theme, but there has been no comprehensive study of it so far. Most of the scholarly works in English attempt to deal with the whole of Lorca's dramatic and poetic writings probably in an attempt to acquaint the readers with as much material as possible instead of dwelling on a single work and its theme. This study will, however, deal primarily with those elements which are peculiar and pertinent to the theme of sterility.

In an attempt to acquaint the reader with Lorca and his place in the Spanish traditions and history, the first two chapters relate his life and his place within the framework of Spanish drama.

Before studying the plays' theme of sterility, it was found necessary to first define sterility relative to Lorca and his particular works and discuss briefly the reasons for the theme appearing in his work.

The plays will be analyzed according to plot and character, which will be combined because Lorca's plays are so well constructed that these elements are almost perfectly fused together; language, where some recurrent images and symbols will be discussed; and visual elements, which will analyze settings, atmosphere and stage directions specified by the author. These are the components used by Lorca for the heightening of thematic statement.

This study hopes to provide the readers and producers of Lorca's plays with a better understanding of his life and the traditions of his drama, thus providing a basis for a more valid key to the interpretation of his works, chiefly the three tragedies.
II.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

The embodiment of an artist in all aspects, Federico Garcia Lorca was a painter, a poet, a musician and a dramatist. His abilities range in the dramatic fields beyond his primacy as a playwright -- he was a director, a scenic designer, an actor. Had it not been for the circumstances of his death, however, Lorca would probably not have been as well known in the world outside Spain as he is today.

Lorca's murder created a wave of shocked indignation around the world. In a century hardened by crime and violence his death is still unforgotten. His fame grew rapidly. He was first a name, then a symbol. When the readers discovered the poet and the dramatist behind the symbol his lasting influence became assured.¹

Federico Garcia Lorca was born on June 5, 1898, in Fuentevaqueros, Granada, to an energetic farmer and a school teacher. His father, Don Federico Garcia Rodriguez, a widower, had married Dona Vicenta Lorca. "From the beginning it was she who nurtured his musical and poetic interests."²

Despite a childhood ailment³ that prevented him from speaking until


³This ailment is not identified by any of the authors.
he was three and walking until he was four, Lorca\(^4\) showed that he was a preco-
cocious child by learning to hum songs at age two. During his childhood, his
interests in the theatre arts developed. He would conduct imaginary church masses
and construct miniature theatres for his puppet plays.

The first toy that Federico bought with his own money, by
breaking open his savings bank, was a miniature theatre. He
bought it in Granada, in a toy store called "The North Star,"
which was on the street of Catholic Kings. No plays came with
this theatre, so they had to be made up. This must have been his
first attempt at drama.\(^5\)

His childhood theatrical interests are further described by his brother,
Francisco:

But Federico was attracted by games of theatrical nature
even more than by real theatre. He liked to play at theatre
and marionettes... I remember that in our childhood we
frequently played one of his favourite games. Before an altar
made with an image of the Holy Virgin, loaded down with roses
and celandines from the garden, he would play priest, costumed
in the best he could find. My sisters, I, a few other children,
and the servants would attend. The almost expressed, and
almost tacitly accepted condition was that we had to weep at
the time of the sermon. Half in jest, we would weep. Dolores
\[\text{the children's nurse -- Author's note}\], Federico's ideal audience,
would really weep.\(^6\)

\(^4\)Honig, op.cit., p. iii. In Spanish the surname is customarily given as
a composite of the father's name and the mother's name in that order. Thus, in
Spain or Latin America, the poet is always called Garcia Lorca. But since Lorca
is known to readers of English exclusively by the second part of his surname, I have
followed the English rather than the Spanish practice throughout.

\(^5\)Federico Garcia Lorca, Three Tragedies of Federico Garcia Lorca:
"Introduction" by Francisco Garcia Lorca; James Graham-Lujan, Richard

\(^6\)Ibid., pp. 1, 3.
Lorca, who was a mediocre student, preferred stimulation from the literary men he knew rather than pursue academic work. He did, however, attend the Colegio del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus in Granada for a brief period and then entered the University of Granada where he eventually received a degree in law in 1923, but only after he had attended the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid for several years.

In 1919 at the suggestion of Fernando de los Rios, his mentor, he quit the University of Granada to attend the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid.

Here at the Residencia, the intellectual and artistic center of Spain had been formed. Established as a result of the educational reform movement of 1898, the Residencia offered a liberal arts and science training in the enlightened manner of the best European universities.

It was during his stay at the Residencia that his first play, El Maleficio de la Mariposa [The Witchery of the Butterfly] (1921) was produced in Barcelona.

At the Residencia he became a part of the most profound and artistic group in Spain at that time -- Salvador Dali, Jorge Guillen, Rafael Alberti, Pedro Salina, Gerardo Diego and Damaso Alonso -- and these people introduced him to the latest ideas in esthetic movements.

His popularity as a people's poet grew as did his abilities as a painter. The main impression created by this young artist was one of charm and ease. Many of his works were first improvised bits of poetry that he recited in bars and nightclubs in Madrid. This improvisational ability was part of his charm and also his artistic personality.

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7 Ibid., p. 212.
8 Honig, op.cit., p. 5
9 Lorca, loc. cit.
He could improvise a song about almost any subject. He could also communicate through music: an excellent pianist, he would play and sing for hours. Painting was a favorite pastime with him, or rather drawing. He could do it anywhere: on a cafe table, on the back of a menu, in a letter. He had become thoroughly familiar with certain subjects, such as Spanish folklore, art, and literature, and could talk about them for hours, but, being both intelligent and sensitive, he ordinarily took care not to monopolize the conversation.10

In 1927 his first dramatic success, Mariana Pineda, was produced in Madrid and at the same time he held a showing of colored drawings in Barcelona.11 A year later he published the first edition of Gypsy Ballads and became an overnight success. He was at the same time editing a new literary-art magazine, Gallo.12 But this success left him somewhat dissatisfied and in 1929 he joined his former teacher, Ferdinando de los Ríos, on a journey to New York; de los Ríos arranged for him to stay at Columbia University during this visit. The reasons for this journey from Spain were never clear, but Honig in Garcia Lorca quoting Angel del Río gives the most complete reasons for it:

But inwardly, such demonstrative success leaves him dissatisfied. He undergoes a crisis of disillusionment. The causes are not clear, even to his closest friends. Martínez Nadal, his constant companion in these days tells us, "As the months passed by and the popularity of the book (Romanceros) increased, the poet felt the weight of his own work. This, along with other intimate reasons made him pass through the only period of depression in his life. He grew sad, isolated himself, said nothing of his plans, and, stranger still, no longer recited his new poems." Lorca had grown aware of the danger of his success. He knew that many artists had ruined themselves by living on their easy triumphs... There was also, as Martínez Nadal suggests, some

10 Duran, op.cit., p. 4 11 Lorca, loc.cit. 12 Duran, op.cit., p. 3.
emotional disturbance of his intimate life, to which he would later refer sadly and obscurely. The crisis resolves itself into a desire for flight, and for the first time he seeks to leave Spain.\(^{13}\)

From 1929, when Lorca settled at Columbia University in John Jay Hall\(^{14}\) until he left in the spring of 1930, he gained, if not a knowledge of English, at least a new depth and scope as an artist. "The experience was indeed tremendous, not simply because it found expression in the most bizarre book of poems he ever wrote (Poeta en Nueva York), but because it resulted in evidences of a spiritual transformation giving new direction to the whole of his art."\(^{15}\) "Poet in New York is the product of a critical period spent in America, an interval of solitude during which Lorca was to find the key to his stage career, the formula for his plays."\(^{16}\)

He was fascinated by the Negro and was constantly drawn to Harlem night life. He also learned the American way of living and changed his manner of dress during his stay at Columbia. The fascination with the Negro was only one aspect of his wider perception because while he was in New York, Lorca saw in retrospect the Spanish woman in a new light. He saw and compared the freedom of morality in the American women with the stringent moral codes so inherent in the Spanish women.

After his return to Spain his plays concerned themselves almost exclusively with a single theme, the suffering and the frustration of the Spanish woman. Is it not possible, and

\(^{13}\)Honig, op. cit., p. 12.  \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 12.
\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 13.  \(^{16}\)Duran, op. cit., p. 5.
indeed probable, that Lorca learned to understand the situation of the Spanish woman by thinking about her in New York and comparing her position with the situation and the possibilities, so completely different, of the North American girl?17

In 1930 Lorca left New York to lecture at the Institucin Hispano-Cubano de Cultura in Havana. He enjoyed his stay in Cuba more than his stay in the United States because of the similar cultural background that Cuba and Spain share. "A strong Hispanic feeling among the Cubans identified itself with an ancestry rooted in Spain."18 In the summer of 1930, after his short stay in Cuba, Lorca returned to Spain to begin one of the most important periods of his life -- a period of change both for Lorca and for the political situation in Spain.

The following year Spain became a republic with the most advanced democratic constitution in history. The men who wrote it, intellectuals, professors, and professional leaders, endowed the new republic with boundless enthusiasm for social and cultural reform. Millions of copies of the constitution were published and spectacularly released by airplane to the people all over Spain . . . But now the movement to awaken the people to the cultural heritage and to their rights as democratic citizens became a principle of the new government.19

Federico Garcia Lorca and Eduardo Ugarte became co-directors of La Barraco [The Hut] under the sponsorship of the new government. La Barraca was to be a traveling repertory theatre that would bring to the smallest cities and provinces of Spain the works of the classical Spanish writers for the theatre -- Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Calderon de la Barca. These plays were supplemented

17 Ibid., p. 9
18 Honig, op. cit., p. 15.
19 Ibid., p. 16.
with traditional ballads that were arranged by Lorca. He also presented his new plays, Blood Wedding, Yerma, and Dona Rosita the Spinster.

Lorca directed, acted, took care of lighting effects, pleaded with old peasant families so that he could borrow their authentic eighteenth century costumes for one night. The settings were extremely simple and very effective. The techniques of modern theatre had finally reached Spain and were applauded first not in its big cities but in the improbable setting of Spain’s remotest villages.

This new side of Lorca’s talents attracted attention and his fame spread to the Spanish-speaking parts of the Western Hemisphere. "In 1933 he was invited to Buenos Aires to produce both his own plays and his versions of the Golden Age dramas. Here a new audience was drawn, one which had never come to the theatre before." Lorca left South America after a whirl of lectures, performances and literary parties. "Upon his return he settled in Madrid and devoted himself to writing plays."

The young poet-playwright returned to Spain and wrote the folk tragedy The House of Bernarda Alba and prepared another set of poems for publication -- The Divan del Tamarit and the Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias. He was at work on The Destruction of Sodom in July, 1936, when he decided, both because of the political situation in Spain and a desire to spend his saint's day with his family, to return to Granada.

The revolt against the Republic began on July 17 in Spanish Morocco, then spread rapidly over many parts of Spain. Lorca took refuge with the Rosales family. He was

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20 Duran, op. cit., p.12.  
21 Honig, op. cit., p. 17.  
22 Duran, op. cit., p. 3.
a good friend of the poet Luis Rosales, whose house was the headquarters of the Falangist movement in Granada. To no avail: A few days later (August 18) a squad arrested him there. He was shot on the dawn of the following day. His body lies in an unmarked grave, probably at Viznar, in the mountains a few miles from Granada.

None of the critics or biographers of Lorca can really explain why he was dragged through the streets of Granada that morning to the firing squad. He had never supported a political theory or dogma and he had even avoided arguments and fights over political issues.

Lorca had never espoused a political cause of any kind. He had fled the bickerings of actions with an instinctive dread for all political dogma. He had once jestingly replied to a question calculated to arouse some partisan admission, that he was a Catholic, Communist, Anarchist, Libertarian, Traditionalist and Monarchist all at once; this was simply his way of stating his integrity as a Spaniard. A few months before his death, in an interview published in the Madrid daily, El Sol, he was quoted as saying,

"I am completely a Spaniard, and it would be impossible for me to live outside my geographical boundaries; but I hate him who is a Spaniard only to be nothing more. I am a brother to everybody and I despise the man who sacrifices himself for an abstract nationalist idea only to love his country with a bandage over his eyes."

Thus, en medias res, the life of Spain's greatest modern dramatist was wiped out perhaps even before he showed the greatness of which he may have been capable. His abilities as a playwright, poet and painter must be judged

\footnote{Most of the authorities on Lorca maintain that he was killed in July, 1936, but none of the others have given a specific date. Honig and Graham-Lugan and O'Connell just mention the month inasmuch as the exact date is hard to establish.}

\footnote{Ibid., p. 4}

\footnote{Honig, op. cit., p. 18.}
these works. He provided the world not only with some great works of poetry and dramatic literature but also with a view of Spain and the Spanish culture. "For the Spaniards of his generation he was the best introduction to the twentieth century, for us he may be the best introduction to eternal Spain."{26}

{26} Duran, op. cit., p. 15.
III.

HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

OF SPANISH DRAMA

A brief survey of the Spanish drama is in order here because it is from the traditions and themes of the Golden Age dramatists that Lorca developed his writing. His dramatic theme of honor, the basis of the tragic trilogy, was adopted from the dramatists of Renaissance Spain, for example.

In general, more, the contagion of the Spanish Theatre’s theme of honor and punctilio, including the drama of punto de honor or “point of honor” — that is, of offended dignity as a motive for dramatic action — was widespread.

His works also show the soul of Spain for they are dominated by the Spain that he knew and loved. The history, the folklore and Spanish themes fill his work as it does in almost all of the great Spanish writers.

The drama of Spain much like the non-dramatic literature of Spain has been little known outside the country of its origin. The Spanish authors, including Lorca, both of dramatic and non-dramatic literature have always been intensely nationalistic and almost esoteric in their writing which sometimes lacks the universality of some of the great authors of the world’s literature.

The best plays that have come to our attention possess traits uniquely Spanish. These have appeared conspicuously in regional pieces or dramas of local color, and in poetic drama, whether comic or tragic; especially in the work of Federico Garcia

Lorca, who became a major figure in the theater despite his early death in 1936.²

These uniquely Spanish traits are probably the reason that the English-speaking world is somewhat ignorant of Spanish dramatic literature. John Gassner quotes Barret Clark who says: "... the drama of Spain, early and modern, has in English-speaking countries been sadly neglected, it is regrettable that one of the most gorgeous and passionate outbursts of national dramatic genius has received but scant attention from English readers, ..."³

In Spain, as in almost every country throughout Europe, the highest achievements in the dramatic arts were accomplished during the Renaissance. With the driving out of the Moors and the exile of the Jews during the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand, the country unified and prepared itself for the Renaissance. The political unity of a country long torn by internal strife created an intense nationalism and interest in the history and development of the country, fostering an interest in historical drama. Lorca adopted from this tradition of historical drama, too, in his first successful play, Mariana Pineda, based on a nineteenth-century martyr of liberty.

During the early Renaissance England was proceeding into her Elizabethan Age and the similarities in the development and production of the drama in the two countries is almost astounding.

The progress of the Renaissance in Spain was also marked, as in England, by a developing awareness of national history


³ Ibid., p. 3.
and legend, and by a concern with national characteristics, customs and ideas. Significant literary works in both prose and poetry treated the drama of history. 4

Throughout western Europe almost all the theatre developed from the medieval religious drama that was supported and used by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church had found that an easy and comprehensible means of illuminating the Biblical lessons was through dramatic action; consequently, the miracle and mystery plays developed in the Church for religious purposes.

In Spain the first religious plays, as well as the secular ones, were called autos — "actions" or "acts." The earliest sacred dramas seem to have been re-enactments of stories from the Bible or the lives of the saints. . . . Even the first of these autos sacramentales differ from the mystery plays in a number of ways. They seem nearer to the English moralities in dramatic treatment and methods of production. 5

In most of the countries the renewed interest in the classic writers of Greece and Rome resulted in an almost conscious effort to move away from the liturgical drama toward a more classic form. In contrast with the rest of the continent, however, Spain's drama stayed tied to the Church until 1765 — several hundred years longer than in most of western Europe.

As the interest in the autos increased and their production became more popular, entremeses (interludes of comedy, dancing and singing) intruded into the sacred drama. The clergy and some members of the laity finally attacked these interludes and the coarser elements of the performances and finally "... in 1765


Charles I prohibited by royal decree the performance of all *autos sacramentales*.

By this time, however, the theatre was an important part of the lives of the people and the popular theatre had developed, reached its apogee and gone into its decline. It must be remembered, however, that the sacred and secular theatre in Spain can never be separated. "The Spanish players of the sixteenth century can never be separated from the religious theatre or from a certain amount of dependence on income from productions at religious festivals."  

The development of the secular drama in Spain's Golden Age began with Juan del Encina, who is known as the father of the Spanish drama. He and Bartolome de Torres Naharro were schooled in Italy; but they did not become devoted to the classical forms and they prepared the way for the founder of the Spanish National Theatre, Lope de Rueda. "Rueda, rather than being the father or founder of the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age should simply be recognized as the most successful or best known practitioner in a rapidly expanding secular theatre."  

Lope de Rueda and a friend (unnamed by historians), gathered together a group of friends and set off as strolling players, touring the religious festivals and performing his short pieces of dramatic works combined with popular ballads and dancing:

Lope de Rueda, who became so influential that he is said to have founded the Spanish national theatre, is first heard of in 1554. He

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6Ibid., p. 118.


9Hesler, op. cit., p. 54.
is the first head of a company of players of whom we have any knowledge and he dominated the Spanish theatre until 1565. His activities paved the way for the flowering of the next 50 years.\(^\text{10}\)

Here again Lorca fits into a tradition of the Golden Age dramatists; for he, too, had a touring company with which he brought the classics to the provinces, and Lorca included ballads and dancing as interludes.

From this somewhat meager beginning of playlets and strolling players the history of the Spanish Golden Age moves to probably the world's most prolific playwright. He is supposed to have written some 1800 secular plays and about 400 sacred plays.\(^\text{11}\) Lope de Vega gave the Spanish dramatists of the future not only plots but also ideas and characters with which to work. His most important contribution, however, was the form of the *comedia*. The *comedia* was a three-act play of nebulous structure and verse forms. Instead of adhering to a single metrical pattern as did the Elizabethan and the French neo-classic writers, the Spanish writer was free to use any or all of the existing forms or create new ones if they would better suit his purpose. And it is Lope de Vega who "shaped the final form of the *comedia* and gave it distinction."\(^\text{12}\)

Lope de Vega was an extremely popular playwright. His plays were exciting with their romantic characters and energetic plots and yet these plots were disciplined and skillfully constructed.

From this we may be sure (without reading all the surviving 450 works) that his plays are filled with action and surprise, with inventive plot and swift movement, with flattery and romantic

\(^{10}\text{Roberts, op. cit., p. 174.}\)
\(^{11}\text{Macgowan, op. cit., p. 131.}\)
\(^{12}\text{Macgowan, loc. cit.}\)
description, with playings-up to royalty and religion, with farcical interlude and relief characters, with fascinating heroes and seductive heroines. They are, too, deft, clever, fast flowing, with the most skilful mechanical articulation yet known to the world stage.  

Lorca was, like Lope de Vega, an extremely popular playwright. He used the comedia form that had been perfected by de Vega with its three-act structure, freedom of verse forms and combinations of poetry and prose.

Perhaps a lesser playwright, but a far greater poet, Pedro Calderon de la Barca, came next to the scene of the Spanish stage. He is the last of the great Spanish dramatists of the Golden Age. When he died at the age of 81, he left behind him an impressive array of dramatic writings. His influence did not help to carry the current age further, but his importance with the Romantic playwrights of the early nineteenth century cannot be underestimated. "Among foreign dramatists only Shakespeare, in fact, had a greater impact on the German-speaking stage than Calderon."  

Thus in 1681, the greatest period of the Spanish drama had reached its peak and started into a decline.

Other playwrights of this period that added greatly to the reputation of the theatre in Spain were Cervantes whose approach to drama was perhaps too literary for the people who visited the theatre. Another was Tirso de Molina, who gave not only the Spaniards one of their greatest characters but also added notably to the world drama with the character of Don Juan. This character appears in plays from Moliere's Don Juan to Mozart's Don Giovanni to Shaw's Man and Superman.

Here then we see a period of over 100 years coming to a climax. The

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13Cheney, op. cit., p. 251.  
14Flores, op. cit., p. 2.
importance of this period to dramatic literature is inestimable: playwrights wrote plays that are still worthy of production, introduced themes and characters and developed an intrinsically nationalistic dramatic literature, possibly one of the most nationalistic theatres in the history of the world drama. The brilliance of this epoch cannot be placed on one man but on the many important persons who contributed to it.

Rueda has been singled out as the father of the national theatre of Spain and he may well deserve this title; but parenthood is often difficult to prove and the secular theatre in Spain could better be described as the product of many rather than the offspring of one. That professionalism in the Spanish theatre of the mid-sixteenth century was extensive is demonstrated in the list of names of actors and authors that have been transmitted to us and in the rapid establishment of — if not permanent theatres — then of preferred corrales during Rueda's life and immediately following his death. 15

From this epoch stems much of what has been influential in the modern drama of Spain; Lorca especially shows the influence of the Golden Age writers. Lope de Vega and Calderon's dependence on history, folklore, excitement and point of honor is shown again in the works of Lorca and indeed in most of the Spanish drama.

Lorca also maintains much of the lyricism that is so easily noted in the poetry of the Renaissance Spanish writers. There is, too, a freedom in form and structure that isn't inherent in most of the other dramas of the world with the exception of the Elizabethan — this same freedom from strict rules of classical dramaturgy is shown in some modern writers.

The two great theatres of the Renaissance and the baroque period are indeed those of England and Spain, where the curb of the unities of time, place, and action was adopted only by scholarly playwrights, and at that only half-heartedly; where events were allowed to transpire visibly on the stage instead of

15Hesler, op. cit., p. 53.
being merely narrated; and where a vigorous spirit, or, if need be, a world of turbulence and violence escaped suppression by neoclassical "decorum" and logic. 16

From 1681 at the death of Calderon to 1892 when Jose Echegaray began writing his Romantic-Naturalistic dramas, the Spanish theatre gave little to the library of dramatic literature. There were a few melodrams that are remembered only because they provided the librettos for operas: El Trovador by Garcia Gutierrez became Verdi's Il Trovatore; and Don Alvaro by the Duque de Rivas for his La Forza del Destino. "But all in all it was a discursive, often hysterical theatre of hot passions, violence, sudden death and unbearably unreal and pompous afflatus." 17

Jose Echegaray's plays, although modeled after Ibsen, are still somewhat Romantic in nature and structure, and his The Great Galeoto is an excellent illustration of the Romantic trend in Spain.

With the defeat of Spain by the United States in 1898 there came a sobering effect on the Spanish literary world. Azorin, Baroja and Unamuno with their essays and debates influenced the next generation of Spanish writers, especially Galdos, Benavent and Rivas. Benavento was glib and sophisticated and with this tone commented on the Spanish scene but at the same time achieved a universality that is somewhat uncommon in Spanish literature. He dominated the Spanish stage for many years and then came a challenge to his supremacy -- Federico Garcia Lorca.

Lorca's career, though impressive, was short and whether or not he would have ascended any higher on the ladder of literary genius than he was at the time of his death is hard to determine. He was a man in love with his people and their culture.

16 Ibid., p. 5 17 Ibid., p. 10.
and his dramatic works are centered in this culture. His works are not only an eminent comment on his Spanish world but also worthy pieces of dramatic literature and are recognized as such. Angel Flores remarks: "His Blood Wedding (1933) will remain among Spain's loftiest contributions to the world literature." 18

Following Lorca's death and the other atrocities of the Civil War, the theatre of Spain remained quiet for almost a decade. Only in the more recent past has the work begun again toward a Spanish theatre. In Spain itself one now hears the voices of Antonio Buero Vallejo, Alfonso Sastre and in exile there are Alejandro Casona and Max Aub. 19 Perhaps these voices will provide another Renaissance in Spanish drama or add to the one that started at the beginning of the current century. The English theatre that has so long been allied with the Spanish for some unknown reason has been breaking free and moving toward a truly great and exciting theatre; perhaps this will happen with the Spanish drama also.

Like the English-speaking theatre, the Spanish can boast of two periods of major importance, a Renaissance-baroque age and a modern one, the latter starting during the last decades of the nineteenth century. 20

In Lorca we find a poet-dramatist whose works show an intense interest in his homeland, its people and its culture. He studied its history, folklore and the traditions of its greatest drama. He brought these elements into his poetry and drama, revitalizing them with his own creative genius, not merely copying the forms.

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18 Ibid., p. 11  
19 Loc. cit.  
20 Ibid., p. 4.
IV.

STERILITY IN LORCA

The problem in discussing the theme and symbols of sterility in the plays of Federico García Lorca is not in finding them but in discovering the reasons for them and substantiating them as a valid key to interpretation of his work. The problem stems from the lack of material dealing with the topic of sterility. There is, therefore, a need for a definition with reference to the sterility found in Lorca’s works.

For the purpose of this study, Sam Bluefarb’s definition of sterility will be helpful: "... sterility, the incapability of life to bring itself forth, reproduce itself: ..." ¹ In Lorca the problem of sterility is not, as implied by the above definition, the physical incapability to reproduce life; it is the social mores and obedience to a strict code of honor and sex that makes the women in Lorca’s plays incapable of reproduction.

It is not the moral codes nor the code of honor per se that sterilize the women in the tragic trilogy. It is their own interpretation of the codes and the rigidity of their method of adherence that sterilizes the women. The attributes of these traditions have become negative instead of positive and have become a fetish with the tragic heroines. The plays, and through them the women, "... show opposites and tensions which express those two great contenders at war with each other,

the Life Force and the Death Wish."\(^2\) The unfertile state of the women stems from the fact that ". . . in one way or another these characters have stifled the life force not only in others but within themselves, or they will extinguish it where it exists."\(^3\)

Physically, however, the women are fecund, but the strict social standards and the inviolable code of honor which binds them renders these women metaphorically, as well as morally and socially, sterile. This, then, will be the major premise of this study: that the women in Lorca's three tragedies Blood Wedding, Yerma and The House of Bernarda Alba are incapable of reproducing life because of their method of adherence to a strict social standard of sex and a traditional code of honor found in the tradition-bound Spain of the early twentieth century. In the study of this premise two topics will be considered: 1) the reasons for the theme of sterility and 2) its expression in these plays.

During the sixteenth-century reign of Phillip II, Spain seemed to withdraw from the path that the rest of Europe had taken. It developed its own society and set of values. Her people's education fell far behind so that by the time the rest of Europe had reached the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Spain lagged in its development. She seemed to resist progress. The government and, through it, the Catholic Church controlled the schools; the people outside the metropolitan areas were for the most part illiterate. Culturally, however, the people developed a spontaneous type of art that is highly characteristic of their nation and heritage.

True, in a nation where the great majority were unable to read or write there existed a powerful sense of creativity and of

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 110. \(^3\)Loc. cit.
dignity among the masses. The Spanish people continued to produce spontaneous poetry, songs, and other expressions of their naturally artistic popular sentiment. There is no country on earth with a more beautiful body of folk poetry and folk music than Spain. There is no country where the illiterate masses possess greater innate refinement and vitality. 4

At the time of Lorca's birth in 1898, Spain had reached the depths of misfortune. She had lost the war with the United States, thus losing all of her hold in the Western Hemisphere and the Orient; with the loss of her empire, she was forced to depend on loans from foreign powers because her own major industries could not support her. These loans were repaid in part from her meager copper and iron mines, pawning her railroads, and the selling of water power to foreign governments.

Her lands, because of drought and mismanagement, were not producing; there were earthquakes and other disasters. Arturo Barea describes this miserable state.

Her fertile but mismanaged lands were exhausted, her crops reduced by annual droughts, while irrigation schemes and new methods of agriculture were futilely discussed; the country was short of bread. But it was plagued by earthquakes, epidemics and floods which in the eyes of the bewildered ignorant people heralded the Apocalypse. The monarchic politicians smelt of decay. 5

From this impoverished backward nation sprung a group of intellectuals known as "the generation of '98." The best writers, poets and philosophers since the Golden Age of Spain -- Galdos, Unamuno, Baroja, Valle-Inclan, Azorin and Machado -- came forth to bring to light the problems of Spain. They searched in


the folklore, history and culture of their country to discover "What is Spain?", and
from this quest Spain awoke again.

The writers of the "generation of 1898" embodied the last, best hope of modern Spain. The contradictions implicit in their lives and works are the contradictions of their country. They exalted the use of the human will, and had none. They extolled the power and glory of Castile, and were not Castilians. They argued for the Europeanization of Spain, but one finds tradition omnipresent in their works. They longed for a religion of faith and were themselves skeptics. One thing they did achieve, as Spaniards have always achieved: They constructed a palace of beauty.6

Arturo Barea agrees that the influence of these artistic and literary giants of modern Spain was as profound and long lasting as indicated by Crow. But here again it is found that Spain is still bound to itself and the writers are still obsessed with the inner reality of Spain and her culture. They have not yet moved outside the realm of their own little world.

In the spiritual life of Spain it has left deep traces which nothing as yet obliterated and hardly anything overlaid. They established contact with the world outside Spain, only to return to the problem that possessed them, the problem of their country's inner life.7

This was the world that produced Lorca. The young, sensitive poet-to-be reached adolescence in one of the more provincial areas of Spain -- Granada. The provinces with their desolation, poverty and adherence to the strict Catholic codes

provided the background material for his plays. In writing of Dona Rosita, The Spinster, Barea says:

He re-created his own city of Granada about 1900, but it was more than a regional period piece that he gave. The asphyxiating atmosphere of prejudice, bigotry, hypocrisy, fear, malice, and genteel behavior in which the unfortunate girl Rosita withers away, was only too well known to the great mass of the theatre-going public. And Lorca made the people of that society come alive, in all their mortifying deadening way of living.  

Here is where the sterility starts -- in a Spain that is no longer a world power, in a Spain that hasn't really reached the modern industrial era of the twentieth century, in a Spain that is tradition-bound to the concepts of honor and sex that have dominated her for hundreds of years.

It might be that the poet felt, subconsciously perhaps, that Spain and his eternal Yerma were one, that the sterility of his country among modern nations was a slight on its great past and a hurt to his own being and sensitivity.

The theme of sterility naturally did not entirely stem from Spanish tradition or the current of the times. The Spanish code of honor and sex -- the traditional mores of the Spanish society -- also played an important part. And it is with this code that Lorca's characters are bound.

Every country has its rules of behavior and morality, though usually unwritten, they tend to be inviolable. So it is with Catholic Spain. In Spain these rules are codified into a strict system of behavior and action and it hasn't changed for several hundred years. The codes of honor and sex are much the same today as they

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8bid., p. 29.

were in the height of the Golden Age of Spanish Drama when they were adopted from the standards set up by the Church. Here again Lorca takes from the classical Spanish writers whose works depended on the themes of love and honor and the place of the woman in society.

Lorca felt and expressed the problems of sex such as they had been shaped and transformed by the complex conventions of his people. He felt the emotions at the root of the Spanish sexual code so deeply that in his art he magnified them until traditional values stood out with a perturbing significance. 10

The woman in the Spanish society is merely a bearer of children. It is she from whom the land prospers because her sons are the tillers of the soil and the fecundation for the women of the future. Her role is important in this respect.

Centuries of Moorish and medieval-Catholic breeding, centuries of a social order in which women were valued only for the sons they produced, created this attitude. The code which sprang from it is still valid in Spain. Lorca's "mother," who likes men to be lusty and wild because it means more sons, is deeply convinced that procreation and fecundity are the object, not the correlate of married sexual love. 11

The Moorish practice of the harem -- fidelity and procreation -- influenced Iberian mores. These ideals along with the Catholic Church's firm stand on marital sex, which is only for the procreation of the race and not for physical pleasure, lead to a very stern sociological and religious pattern in the lives of the Spanish women. The Spanish woman, therefore, must live within the framework of a severe and

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10 Barea, op. cit., p. 34. 11 Ibid., p. 36.
unyielding moral system. Her position and duty is that of child-bearer and erector of a socially acceptable facade for the public to view.

We see that women lived in a degree of seclusion little less than Oriental, and in a perfectly Oriental dependence on the head of the family. We learn that marriage was, as still it is to a great degree, a mere matter of business arrangement, in which the inclination of the parties most interested is the last thing taken into consideration.  

The male’s role in this system is not nearly so severe or so unyielding as that of the female’s. A true double standard of morality is maintained in this country as in other countries of the world. The man’s procreative powers are revered by the woman, for without a man, she is unable to fulfill her mission in life. He is the strength and the power by which the women survive.

This moral conviction that men and women must be fecund and that the man and husband is the master because he is the instrument of fecundation has the deepest possible psychological and social roots.  

The man is also the protector of the faith in that he must protect the honor and reputation of the family. Here the code of honor and revenge come into importance in almost all of Spanish literature. This code of honor is extremely demanding and vindictive. It demands the taking of life and maintenance of virginity not necessarily for the sake of love but for the purity of the blood. ”... it provides the sanctions against sexual offenses and protects the property of the family.”

With an artist’s clarity of vision, Lorca examined the state of the folk women of Spain. He shows a tremendous knowledge of the problems and frustrations of the

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14 Ibid., p. 37.
Spanish women. Perhaps during his visit to New York and the new insights he obtained there prompted this interest in the women of his own country. Manuel Duran suggests that it is possible and highly probable that Lorca gained a new view of the role of the Spanish woman by comparing her with the women of America and their comparative freedom. 15

Barea feels that the early childhood disease of Lorca may have had a great influence on his understanding of women. Very few of the biographers will agree on any definite psychological effects of this early disease on Lorca. It cannot be ascertained exactly what the disease was.

Because of his ailment, his childhood impressions and emotions must have been molded to an exceptional degree by the women around him. Certainly Lorca's work shows his singular faculty for identifying himself with the inner world of women. His relationship with his mother and sisters was intimate and close throughout his life. 16

Certainly this insight into the psychology of woman is an important part of his writing, but it must be remembered that the Spanish woman is the one who bears the load and burden in the severely codified system of morality. Consequently, the woman would be the more powerful force of the two in the considerations of the conflicts necessary for good drama.

A human being, as a nation, which ceases to create, or which cannot create, snuffs out its only certain chance for immortality. This would surely be the greatest possible tragedy, the greatest travesty, the deepest hurt which might be imposed on created life. Lorca's own single life, the sterility of the lives of countless Catholic priests which he might have identified with sterility

15Duran, op. cit., p. 9.  
16Barea, op. cit., p. ix.
in the Church and in Spain itself, and the frustration of mankind's creative urge as seen in woman, who is womb, might all have stirred the poet's individual sensitivity.  

In considering the different ideas and concepts that contributed to Lorca's writing of the sterility theme, it must be remembered that Lorca was a poet of the people and that for him and his people, this was an important and recurrent problem to be considered. No one can really tell, however, the exact causes for this interest, or almost obsession, with the sterility and frustration of the women of Spain that Lorca possessed.

Personally I do not believe that anyone can clarify perfectly this phase of Lorca's artistic creed, and I am afraid that anyone who attempts to do so with a feeling of certainty is bound to perpetrate that greatest of all falsehoods, the half-truth. And so far as Lorca's character as a writer is concerned, such conclusions do not greatly matter. Certainly it is doing the man a tremendous injustice to say of him that he was a "poet with a great preoccupation for sex, with an obsession for sterile or frustrated passion," and let that stand as the pith of his poetic being. 18

18 Ibid., p. 90
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BLOOD WEDDING

In writing his plays as in the writing of his poetry, Lorca held the idea in his mind for quite some time waiting for the complete development of the idea and theme, then he would sit down and write the work. So it was with Blood Wedding. The official premiere of the production was on March 8, 1933 at the Teatro Beatrix in Madrid. From there it traveled to Latin America and was finally produced in New York under the title of Bitter Oleander in 1935. But the idea had grown and developed from a newspaper article that Lorca had read many years before:

"Before Blood Wedding was a play, it was a short newspaper account in El Defensor de Granada, one of the local papers. I remember Federico reading to me an account of a bride from Almeria who, on her wedding day, ran off with her former lover. The bridegroom followed them and the two men killed each other... Apparently, after this, the newspaper account was forgotten; yet some time later Federico told me of an idea he had for a tragedy -- it was based on the incident in Almeria. Then, for some time, the play would seem to have been forgotten again. This process of letting a play write itself was my brother's method. He never consciously wrote down a play's outline."

After the period of gestation that is mentioned by Francisco Garcia Lorca, the play itself was finally written in a single week.

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2 Ibid., pp. 188-189.

Plot and Character

As with all the tragedies, the central figures are the women and their sterility and of their subsequent frustrations. The action of the plot centers around the Mother and the Bride. These two central characters become the forces with which the play moves forward.

The play's theme is the codified systems of sex, honor and passion. And the tragedy revolves around the Mother who loses everything at the end of the play except for the peace of knowing she'll never lose another son as she has in the past. "It is La Madre who holds the tragedy together; it is her sense of love and hatred, honor and vengeance that directs the physical action of the play. Therefore it is her tragedy."^4

The traditions that dominate the play include the strict idea of revenge -- the eye for an eye type of revenge; honor for the family and for the code of honor that the society has imposed on these people. These traditions so dominate the characters that they are fated to sure tragedy at the hands of the codes which they embrace.

The Mother is the one in whom sterility is most clearly seen. From the beginning of the play she is metaphorically sterile. Her husband is dead; she has only her youngest son to carry the family forward and turn the many acres of land into a fertile area. She has clearly fulfilled her duty in bearing children, but with only one son remaining the chances of survival are more dubious than before.

^4Lima, op. cit., p. 190.
This son is her last remaining hope. For through him there is the hope of grandchildren, but if her son marries to produce these grandchildren, she will be left alone -- sterile except for his procreative powers. "Yes, yes -- and see if you can make me happy with six grandchildren, or as many as you want, since your father didn't live to give them to me."  

Another characteristic of the Mother that leads to her tragedy is that she is obsessed with the past, remembering it as a vital period in her life; with the present and future there is only bitterness and hatred. When the Bridegroom offers to let her live with him and his new wife, she insists that she cannot:

No. I can't leave your father and brother here alone. I have to go to them every morning and if I go away it's possible one of the Felix family, one of the killers, might die -- and they'd bury him next to ours. And that'll never happen! Oh, no! That'll never happen! Because I'd dig them out with my nails and, all by myself, crush them against the wall.

The Mother lives within the strictest codes of honor and marriage that are so much a part of the Spanish system. She questions the reputation and honor of the Bride because of the Bride's previous engagement with another man. Her doubts are only heightened when she finds that the man to whom the Bride was formerly engaged is a member of the Felix family and that the reputation of the Bride's dead mother is somewhat questionable. She wishes, as much for herself as anyone, that no one knew about these two women. "I wish no one knew anything about them -- either the live one or the dead one -- that they were like two thistles no one even names but cuts off at the right moment."

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At the meeting with the Bride and her Father, the Mother questions the Bride about her duties:

Mother . . . Do you know what it is to be married, Child?  
Bride. 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! Live Long!

Almost from the beginning of the play the Mother is a fatalist knowing that something will happen that will destroy her hopes for the future. She feels that any encounters with the Felix family (which are now unavoidable because of the relationship with the Bride's family) will bring nothing but evil and disaster to her own family. As she and the Bride's father prepare to leave for the wedding, she warns the Bridegroom and the Bride: "And go along carefully! Let's hope nothing goes wrong!"

On the return from the ceremony, she tells the Father that she does not like having Leonardo and his wife (the Bride's cousin) present at the festivities. The Father skilfully changes the topic of conversation by mentioning the number of grandchildren that could result from this marriage. His hope is that there will be many sons to till the soil and turn the wasteland in which he lives into fertile ground. This change of subject helps the Mother to forget the Felix family and gives her a chance to show her pride in both her son and herself.

Mother. And some daughters! Men are like the wind! They're forced to handle weapons. Girls never go out into the street.  
Father. I think they'll have both.  
Mother. My son will cover her well. He's of good seed. His father could have had many sons with me.

The Father of the Bride wishes that he could have everything -- the marriage and two or three grown grandchildren all in one day. This leads the Mother back to her
obsessions with the past and she explains that this is the tragedy of a death -- that procreation takes so long.

Mother. But it's not like that. It takes a long time. That's why it is so terrible to see one's own blood spilled out on the ground. A fountain that spurts for a minute, but costs us years. When I got to my son, he lay fallen in the middle of the street. I wet my hands with his blood and licked them with my tongue -- because it was my blood. You don't know what that's like. In a glass and topaz shrine, I'd put the earth now moistened by his blood.

Father. Now you must hope. My daughter is wide-hipped and your son is strong.

Mother. That's why I'm hoping.

Here again the Mother expresses her hope for the procreative powers of her son and this is an expression of all that her sterile life holds for the future.

By this time, the Mother has decided to go home alone to her empty house. But before she has a chance to leave the party, the Bride has run away with Leonardo and the Mother sends her son forth to save the family honor and certain death.

It is at this point of the play that the Mother reaches her moment of tragic recognition. To send her son off is certain death for him, annihilating any hope for the future for which she has planned, but at the same time, to keep him with her would annihilate the family honor and name. Her choice is made almost instantly in favor of death, knowing that only her honor will be left her. "There seem to be two justifications for blood revenge, though they both may seem morally reprehensible: 1) excess of pride, and 2) the double standard of morality for men and women." 6

Clearly with the Mother the "excess of pride" is the important aspect to be considered.

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at this point but even she has her qualms about sending her son to his death and sealing her own sterility.

Mother. Yes, your daughter! Spawn of a wicked mother, and he, he too. But now she's my son's wife.
Bridegroom. Let's go after them! Who has a horse?
Mother. Who has a horse? Right away? Who has a horse?
I'll give him all I have -- my eyes, my tongue even . . .
Voice. Here's one.
Mother. Go after them! No, don't go. Those people kill quickly and well . . . but yes, run, and I'll follow.

When the Mother next appears in the play (Act III, Scene 2), she has nothing left of her dynasty, her hopes, or her fertility. She has only the peace of knowing that she will never again experience the death of one of her men.

Mother. I want to be here. Here. In peace. They're all dead now: and at midnight I'll sleep, sleep without terror of guns and knives. Other mothers will go to their windows lashed by rain, to watch for their sons' faces.
But not I. 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.

Now for the Mother there is only lamentation, sorrow and peace. "The earth is the only companion in her solitude, because in it there lie the beings born from her womb: . . . The earth is the only consolation, because it changes the blood of the dead into a new fountain of life, . . ."7

Even the Bride and the Bride's hope for death cannot stir the Mother into action. At first she attacks the Bride, then realizes that this girl was only a means to an end, without the Bridegroom, the Bride is nothing. Truly the Mother has only the earth in her sorrow.

But what does your good name matter to me? What does your death matter to me? What does anything about anything matter to me? Blessed be the wheat stalks because my sons are under them; blessed be the rain because it wets the face of the dead. Blessed by God, who stretches us out together to rest.

As it is the Mother who holds Blood Wedding together, it is the Bride and her passion that bring about the tragedy of the play. From the beginning of the play, there are doubts about the honor of the girl. Her mother did not love her husband and was tremendously beautiful as is the Bride. The Bride’s relationship with Leonardo Felix makes her immediately suspect in the Mother’s mind. Before we meet the Bride herself, the doubts are beginning to be implanted in a skillful handling of exposition. Even Leonardo, her former suitor, casts doubts on her character.

Mother-in-Law. His mother, I think, wasn’t very happy about the match.
Leonardo. Well, she might be right. She’s a girl to be careful with.
Wife. I don’t like to have you thinking bad things about a good girl.
Mother-in-Law. If he does, it’s because he knows her. Did you know he courted her for three years?

Even though Leonardo’s wife defends her cousin in this scene, she has her doubts about his faithfulness and the honor of the Bride. She has heard rumor that Leonardo has been seen at the edge of the wasteland near the Bride’s home several times and questions him about it. He denies this and she acquiesces for familial peace.

The first meeting with the Bride, however, makes one wonder if she is very devoted to the young man she is about to marry. She is solemn, polite and extremely laconic in the presence of the Bridgegroom and his mother.
She doesn't react in a natural manner after they have left either. She doesn't show in her first scene any joy or happiness in her forthcoming marriage. Even with her servant she is sharp and denies that Leonardo has been making early morning calls at her bedroom window. No sooner has this denial been made than a horseman is heard and the Bride must admit that it is Leonardo.

The surroundings of the Bride even indicate that at present she is sterile. She lives in the midst of a barren wasteland with the extreme heat indicative of her passion. In addition to this, no one mentions her ability to bear children except with reference to the Bridegroom indicating that she is sterile without his procreative powers. In Act II, as she is being prepared for the marriage ceremony, she comments that it was in this dry, hot climate that she is, as her mother did before her, wasting away.

Bride. My mother came from a place with lots of trees --
   from a fertile country.
Servant. And she was so happy!
Bride. But she wasted away here.
Servant. Fate.
Bride. As we are all wasting away here. The very walls give off heat.

The Bride during this preparatory scene still has her doubts about marrying; she, like the Mother, feels that something evil is about to come: "Storm clouds. A chill wind that cuts through my heart." With Leonardo's entrance, the Bride becomes more confused about her position, but she has resigned herself to it, that she will wed and tells Leonardo that his passion for her is one thing but that she must live within the framework of the code and marry for her own pride and honor.

A little later in the same scene, the Bride admits her passion for him and
they leave each other aware that they must never see each other again, that they
must be truthful to their vows even if they would rather follow the dictates of their
passion. The Bride, however, realizes that she is still weak and could very easily
turn back to Leonardo. When the Bridegroom arrives, she wants to leave immediately
for the church, believing that once she becomes a wife that the code and her own
honor will protect her from this unnatural desire. "Yes, I want to be your wife
right now so that I can be with you alone, not hearing any voice but yours." The
Bridegroom naturally assumes that this is devotion to him, but the audience realizes
that she is only trying to find a way of protecting herself from her passion for
Leonardo.

Leonardo's encounter with his wife shows that he too is having trouble restraining his passion and resigning himself to living without the Bride. The code is
not so strong as these two young people might hope.

Time has worn such subjectiveness thin and what remains is the unresolved passion with Leonardo and La Novia burning within them. Fate has worked mightily against the lovers, depriving their souls even of the comfort of resignation.

On the return from the wedding the Bride is even more nervous than she was
previously. Leonardo is still there -- temptation personified -- distracting her from
her concentration and duties of devotion to her husband. When the Bridegroom sneaks
up behind her and hugs her without her knowing who it is, she immediately assumes
that it is Leonardo and becomes frightened.

Bride. Let go of me!
Bridegroom. Are you frightened of me?

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8Lima, op. cit., p. 201.
Bride. Ay-y-y-y! It's you.
Bridegroom. Who else would it be. Your father or me.
Bride. That's true.

The Bride asks to be excused because she isn't feeling well and that she is going to her room to rest for a few minutes. It is at this point that she disappears with Leonardo. Several guests begin looking for the Bride and Bridegroom to lead a dance. When she can't be found, a search is started and Leonardo's wife returns to the house bringing the news that she has seen the lovers escaping.

At this climactic point in the play, the Bride has made her decision fully realizing the consequences that will result. She has dared to flaunt the code and now must prepare to meet the consequences. "The heroine who is to marry the lover of her own choice against the wish of her parents, must therefore employ as much ingenuity, and display as much daring, as the prisoner who is breaking out of jail." The Bride, though not contemplating marriage, has done just this. She has dared to follow her love and passion instead of becoming bound by a code that is impossible for her to accept.

The lovers next appear in Act III, Scene 1; they debate whether they should part and only one of them face the responsibility for their actions. It is in this scene that one feels that the two are not dominated entirely by sexual passion but have a real love for one another. Granted they are driven by their sexual desires, but they also express love. The true depth of the Bride's character is brought forth in this scene. She is rational, even in her passion, and she is devoted to Leonardo and desires to protect him from the inevitable death that she knows is approaching. The

lovers cannot part, though, even when they hear the sounds of their pursuers drawing near. Their love has not been consummated but now survival takes precedence and they flee affirming their love:

Leonardo. If they separate us, it will be because I am dead.
Bride. And I dead too.

If the Bride's honor and integrity were in question before, there is no doubt in anyone's mind now except perhaps her own. Her purpose is the proving of her purity, her obedience to the code. She knows that she remains a virgin and in a way has not sacrificed either her own honor or that of her husband except in some small way by escaping. When the Neighbor tries to prevent the Mother from beating the Bride, the Bride cries:

Let her; I came here so she'd kill me and they'd take me away with them. But not with her hands; with grappling hooks, with a sickle -- and with force -- until they break on my bones.
Let her! I want her to know that I'm clean, that I may be crazy but that they can bury me without a single man ever having seen himself in the whiteness of my breasts.

The Bride tries to explain to the Mother that she was burning with desire, that even though she knew that the Bridegroom would have provided her with security, children, honor and position, that she was dragged along by her desire and passion and she wouldn't have been able to resist "even if I were an old woman and all your son's sons held me by the hair!"

The Bride reaffirms her purity to the Mother who has no desire to know whether the girl is being truthful or not. The Mother has lost everything and now only her grief is important to her.

Bride. 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.

There is no justification for the actions of the Bride so far as the Mother is concerned. In her vision of traditional morality and the code of honor, the Bride is as guilty as if she were unpure. It makes no difference to the Mother. The Bride, however, feels that she hasn't done anything wrong.

This rule is accepted by the girl herself. She knows that she did wrong in following the other man, who she could never marry, and in wanting to live with him. She accepts the law that the honor of the family and her own honor are safe only if her virginity is left intact for her husband to convert into maternity.  

But now she has no husband. She has only an empty life because her reputation is now tarnished and everyone knows of her transgression. She is now sterile too. Without a husband, a commodity that would be, at best very difficult for her to find, she can never fulfill her duties and obligations. And there is no fulfillment of her passion for she is faced with a life without even the obligatory sex required of marriage. Her passion which was never really consummated will nor remain unsatisfied.

The play ends showing the women and their different levels of sorrow and sterility; The Mother has known fertility and fulfillment but now has nothing left to fill her life; Leonardo's wife has her sons remaining and the promise of some kind of future, limited though it may be, without her husband, "Your children are yours,/ that's all. On the bed/ put a cross of ashes/ where his pillow was." and the Bride has nothing -- her life has ended before it began because her honor, though she remains a virgin, is tainted and her passions and desires cannot be fulfilled.

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10Barea, op. cit., p. 38.
In addition to plot and characters to heighten the sterility theme Lorca also uses symbolic language and the recurrence of words to show this theme. In Blood Wedding his symbols are mostly agricultural symbols referring to the productivity or aridity of the land and animals.

Those words denoting fecundity are used only with reference to the men — Leonardo and the Bridegroom. This is correct because it shows again the social significance of the man as a procreative force without which the woman cannot fulfill her position as childbearer.

The men are referred and compared to wheat, "That's what I like. Men, men; wheat, wheat,"; flowers, "First your father; to me he smelled like a carnation," and "A sunflower to your mother, . . ."; and water, "... your son was a little bit of water from which I hoped for children, land, health; . . ." and there are constant references to the vineyards which the Bridegroom owns. The vineyards, too, become symbols of fertility, for the Bridegroom has produced them from the arid soil and thus they show his procreative powers.

The sterility in the play, in contrast, is shown only through the women, chiefly the Bride, because she is the one woman in the play who has a chance of being fertile. Her ability at producing children is never mentioned except in terms of the Bridegroom. The bouquet of orange blossoms which the groom gives her, are even indicative of her sterility -- for these flowers -- generally a symbol of fertility -- are wax:
Bridegroom. Did you like the orange blossoms?
Bride. Yes.
Bridegroom. It's all of wax. It will last forever.

The deaths of the young men are presaged almost from the beginning of the play. The Mother talks continually about knives, "Knives, knives. Cursed by all knives, and the scoundrel who invented them." In the play's language, the knife becomes a symbol. The knife is a sterilizing force because of its power to kill the male -- the procreative force. "Oh, is it right -- how can it be -- that a small thing like a knife or pistol can finish off a man," and "... it goes down through the whole evil breed of knife wielding and false smiling men."

And the two men kill each other with knives in their final duel of honor.

In the Mother's lamentation in the third act, she again points to this sterilizing force -- the knife:

With a knife,
With a tiny knife
that barely fits the hand,
but that slides in clean
through the astonished flesh
and stops at the place
where trembles, enmeshed,
the dark root of a scream.

In contrast to the first where the major metaphors and symbols are of fertility, the last scene turns these same symbols into symbols of sterility. "Over the golden flower, dirty sand," "But now my son is an armful of shrivelled flowers," and even the earth becomes only a place to bury the dead: "... the couch of earth, the bed that shelters them and rocks them in the sky."

These are just a few examples of how Lorca makes use of language in the heightening of the theme of sterility in Blood Wedding. There are more and there
are reworkings and new images and comparisons with the same symbol, all of which would require another paper entirely to discuss.

**The Visual Elements**

Lorca, because of his abilities as a painter and his consummate skill as a playwright, writes in a very visual style. He specifies in his writing many of the visual aspects of his plays.

The setting's colors are specified in each scene. And these colors are important in developing the sterility in the plays. The first two sets in *Blood Wedding* are colored: the yellow of the opening scene is the same color of the wheat with which the Mother allies the fertility of her son. The rose color of the walls in Leonardo's home are indicative of his own fertility and passion, especially the fertility which is proved by his child and the one his wife is now carrying.

From the third scene of Act I in the Bride's home all the sets are white, a color of purity and sterility. Even the area surrounding the Bride's house -- the wasteland is symbolic of her sterile nature.

The main point of fertility shown in the settings of the play is the forest scene in Act III in which the lovers try to consummate their love, but the entrance of the Bridegroom prevents their fulfillment. The forest becomes a place of fertility for here the Bride could become fertilized and fulfilled by Leonardo. The forest is filled with many natural things -- grass, trees, moss, ferns -- all of which show the fecundity of this soil.
In the final scene of the play, the women are sterile and again the set is entirely white, including the floor. Another point is that there are absolutely no men in the final scene of the play; the women are left alone without men and the sterility of the color of the walls complements their sterile state.

Again in the visual aspects of the play, Lorca shows the depth and scope of his artistic nature by using the settings as a means of supplementing his theme.
VI.

YERMA

Lorca's theme of sterility becomes the dominant one in the second play of his trilogy, Yerma. Margarita Xirgu and her company premiered the play in December, 1934, in Madrid. There has been no Broadway production of this play.\(^1\) In contrast to Blood Wedding and The House of Bernarda Alba, this play cannot be traced to an actual event. There is no incident in Lorca's life which provided the material for this tragedy of sterility.

Lorca, whose style of writing always adopted from the classical Spanish writers, changed his emphasis in this play from Lope de Vega to Calderon.

Yerma follows in the tradition of Calderon de la Barca, who insisted on the individual conception of tragedy, formulated by a religious code setting certain moral bounds to action. This makes not only for a natural difference in dramatic construction, but for the resolution of tragedy on a higher spiritual plan in Yerma than in Bodas de Sangre.\(^2\)

Plot and Character

This play, as with the other plays in the folk trilogy, depends on the female sex for the basis of the tragedy. It is the sterility of one woman that becomes the tragedy of the play. There is a difference here, however. Yerma is the central character on whom the play is based while in the other two plays of the trilogy there are several for whom the code of honor leads to tragedy.

\(^1\) Lima, op. cit., p. 217. \(^2\) Honig, op. cit., p. 163.
Even the name of the central character and the title of the play denote the sterility that will be the theme of the play.

The word "yermo" means in Spanish "uninhabited, deserted, uncultivated, not productive," and is applied principally to sterile land. It may also be used as a noun meaning "uncultivated grounds" -- yermos. In Lorca's tragedy Yerma is the protagonist -- a tragic figure precisely because she is yerma.  

Yerma, like the other women in the tragedies, is not physically sterile. Her sterility is imposed upon her from outside sources -- chiefly her husband, Juan, and her observance of the strict code of honor which guides the lives of the other tragic heroines.

Her desire for a child has been unfulfilled by Juan who, firstly, does not want children and, secondly, spends all of his time in the fields. His procreative powers -- so inherent in the men of Lorca -- are devoted to the earth instead of to his wife. In actuality, within the framework of the code, these powers should be devoted to both. Yerma from the first scene knows that something is wrong between her and Juan.

"You were different when we were first married. Now you've got a face as white as though the sun had never shone on it. I'd like to see you go to the river and swim or climb up on the roof when the rain beats down on our house. Twenty-four months we've been married and you only get sadder, thinner, as if you were growing backwards."

Juan, however, will provide anything that Yerma wants except children.

"If you need anything, tell me, and I'll bring it to you. You know well enough

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3Correa, op. cit., p. 96.

I don't like you to be going out." He fears even at this point in the play that Yerma will seek the fulfillment of a child in the arms of another man.

After Juan's departure, a young bride of five months, Maria, enters. She tells Yerma that she is already with child in this short time. Maria admits that she knows nothing of bearing a child and says that she will ask her mother, but Yerma knows what you must do and gives advice to Maria.

Maria. About what I must do. I'll ask my mother.
Yerma. What for? She's old now and she'll have forgotten about these things. Don't walk very much and when you breathe, breathe as softly as if you had a rose between your teeth.

When Maria tells Yerma that one suffers a great deal with children, Yerma tells her that the pain may be great but it is a pleasant pain and that only women who are weak and don't want children complain about the pain, that the bearing of children is an important part of a woman's life.

Bah! I've seen my sister nurse her child with her breasts full of scratches. It gave her great pain, but it was a fresh pain -- good and necessary for health. . . . .

That's a lie. That's what weak complaining mothers say. What do they have them for? Having a child is no bouquet of roses. We must suffer to see them grow. I sometimes think half our blood must go. But that's good, healthy, beautiful. Every woman has blood for four or five children, and when she doesn't have them it turns to poison . . . as it will in me.

Here Yerma's doom is already being foreshadowed by Lorca and from her own mouth. She knows almost from the beginning of the play that she is doomed to eternal sterility or at least expects it.

Yerma promises to make the clothes for the baby and begins almost
immediately this act of love. Victor, Yerma's childhood sweetheart, enters and is overjoyed to find that Yerma is making baby clothes; but, when he finds that the clothes are not for Yerma's child, he hopes that Maria's example will encourage Yerma and Juan, "This house needs a child in it." Then the character of Juan is exposed a little more for the audience: "Tell your husband to think less about his work. He wants to make money and he will, but who's he going to leave it to when he dies?" Juan is somewhat materialistic in nature, but his obligation to the code is not being fulfilled because he, as the regenerative force, has not given Yerma a child. He loves Yerma, but his interest in sex is pleasure and not procreation as it should be in the views of the Catholic Church's moral code which binds the Spanish people. He is selfishly building a world of his own but not for his children as the code dictates.

The problem of bearing a child, of becoming fertile, weighs heavily on Yerma's mind. In Scene 2, she tries to find a way of becoming fertile from the First Old Woman. This woman has borne fourteen children by two husbands. From her Yerma hopes to find a means to her own end.

Why am I childless? Must I be left in the prime of my life taking care of little birds, or putting up tiny pleated curtains at my windows? No. You've got to tell me what to do, for I'll do anything you tell me -- even to sticking needles in the weakest part of my eyes.

When the woman finds that the union of Juan and Yerma was arranged and that Juan does not excite Yerma sexually, her love for Victor is exposed, but Victor is a force that is forbidden to her. Juan for Yerma was merely a means to an end - that of having children. Her code demands that she fulfill her duties
only within the framework of her marriage and she will try to do this even if it leads to her eventual tragedy. As the old woman leaves without telling Yerma anything, two young girls enter, one of whom has left her child at home alone while she delivered food to her husband in the field. Yerma berates her for risking the child's life and for not caring for her most valuable possession. "Yes, but even so, we don't realize what a tiny child is. The thing that seems most harmless to us might finish him off."

The second girl, too, is unhappy in her marriage but not for the same reasons as Yerma. The second girl does not want to bear children, indeed, she does not even want to be married. She would rather run the fields and be free. Yerma does find out, however, that the Second Girls' mother is a sorceress — Dolores; and a plan forms in Yerma's mind to visit her to see if the sorceress can help her gain fecundity.

Then Victor re-enters and Yerma finds that this man could be the source of her fertility. For in her mind she hears the sounds of a young child within him and at the same time she knows that the child will never be produced, "And he cried as though drowning." She knows that even though this child is waiting inside Victor that she cannot bring this child forth because Victor is forbidden to her through her obedience to the code:

Victor is associated with Leonardo and El Jugador de Rugby insofar as he is the great sexual force forbidden to Yerma, just as Leonardo and El Jugador are that in their respective plays.5

5Lima, op. cit., p. 224.
As Victor is leaving, Juan enters and finds Yerma who he has sent home some time before. He wants her home because so long as Yerma is confined within the house there will be no talk or rumors about his family. "But this is just the way to give people something to talk about," Juan, too, is dominated by the code of honor but only in reference to his own reputation and that of his family. It doesn't matter to him whether or not the talk is true, but only that there is talk. In contrast to Yerma's sexual honor, his honor is chiefly social.

Social honor thus becomes the highest regulating principle of society. It comes to acquire qualities of virtue and generosity and every worthy man must preserve intact the precious patrimony of social honor of which each is a guardian: this honor animates the whole existence of the community; collective life becomes elevated and virile; to neglect that patrimony is bastardsly cowardice and constitutes an abuse of the collective honor. 6

Juan's obligation is with the community and that of Yerma is in her home. Juan does not realize, however, that because of Yerma's sterility the people are talking anyway and, as is found in the next act, Yerma's sterility is not blamed on Juan but on Yerma herself.

The scene of the Laundresses at the beginning of Act II exposes the talk about which Juan has been so worried. The women claim that Juan has brought his two sisters who used to watch the church, to watch their sister-in-law. Only one of the Laundresses defends Yerma but not too successfully. "She hasn't any children but that's not her fault." "The one who wants children, has them."

The rumors about Yerma start that she has been seen with someone else.

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6Correa, op. cit., p. 100.
on two separate occasions. This is the reason that Juan has brought his sisters to watch Yerma. As the discussion of Yerma and her environment continues, the two Sisters-in-law enter and the conversation changes; then the women begin singing a song of great sensuality about an unfertile wife. The Sisters-in-law never speak; they continue with their washing and try not to react to the gossip of the women.

In the second scene of Act II, the antagonism between Yerma and Juan comes out in full force. He demands as she returns from the well that she spend more time in her home where women belong. Yerma agrees and continues:

Yerma. Justly. Women in their homes. When those homes aren't tombs. When the chairs break and the linen sheets wear out with use. But not here. Each night, when I go to bed, I find my bed newer, more shining -- as if it had just been brought from the city.

Juan. You yourself realize that I've a right to complain. That I have reasons to be alert!

Yerma. Alert? For what? I don't offend you in any way. I live obedient to you, and what I suffer I keep close in my flesh. And every day that passes will be worse. Let's be quiet now. I'll learn to bear my cross as best I can, but don't ask me for anything. If I could suddenly turn into an old woman and have a mouth like a withered flower, I could smile and share my life with you. But now, now you leave me with my thorns.

The battle between Yerma and Juan continues as the Sisters-in-law become almost ghosts in the background. Juan asks Yerma if she needs anything and she tells him yes, but he again refuses to think about children and that he has forgotten about having children altogether. But Yerma is not so easily dissuaded, "Men get other things out of life: their castle, trees, conversations, but women have only their children and the care of their children."
Juan offers to let Yerma bring one of her brothers' children to live with them but she refuses. If she cannot bear her own children, she will suffer with none. Yerma, as the argument continues, is insistent that there is no sin in talking with people, and Juan reminds her, "it can seem one." Here again Juan is showing his strict adherence to the social codes and mores of his people.

The man generally adheres inflexibly to this code and credits rumor with being true -- what people are thinking is the essential point; the fact that people are talking is what matters to the father, husband, or brother.  

Following this argument, Yerma's anguish reaches its epitome. Maria enters with her child. Yerma takes the child, but her ugliness and her uselessness through her sterility makes her return the child to his mother because "He's happier with you. I guess I don't have a mother's hands." Her obsession for having a child and the constant frustration are removing her hope and desire; she even sees her own insanity to an extent.

I'll end up believing I'm my own son. Many nights I go down to feed the oxen -- which I never did before, because no woman does it -- and when I pass through the darkness of the shed my footsteps sound to me like the footsteps of a man.

But at the same time that Yerma is realizing these facts, she admits that her honor will not allow her to look beyond the confines of her own sterile home no matter what the gossip of the village is, "They think I like another man. They don't know that even if I should like another man, to those of my kind, honor comes first."

She will maintain this sense of honor to the end of the play and her own destruction.

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7 Ibid., p. 100.
After a brief encounter with Victor, who has decided to leave the valley, Yerma goes to the sorceress in one of her last attempts at fertility.

Both scenes of the third act are unabashed attempts on the part of Yerma to achieve fertility. The first scene takes place at the home of the sorceress and the second at a hermitage where a procession to the saints is held to pray for fertility. In both attempts, Yerma moves outside the doctrines of the Church to a more primitive pagan ritual, hoping to achieve that which has been denied her. The desire of Yerma to find fertility and a child has become an obsession now and she will do anything within her own code of honor to become fecund.

In the first scene she is found returning with Delores, the sorceress, who guarantees that if the prayers are sustained that a child will surely result. Yerma imagines a woman who has borne a child to be the most beautiful creature and hopes that through childbirth she too can leave her ugly state of existence. "I have an idea that women who've recently given birth are as though illumined from within . . ."

She goes on to explain that her sterility has made her feel like a desert -- arid and dry:

I'm thinking how thirsty I am, and how I don't have any freedom. I want to hold my son in my arms so I'll sleep peacefully. Listen closely, and don't be frightened by what I say: even if I knew that my son was later going to torture me and hate me and drag me through the streets by the hair, I'd still be happy at his birth, because it's much better to weep for a live man who stabs us than for this ghost sitting year after year on my heart.

Yerma again blames Juan for her sterility and wishes that Juan were not such a good man or that she could have the children by herself.

One might doubt whether the only reason for the couple's not having children is Juan's decision not to have them; Yerma
herself could be the source of the sterility. The tragedy is rather vague on this point. Nevertheless, through the repeated incriminations which Yerma casts at her husband, we may assume him to be the cause of her tragedy.

As Yerma prepares to leave Delores' house, Juan and his two sisters enter.

Juan's shame is manifested in this scene but his sense of honor will not allow him to shout the house down.

If I could shout I'd wake up the whole village so they'd see where the good name has gone to; but I have to swallow everything and keep quiet -- because you're my wife.

Juan's suspicions about why Yerma is out at night are unjustified and finally Yerma reaffirms her honor, but Juan will not listen; he is interested only in what the villagers are saying.

Come near and smell my clothes. Come close! See if you can find an odor that's not yours, that's not from your body. Stand me naked in the middle of the square and spit on me. Do what you want with me, since I'm your wife, but take care not to set a man's name in my breast.

The final scene of the play takes place on a mountainside at a hermitage. The idea is for barren wives to make a pilgrimage to the shrine to seek the fertility they are lacking. Through the years, however, the religious purpose of the pilgrimage has degenerated. Young virile men come now to offer themselves to the barren women in hopes of fertilizing them. For this reason Juan has accompanied Yerma on this her final try at fertility. A highly sensual dance between the devil and his wife takes place following which most of the young women and men run immediately from the stage to fulfill their passions. Yerma remains, however, and the First Old

8 Correa, op. cit., p. 100
Woman returns and offers Yerma her son, telling Yerma that her sterility is Juan's fault.

The fault is your husband's. Do you hear? He can cut off my hands if it isn't. Neither his father, nor his grandfather, nor his great-grandfather behaved like men of good blood. For them to have a son heaven and earth had to meet -- because they're nothing but spit. But not your people. You have brothers and cousins for a hundred miles around. Just see what a curse has fallen on your loveliness.

Yerma, however, true to the code of honor under which she has been raised refuses the First Old Woman's son. The Old Woman now throws Yerma's honor back at her and tells her that her sterility stems from adherence to this strict honor.

Old Woman. When one's thirsty, one's grateful for water. Yerma. I'm like a dry field where a thousand pair of oxen plow and you offer me a little glass of well water. Mine is a sorrow already beyond the flesh. Old Woman. Then stay that way -- if you want to! Like the thistles in a dry field, pinched and barren! Yerma. Barren, yes, I know it! Barren! You don't have to throw it in my face. Nor come to amuse yourself, as the youngsters do, in the suffering of a tiny animal. Ever since I married, I've been avoiding that word, and this is the first time I've heard it, the first time it's been said to my face. The first time I see it's the truth.

Here is Yerma's tragic recognition. She knows now that she is doomed.

Juan enters and fulfills the prophecy of doom. He asserts that he wants her as a woman and that he is happy not having children. He enjoys Yerma as a woman sexually in direct defiance of the Church's stand on sexual intercourse only for procreation. And Juan reaffirms his own selfish desires that have led him on throughout the play.
Yerma. And you never thought about it, even when you saw
I wanted one?
Juan. Never.
Yerma. And I'm not to hope for one?
Juan. No.

Now that Juan has again denied Yerma's highest desire and she sees in
him the impurity of his lust, she rises to kill him and in doing so has committed
suicide.

And knowing the final betrayal and no answer, she chokes
him for the impurity which is worse than the desert he has
imposed upon her. She kills him with her own hands, cleanly,
with the strength of her passion . . . Having killed him, she
has also committed suicide within herself, for according to her
self-created code, she is at last certain, now that her husband
is dead, never to bear children.9

"My body barren forever. What would you know? Don't come near me, because
I have killed my child. I myself have killed my child!" She has now come the
full cycle of all Lorquian women -- she is sterile. As there is no longer hope for
the Mother and the Bride in Blood Wedding without the Bridegroom or Leonardo, as
there is no hope for the daughters of Bernarda Alba without Pepe el Romano, there
is no hope for Yerma without Juan.

Language

Being a poet before becoming a playwright, Lorca uses language to its
utmost advantages in Yerma. Honig says that Yerma's name literally translated is
desert, sterility.10 Using this as a starting point, Lorca's imagery and symbols
throughout the play are aridity and dryness. These symbols supplement the theme
of sterility, "And only we poor bedeviled women turn to dust." And Yerma tells

9Honig, op. cit., p. 176 10Ibid., p. 163.
the First Old Woman that she must give Yerma help and information,

   And you, too; you, too, stop talking and go off with the
   air of a doctor -- knowing everything, but keeping it from
   one who dies from thirst.

When the Laundresses sing their song of the barren wife for Yerma's sisters-in-law,
they refer to sand -- an element of the desert, "Alas for the barren wife! Alas
for her whose breasts are dry."

In Act III, as Yerma's obsession with her lack of fecundity grows, the
references to dryness and aridity increase, "I'm thinking of how dry I am, . . .", and Dolores, the sorceress, tells her that she knows the prayers will help because
"The last time I said the prayers with a beggar woman who'd been dry longer than
you, . . ." and the prayers had helped.

And in the final scene, the First Old Woman offers Yerma her son, a
drink of water -- symbolizing his fertility through the water, a traditional image of
the life force:

   Old Woman. When one's thirsty, one's grateful for water.
   Yerma. I'm like a dry field where a thousand pairs of oxen
       plow, and you offer me a little glass of well water.

   Yerma in her final lament for her lost fertility mentions her aridity,
   "My body dry forever."

   As in the scene with the First Old Woman, throughout the play water is
the life force which is denied the dry, sterile Yerma. "I want water and there's
neither water nor a glass," and Victor's voice, "It's like a stream of water that
fills your mouth. The fertile young men who have come to the hermitage to help
the barren wives are referred to as, "A river of single men . . ."
Realizing the monotony of repetition, however, Lorca uses other symbols and images, too. As he did in Blood Wedding, he uses again the language of agriculture and also of nature: fruit and flowers, "These bed clothes smell of apples," says Yerma of her wedding bed, and "When sweet your flesh of jasmine smells," she sings to her unborn child; agriculture, again he uses the bull as a symbol of masculinity and fertility, "He used to bellow like a bull."

These symbols serve Lorca in bringing forth his theme of sterility and his agility as a dramatist and as a poet.

The Visual Elements

In Blood Wedding Lorca displayed his skills as a painter and scenic designer by specifying the colors of the sets and some of the visual elements. But by the time he wrote Yerma, he had developed his artistry in a new area -- stage direction. Yerma was written during the period that Lorca was directing for La Barraca and in this play, he directs more than in Blood Wedding. The stage directions in Yerma for business and movement are far more copious and detailed than in the earlier play. In several places the business indicated is perfect for heightening his theme and in developing his characters: "Yerma, who has risen thoughtfully, goes to the place where Victor stood, and breathes deeply -- like one who breathes mountain air," and "Yerma gives signs of fatigue and acts like a person whose head is bursting with a fixed idea." These are two examples of the stage directions; others, too numerous to mention, include the pace of the entrances and exits, the exchanging of glances and the grouping of people for stage pictures and composition.
Lorca's setting elements in Yerma are merely mentions of the locale without the vivid description that was included in Blood Wedding: the emphasis in Yerma is clearly on the stage direction.

In this way, then, Lorca shows a new stage of artistic development in his theatre, and in The House of Bernarda Alba, he combines both the scenic elements of the first play and the direction components of the second to further supplement his ideas and themes.
VII.

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

The House of Bernarda Alba, the last completed play of Lorca, was finished less than two months before his death. It was not published or performed until nine years later and "... in a version he may not have considered final, ..." 1 The play was completed on June 19, 1936, shortly before his death. The premiere performance was in Buenos Aires at the Teatro Avenida and was produced by Margarita Xirgu and her company. 2 There has not been a Broadway production of this play.

As in the case of Blood Wedding, the basis of the play is real life in the form of a family about whom Lorca had heard. The story by a friend of Lorca's in Robert Lima's book, says:

"There's a small village, not far from Granada, why my parents owned a small property -- Valderrubio. In the house which was neighbor and adjacent to ours, lived a 'dona Bernarda,' a very old widow who exerted an inexorable and tyrannical vigilance over her unmarried daughters. As they were prisoners deprived of all free will, I never spoke with them; but I could see them pass like shadows, always silent and dressed in black ... there was a joint dry will in the confines of their patio and I would descend into it to spy on that strange family whose enigmatic attitude intrigued me. And I was able to observe them. It was a mute and cold hell under that African sun, the sepulchre of live people under the inflexible rule of the gloomy incarcerator. And that is how La Casa de Bernarda Alba was born." 3

The complete title of the play is The House of Bernarda Alba: A Drama About Women in the Villages of Spain. And Lorca adds the following after his list:

1 Barea, op. cit., p. 51
2 Lima, op. cit., p. 263.
3 Ibid., p. 264.
of characters: "The writer states that these Three Acts are intended as a photographic
document." This leaves little room for doubt about the style of production that is
required — utter realism. Adolph Salazar, a friend of Lorca's, tells us that every
time Lorca finished reading a scene of the play shortly after its completion he would
exclaim enthusiastically: "Not a drop of poetry! Reality! Realism!"

This seemed to be his goal and aspiration: to reach cold,
objective, essential tragedy, tragedy without any lyrical addition.
He was reaching a serene maturity without having lost any of his
fresh creative genius. It is therefore not surprising that in the
House of Bernarda Alba he may have achieved a complete and
inspired masterpiece, anticipated by Blood Wedding and prepared
by Yerma, which, although less accomplished as works of art, had
already given him a first classical pattern.

Plot and Character

The plot of the play is extremely simple. Bernarda Alba and her five
daughters are in mourning for Bernarda's second husband, and the father of the four
younger daughters. Bernarda has told them that they will remain within the house
for eight years of mourning.

For eight years of mourning, not a breath of air will get in this
house from the street. We'll act as if we'd sealed up doors and
windows with bricks. That's what happened in my father's house —
and in my grandfather's house. Meantime, you can all start
embroidering your hope chest linens. I have twenty bolts of
linen in the chest from which to cut sheets and coverlets.

4Lorca, op. cit., p. 156. 5Angel del Rio, op.cit., pp.153-
154. 6All textual quotations are taken from: Three Tragedies of Garcia Lorca,
James Graham-Lujan and Richard L. O'Connel (trans.), (New York: New
This action will be the source of conflict for all the daughters are of marriageable age.

The only daughter who has enough money to offer as a dowry equal to that of her social position is Angustias, who is thirty-nine. Angustias has inherited the larger portion of the foster father's estate. Because of the size of her dowry -- Pepe el Romano has come asking for her hand. Pepe, however, never appears on stage. All of the negotiations for the marriage are conducted off stage.

Adela, the youngest, is in love with Pepe and has been for some time. She starts meeting him at her window grill after he finishes his dutiful visits with Angustias. Their passion is aroused and finally Adela meets him in the barn one night after he has told Angustias that he is going on a short trip. Martirio, who is also in love with Pepe, catches Adela and tells Bernarda, who immediately grabs a rifle and tries to kill Pepe. She and Martirio return to the others and tell them that Pepe is dead. Adela runs into her room and hangs herself. Bernarda finds the body and, true to her code of honor and desire for defending her reputation, demands that Adela be dressed as a virgin, that the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba is to be known as a virgin at her death.

Clearly the women in The House of Bernarda Alba are sterilized by Bernarda and her obsession with the codes of honor and reputation. The sterility is brought about through an enforced chastity. Society demands that the house remain in mourning for eight years, but there have been no visitors since Bernarda's father died some years before. Bernarda Alba feels that her social position is far superior to that of the other people in the village. Why then has she never left the village
to give her daughters a chance to marry? Poncia, Bernarda's maid explains: "Of course any place else, they'd be the poor ones." Because of her obsession with her superior social position, Bernarda Alba has inhibited the fulfillment of her daughters' lives.

Before Bernarda Alba and her daughters return from the funeral at the opening of the play, the maids talk about her and describe her character. She is described as tyrannical, vicious and "the highest everything," and the fact that her husband's family did not come to the funeral because they hate Bernarda so much sheds considerable light on her character. From this beginning description one discovers the character of Bernarda Alba and from this image, she never varies.

When Bernarda returns from the Church with the two hundred mourning women, in order to stop their vicious comments about her, she begins a litany that forces the women to respond. The women then leave and from this point, only one outsider enters the home of Bernarda, an old friend of the family who comes near the end of the play to discuss Angustias' wedding plans.

As soon as Bernarda issues her edict of eight years' isolation to her daughters, they all realize that their lives will never be fulfilled, that they are doomed to sterility and isolation. The exceptions to this are Adela, who feels her rebellious spirit will help her escape from this house of doom, and Angustias, whose dowry is sufficient to help her find a man of the necessary social position to remove her from the house.

Bernarda finds out that Angustias has been listening to the conversation of the men in the patio about a whore and her actions of the night before. The story
is related by Adela and Angustias is reminded by Bernarda of her social position and
her obligations to the mourning house. Poncia then comes and relates to Bernarda
the story -- to which she, too, has obviously been listening.

Both Bernarda and La Poncia act outwardly shocked by the events
and by the fact that Angustias heard the men discussing the affair,
but neither hesitates in the re-telling of the story. Each has re-
ceived some satisfaction from it -- for Bernarda, the satisfaction
of meandering into the indecent side of life and not being tainted;
for La Poncia, the pleasure in adopting, if only temporarily and
hypocritically, Bernarda’s attitude.7

Bernarda is above all else a moralist. In the continued discussion of Poca la Roseta,
the whore, not only Bernarda’s strict morality, but her pride, shows through.

Poncia. She? She was just as happy -- they say her breasts were
exposed and Maximilianina held on to her as if he were playing
a guitar. Terrible.
Bernarda. And what happened?
Poncia. What had to happen. They came back almost at day-
break. Poca la Roseta with her hair loose and a wreath of
flowers on her head.
Bernarda. She’s the only bad woman we have in the village.
Poncia. Because she’s not from here. She’s from far away.
And those who went with her are the sons of outsiders too.
The men from here aren’t up to a thing like that.

Following this discussion Bernarda tells Poncia that her daughters have never had
need of a beau and that they are socially above the men in the surrounding area.

"For a hundred miles around there is no one good enough to come near them. The
men in this town are not of their class. Do you want me to turn them over to the
shepherd?" This is the reason that Martirio -- who is a hunchback -- does not
have a husband. She was to be courted by a laborer from the village, possibly her
only chance of finding a satisfying life, but Bernarda, without Martirio’s knowledge

7Lima, op. cit., p. 271.
sent word to the man that he wasn't to come to see Martirio again because of his lower social class.

Martirio, like Bernarda, hates men and feels disgusted by the actions of men. Each of the girls develops a hatred and disgust for their position of isolation while the men about the village have such a great amount of freedom. This attitude is developed and somewhat encouraged by Bernarda Alba in her position as tyrant. It is she who makes her daughters sterile because of her own outlook on life. "For in one way or another, these characters have stifled the life force, not only in others but within themselves; or they will extinguish it where it exists." 8

Augustias and Adela are the only ones in the family who openly disobey or defy Bernarda. And each receives the brunt of Bernarda's wrath, and at the same time, Bernarda reasserts her authority, "Don't fool yourselves into thinking you'll sway me. Until I go out of this house feet first I'll give the orders for myself and you."

Then Maria Josefa, Bernarda's mother, enters demanding her mantilla and pearls so that she may leave the house to find a man to marry. She asserts that none of the girls will ever marry in a bitter prophecy of the future of the daughters. Bernarda immediately sends Poncio and her daughters to return Maria Josefa to her cell. Throughout the play, Maria Josefa becomes a symbol of the daughters and their fate under the iron rule of Bernarda.

Maria Josefa's brief appearance toward the end of the first act is significant in that it serves several purposes: first, it emphasizes Bernarda's iron rule and depicts the extent of this

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8Bluefarb, op. cit., p. 110.
tyranny; second, it is symbolic of the decay to which the daughters will fall if Bernard is allowed to continue her oppression. Maria Josefa is not of minor importance as her relatively few entrances might suggest; she is an impressive symbol of the future. As such she voices all the fears and desires which the younger women feel but are afraid to disclose in the presence of Bernarda.\(^9\)

The conflict of the daughters is finally set into a definite physical action instead of by innuendos and snide comments when Martirio steals a picture of Pepe belonging to Angustias. Bernarda realizes that the only way she can prevent further outbreaks of this type is to marry off Angustias as quickly as possible. She will not admit, however, the fact that Martirio did the stealing as anything but a joke. Poncia knows that there is trouble ahead. She, in her role as servant, has overheard the discontented daughters talking and knows that Martirio's action is more than just a practical joke, "No, Bernarda. Something very grave is happening here. I don't want to put the blame on your shoulders, but you've never given your daughters any freedom." Bernarda tells the maid that nothing is happening, that Poncia only wishes that it would and "... if it should happen one day, you can be sure it won't go beyond these walls," almost in a prophecy of her final action.

Poncia, who is throughout the play more perceptive about the problems of the girls, tells Bernarda that Pepe is and should be Adela's sweetheart. Bernarda informs her that it is none of her business and that "things are never the way we want them!"

Then before Bernarda's eyes, but without her seeing it in her passion for honor and morality, Adela suddenly loses her control. And Adela realizes her

\(^9\)Lima, op. cit., p. 274.
plight if her mother should find out about the affair she is now having with Pepe.

The cause of this realization is that a young woman in the village has had an illegitimate child whom she killed and buried in the woods. A dog found the corpse of the child and returned it to the mother's doorstep, and now the villagers are in the process of stoning the girl. Bernarda encourages this action while Adela, realizing that this could be her, screams for them to stop.

Bernarda. Yes, let them all come with olive whips and hoe handles - let them all come and kill her!
Adela. No, not to kill her!
Martirio. Yes -- and let us go out too!
Bernarda. And let whoever loses her decency pay for it!
Adela. Let her escape. Don't you go out!
Martirio. Let her pay what she owes!
Bernarda. Finish her before the guards come! Hot coals in the place where she sinned.
Adela, holding her belly. No! No!
Bernarda. Kill her! Kill her!

Here is a crucial point in the play: Adela realizes that she has sinned and that if her sin is discovered it may lead to her own death at the hands of her mother. She doesn't know that Bernarda would never allow the scandal and spot on the family name to be discovered through such violent action.

Confronted by the evidence which Adela carries within her womb, Bernarda's code will dictate, she fears, a sentence of death. But what Adela does not realize, and never will, is that Bernarda cannot react equally to a similar situation in her own house. Though the code is unflinchingly applied to those outside her house, Bernarda detests the thought of scandal and would not allow the notice of her daughter's fornication to be known. Adela's failure to understand this aspect of Bernarda's character has its tragic conclusion in the final act.10

10Ibid., p. 281.
It is in the final act that Angustias and Bernarda realize that something is really wrong. Pepe isn’t as attentive as Angustias feels that he should be. Bernarda reminds her of her duties as a wife. Bernarda is relieved to hear that Pepe is visiting relatives and isn’t going to be coming that night. She thinks that they will all get to bed early. But the servants know that something is wrong in the house as they discuss the situation after she has gone to bed. They know that Bernarda doesn’t see the problems that are arising from her dictatorial reign over the household.

Adela then comes out, supposedly to get a drink of water. The two servants leave and Adela goes to her rendezvous in the barn with Pepe. Martirio comes out and catches Adela returning from the clandestine meeting. Martirio admits her intense jealousy of the relationship and Adela tells her that she is going to leave the house and become his mistress, if necessary, but Martirio swears that she will never let her sister go on with this wild plan. Adela has for a long time realized the sterile, cold atmosphere of the house and thus defends her plan.

I can’t stand this horrible house after the taste of his mouth. I’ll be what he wants me to be. Everybody in the village against me, burning me with their fiery fingers; pursued by those who claim they’re decent, and I’ll wear before them all, the crown of thorns that belongs to the mistress of a married man.

Then Adela hears Pepe’s whistle that it is time to go, but Martirio stops her and calls for Bernarda. Bernarda’s injured pride and sense of honor brings forth her wrath, especially when Adela takes Bernarda’s cane — her symbol of authority — and breaks it in a final revolution and rebellion. As the other sisters respond to the noise, Bernarda rushes off to find a gun and kill Pepe with Martirio
accompanying her. After a shot is heard, Bernarda and Martirio return and report the death of Pepe. Adela runs to her room and hangs herself. After her exit, Bernarda and Martirio admit that Pepe has escaped and is still alive. Then Adela's suicide is discovered and the final doom of the other sisters is sealed. With Bernarda's final edict they realize that now they will never escape the isolation and solitude that Bernarda has been enforcing.

Cut her down! My daughter died a virgin. Take her to another room and dress her as though she were a virgin. No one will say anything about this! She died a virgin. Tell them, so that at dawn the bells will ring twice. Tears when you're alone. We'll drown ourselves in a sea of mourning. She, the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba, died a virgin. Did you hear me? Silence, silence, I said. Silence!

The daughters are now sterile. Bernarda has succeeded in maintaining her control and her honor, the only one to escape this miserable state of existence is Adela, who through death is free, but as sterile as the others.

Adela, the one character in Lorca who tries to overcome the fate of a sterile society, becomes one of his most tragic figures. Again, the only means of avoiding sterility inherent in this house is to disobey her mother -- a symbol of the Spanish code -- and this leads to her inevitable destruction. Like the Bride in Blood Wedding she openly flaunts the codes of honor and sex and must, therefore, become sterile in her own way -- through death.

She is the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba, she has a zest for living and life that is stifled by the ideas of her mother. She also has a rebellious spirit that will help her overcome the isolation and her mother's rules even if it means dishonor.

I can't be locked up. I don't want my skin to look like yours. I don't want my skin's whiteness lost in these rooms. Tomorrow
I'm going to put on my green dress and go walking in the streets. I want to get out.

Adela's love for Pepe el Romano is foreshadowed in the opening act but it is not clearly understood then whether or not her love is more than the interest in men that all of the daughters of Bernarda Alba display at this particular time. It is in the second act that her apparent passion and desire for the young man becomes more open and clearly understood. And it is her sister, Martirio, that first suspects that Adela's honor is in question.

Adela. My body aches.
Martirio, with hidden meaning. Didn't you sleep well last night?
Adela. Yes.
Martirio. Then?
Adela, loudly. Leave me alone. Awake or asleep, it's no affair of yours. I'll do whatever I want to with my body.

Adela. She follows me everywhere. Sometimes she looks in my room to see if I'm sleeping. She won't let me breathe, and always, "Too bad about that face!" "Too bad about that body! It's going to waste!" But I won't let that happen, my body will be for whomever I choose.

Adela's major conflict is that she is zestful and lively and has an inbred rebellious streak in a house that is doomed to convention and death. She values her rights and desires as a person over the code that is being enforced by her mother. She is strong and her passion and love guide her actions away from the prudent side of life. She has a desire beyond these white sterile walls of Bernardo's house.

"How I'd like to be a reaper so I could come and go as I pleased. Then we could forget what's eating us all."

As the uprising over the girl who is being dragged through the streets for bearing an illegitimate child starts, Martirio admits to Adela that she knows about
Adela and Pepe and she will prevent Adela from getting Pepe even if it means Adela's death. And she does see her sister dead, but only after Adela has been fulfilled as a woman in the arms of Pepe.

Then comes the crucial scene for Adela as her mother calls for the death of the woman. As was explained earlier, Adela does not realize that Bernarda's strict adherence to the code of honor does not come inside the confines of her own home. But Bernarda's action forces Adela to realize that she must act quickly and remove herself from the tyrannical control of her mother. This leads to her action in the final moments of the play to run away with Pepe as his mistress if need be and when this means of escape is removed she has to escape the only way she knows how -- through death.

Thus with Pepe's supposed death, Adela is left without a means of escaping, there is nothing to live for except the prolonged agony of residence with her mother which would be impossible for Adela to withstand at this point. Adela, however, has something that none of Lorca's sterile women have had -- a sexual fulfillment of their passion. Of the two women who have acted according to their passion instead of adherence to the code in which they do not believe -- the Bride and Adela -- only Adela finds any sort of fulfillment even though it is only temporary.

The third most important character in The House of Bernarda Alba is Martirio who brings the physical action of the plot to an end. She is most like her mother in her strict adherence to the code that binds the lives of these people. Her acceptance of the code is not necessarily from choice but because of her physical
deformity makes the code easier to accept because men are not interested in her any-
way. The only one that was interested in this poor hunchbacked girl was driven
away by her mother. Martirio knows that her life is empty and sterile, so in a way
her acceptance of the code is made somewhat easier.

Because of her physical deformity, Martirio adopts the attitudes and feel-
ings of a martyr. Lima says that her name is significant, "Martirio's is the equiva-
lent of 'suffering'." This attitude is her cover for her deep-seated hatred and
disgust of men. The other daughters and Bernarda, however, realize that this is
just a facade and that she is using it for sympathy and understanding. Throughout
the play there are constant references to her hypocrisy, "I've never been able to
bear your hypocrisy." And when Poncia finds the stolen picture of Pepe between
the sheets of Martirio's bed, Bernarda say, "You'll come to a bad end yet, you
hypocrite! Trouble-maker." And troublemaker she is, too. It is she who finally
calls for Bernarda to prevent Adela from running away to become the mistress of
Pepe. For Adela this is the end of any hope for happiness or fulfillment; for
Bernarda and the family honor, it is the redeeming factor that saves them from
scandal. For if Adela had made her escape, the family name would have been
destroyed; but Martirio wasn't interested in the family name and honor, only in
preventing Adela from having the contentment and fulfillment that she herself could
not have. Martirio admits that "none of us will have him," in reference to Pepe
and this is a foreshadow of the play's end when she prevents the lovers from escaping.

\[11\]
Ibid., p. 271.
The remaining daughters of Bernarda Alba — Angustias, Amelia and Magdalena — accept their fate for what it is. They realize from the first that there is no hope of escape and with Adela’s rebellion and death, they realize that their lives have ended here in this convent away from the world. Their sterility is imposed through chastity by their mother’s obedience to a code.

All of the daughters know from Bernarda Alba’s edict of seclusion and mourning that their lives are futile and sterile. Bernarda Alba, through the code and her own sense of social position, forces sterility through chastity upon her daughters by removing them from the mainstream of life in such a way that they can never even glimpse fulfillment, much less find it and the happiness they seek. Only Adela has the courage — through passion and love — to resist the code and her mother’s wishes to try to find that which Bernarda Alba has forbidden.

**Language**

A recurring symbol in Lorca’s language in *The House of Bernarda Alba* is harder to trace because the form of expression is prose. In an attempt to achieve realism in the play, Lorca sacrificed those lyrical, poetical qualities so readily found in the earlier plays of the tragic trilogy. There are, however, two symbols which recur with some frequency: heat, symbolizing the growing passion of the young women enhancing their sterility, and the second is the eyes, which in Lorca is a symbol of vitality: “For Lorca, the act of looking is immensely vital, symbolizing life itself,”[^12] but in Bernarda Alba’s house there is a reversal because the

references are to blindness and the inability to see denoting sterility.

The heat of summer pervades this house, but as the play moves forward and the frustrations of the girls increase so does the heat, "I haven't known heat like this in years," and "It was one in the morning and the heat seemed to give off fire;" and "I was wishing it were November, the rainy days, the frost, anything except this unending heat." For the daughters of Bernarda Alba, however, the heat will never diminish but only grow as does their passion symbolized by this heat.

The heat is undoubtedly punishing the daughters but it is also referred to as a means of punishment. When Bernarda hears of the girl with her illegitimate child, she screams, "Hot coals in the place where she sinned," and at the end of the play, when Adela is ready to face her punishment if she becomes Pepe's mistress she says, "Everybody in the village against me, burning me with their fiery fingers." This enhances Lorca's theme of sterility then by increasing the passion of the daughters who will be unable to fulfill this passion because of Bernarda's edict. And if their passion is relieved, then they face only more heat as punishment for their sins. This is the hell of Bernarda's daughters.

Bernarda is watching her daughters throughout the play almost in hopes of catching them doing evil, much as she watches or has the neighbors watched by Poncia. But within her own house, she doesn't see all that goes on. Her eyes fail when the evil moves within her house. Bernarda prides herself on her ability to perceive what her daughters are doing, "My watchfulness can take care of anything," and "All because my eyes keep constant watch." But the servants point out that Bernarda's sight is somewhat impaired, that what she sees are only those things she
wishes to see, "She herself pulls the blindfold over her eyes;" "But your children are your children, and now you're blind."

This blindness of Bernarda's is, of course, not physical. But if she could see the anguish and torture to which she is submitting her daughters by her observance of her social obligations then she could relieve the sterility of her daughters with their freedom. It is her blind acceptance of tradition -- eight years of mourning-- that forces the sterility upon her daughters.

The Visual Elements

In the area of visual elements Lorca again depends on color to help him bring out his theme through atmosphere. As in the final scene of Blood Wedding, all of the sets are white, denoting the chastity and through the chastity, the sterility in the house. Onto this white background comes the black of mourning. This color adds, too, because the black is a constant reminder of the reason for the sterility. Only one color appears on stage -- the green of Adela's dress in one scene. This dress is her pride and her hope, as was the fertility it represents. Here again Lorca makes use of his ability as a poet and painter in enhancing the mood and theme of his play.

There are not as many directions for the staging as there were in Yerma, but by this time Lorca is no longer directing La Barraca but devoting almost all of his time to writing. And the motivation for stage movement and business is inherent in the lines of dialogue and consequently not included as stage directions per se.
There is another visual point: as in the final scene of Blood Wedding, no man appears on stage. He is only referred to and the frustration of the daughters' wanting to meet him almost causes a transferral of frustration to the audience, to see this man and discover his reactions to the women.

In Blood Wedding, in Yerma, and now in The House of Bernarda Alba, Lorca makes use of the many facets of his artistic personality. As he develops as a poet, as a scene designer, as an artist and as a director, his abilities as a playwright increase. As each new phase of his art grows and develops, he matures as a playwright bringing new scope and depth to this art.
VIII.

CONCLUSION

For the reader or the producer of Federico Garcia Lorca's plays, his theme of sterility is of major importance for the interpretation of his plays.

The sterility of Lorca's women is brought about by the means to which they adhere to a strictly codified system of morality and honor which is extremely stringent in itself. By their interpretation of their obligations to these codes they kill in themselves and others the life force which could make them fecund and vital. They become for all practical purposes metaphorically sterile. They are totally capable of bringing forth children in a physical sense but through the destruction of this life force they become sterile.

The role of the women in Spanish society is that of childbearer and erector of a suitable facade for the immediate society in which they live. The importance of the children they bear is that the children provide a means by which the family name and heritage is carried on and the children become the tillers of the soil to carry on the traditions of Spain.

The male is the protector of the family honor and the procreative force which germinates the female. Sexual love and passion tend traditionally in the Catholic Church to be evil, and sexual intercourse should be only for the creation of children. It is only through marriage that the women can fill their mission and obligations; consequently, only through her husband can the woman become fertile.
In each play of Lorca's trilogy there is a barren woman whose tragedy comes either from her dishonorable passion -- the Bride and Adela -- or from the absence or neglect by her husband -- the Mother and Yerma. The dishonorable passion leads the woman to act outside the framework of the code leading her to sterility; and the neglect by or absence of a husband renders the honorable sterile. Thus through an adherence and obedience to a rigid system of morality and honor the Spanish woman becomes barren and unfecund.

Lorca brings the expression of this theme to its apogee through his immense skill as a painter, as a poet and as a theatre artist of varied talents. He exhibits a thorough knowledge not only of his art but of his people and the traditions.

Federico García Lorca was the bright light on the horizon of the Spanish theatre of the twentieth century, the hope that his tragic characters never possessed and he cast his light not only on the Spanish culture and the Spanish theatre but also on the world library of dramatic literature. His importance in the twentieth century theatre is estimated by Eric Bentley when he classes him as one of the three greatest playwrights in the current century, along with Bertold Brecht and Luigi Pirandello.
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A comprehensive collection of essays on the various aspects of Lorca's art, poetry and drama.

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An interesting article on the theatre and production conventions at the time of Lope de Rueda.

The best and most comprehensive study of Lorca, his poetry and drama.

The authorized translations of Blood Wedding, The House of Bernarda Alba and Yerma, with an introduction by the poet's brother, Francisco Garcia Lorca.

A comprehensive study and critique of Lorca's drama.

Contains excellent material on the theatre of Spain's Golden Age.

A study of the Renaissance theatre of Spain.
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