

COLOR IN SELECTED DRAMAS OF FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

by

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#### FOREWORD

The purpose of this paper will be to discuss the use of color by Federico García Lorca in two of his farces--La zapatera prodigiosa and Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín--and in his three great folk tragedies--Bodas de sangre, Yerma, and La casa de Bernarda Alba.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

In order to understand an author's work, it is first necessary to investigate his life and ascertain the motivating forces behind his writings. Federico Garcíá Lorca was born in Fuentevaqueros, Granada, on June 5, 1898. He was the son of Don Federico Garcíá Rodríguez, a wealthy farmer, and Doña Vincenta Lorca, a schoolteacher. During his happy childhood, his musical and poetic interests were encouraged by his intelligent and cultured mother. Lorca's development was retarded to some extent by a childhood disease. He was four before he walked and three before he could speak well. However, even at the age of two he was learning popular songs. Lorca's capacity to identify with the inner world of women, a marked characteristic of his literary works, perhaps dates from the period of his infirmity when he was constantly surrounded either by his mother or by a beloved family servant.<sup>1</sup> As he grew older, he gained an enthusiasm for constructing miniature theatres, and he delighted the servants by staging imaginary

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<sup>1</sup>Arturo Barea, Lorca: The Poet and His People, trans. Ilse Barea (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), p. ix.

masses complete with sermons and music.

Lorca's development as a poet can be traced back to his childhood. In Granada he learned of the classical cultures and was a prodigious reader of all classical literature. By spending days on end with the gypsies in the caves of Granada, listening to their haunting songs, and watching their dances of abandonment, he saturated himself with their musical heritage and quickly learned to play the guitar and compose poems in the style of the cante jondo. At the urging of his mother he became a skilled pianist. While very young he became a member of a literary society in Granada and in 1917, at the age of nineteen, published his first work, an article in tribute to Zorilla on the centennial of his death. In doing this he followed the well-defined practice for young would-be writers to publish eulogies. After attending the Colegio del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Granada, he began his study of law at the Universidad de Granada. Although not a good student, he did receive his law degree several years later.

In 1919, at the urging of Fernando de los Ríos, Lorca went to Madrid, the intellectual and cultural center of Spain, where he studied and lived at the Residencia de Estudiantes. He remained there until 1928 except for the summers which he spent in Granada. Madrid, which offered Lorca an outlet for

his talents, also provided him contact with the literary men of his day. His unpublished play, El maleficio de la mariposa, was written in 1920. Libro de poemas, his first book of published poetry, appeared in 1921. And, in 1927, he had an exhibition of paintings at a Barcelona gallery. A certain spontaneity in his art could be observed while he was in Madrid. He often recited his poems aloud to his friends, and they passed them along by word of mouth to others. This explains in part why some of his poems remained unpublished for so long. In Madrid, because of his association with such luminaries as the musician Manuel de Falla, the artist Salvador Dali, and the poets Jorge Guillén, Rafael Alberti, Pedro Salinas, Gerardo Diego, and Dámaso Alonso, Lorca became acquainted with many of the new intellectual ideas which were then sweeping across the Castilian plains. In 1929 Lorca sailed for New York. His reason for leaving Spain is not known. He had, however, been suffering from periods of deep depression caused, perhaps by personal problems. Some critics assume that his flight to New York was prompted by a desire to regain emotional and spiritual stability. Once in New York, his interests rapidly centered in the life and rhythms of the inhabitants of Harlem, and from this resulted one of his major poetic works, the powerful and often surrealistic Poeta en Nueva York. A year later he went

to the Institución Hispana in Cuba. Here too he was fascinated by the Negro. Though both the Cuban and the New York Negro shared a common origin, their differing sociological and economic problems made them seem almost alien species.

With the advent of the Second Republic, Lorca returned to Spain, and it was during this period that his great dramatic works were written. In the summer of 1936, against the advice of friends, he insisted on returning to Granada, for as previously stated, it was his practice to spend the summers there. He held no particular political views. Nevertheless, on August 19, 1936, shortly before he was to return to the United States, he was arrested by a group of Loyalist soldiers and taken to a nearby vacant lot. There the bullets of a firing squad cut short the brilliant career of one of the twentieth century's most outstanding poets and dramatists.

Three main aspects of the Spanish lyric tradition reach their zenith in Lorca's poetry: first, the expression of medieval Arabic-Andalusian art of amorous poetry joined with the early popular ballad or romance; second, the culmination of the Renaissance synthesis in Spain of the Greco-Latin poetic art, ably shown in the conceptist poetry of Luis de Góngora; and third, the presentation of that broad body of

Andalusian gypsy art, the cante jondo or deep song.<sup>2</sup>

By the eleventh century the Arabic poets in Andalusia had perfected the short lyric form, the casida. Here the spirit of the desert in the context of Andalusia resulted in tightly wrought imagery. There was an obsession with erotic love counterbalanced by the notion of chastity--in other words a desire-conditioned purity. Metaphors were mainly analogies based on certain hierarchies found in nature.

Alongside the casida, the romance developed from the cantares de gesta. The romances were a spontaneous form of immediate expression, originally oral in form, which had a simple metrical system to follow and appealed to both the masses and the intellectually elite. They are totally Spanish in spirit and content for they embrace whatever touches the spirit of the country.

The poetic baroque, a stylistic synthesis of materials from the Greco-Latin tradition, had appeared principally in the poetry of Góngora, "el poeta de luces y sombras." In his poetry is found a condensation of the lyrical elements of the Renaissance and a duality of feeling and method. "Lorca shows the same tendency, in constructing what seems a purely autonomous

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<sup>2</sup>Edwin Hbnig, García Lorca (Norfolk, Connecticut: James Laughlin, 1963), p. 20.

world, to synthesize the traditional techniques of Spanish expression continuing from the Middle Ages."<sup>3</sup> Lorca treats the phenomenal world with as much plastic sensitivity and technical mastery as did Góngora.<sup>4</sup>

Lorca is the greatest poetic exponent of the cante jondo, the gypsy contribution to Spanish art. There is a marked similarity between the cante jondo, the hieratic melodies of India, and the primitive Christian chants. The cante jondo --a piercing, unusual, almost orgasmic lament--is a composite expression of the sacred and pagan experiences of ancient peoples. There is always a repetition of certain key phrases. An outgrowth of the cante are the saetas which are sung in Holy Week processions throughout Spain. The gypsy ballads are heavy with the emotions and odors of blood and death; they are the tragic outpourings of an outcast people.

Though influenced greatly by the dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age, by the often unknown composers of the Spanish romances, and by his own Spanish heritage, Lorca was also somewhat indebted to contemporary poets, particularly to the Machado brothers and to Juan Ramón Jiménez. Antonio Machado

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

continued the traditional exaltation of the diminutive, anecdotal, and ironic style of Andalusia. His poetry is a glorification of the elements of nature. His brother, Manuel Machado, adapted the folk songs of Andalusia to his poetry. By using color, Jiménez combined the tones of the folk song with a visual experience. All of these traits were incorporated by Lorca into his dramatic and poetic work.<sup>5</sup>

In all Lorquian drama, whether it be the short farces or the full-length comedias, certain subjects are recurrent: honor, frustration, the defeat of innocence, unconsummated love or marriage, and death are all favorite Lorquian themes. There is often quick transition from stark realism to poetic lyricism and/or surrealism. Musical and folklorical elements abound. Imagery plays an important role, with certain images appearing frequently. The bull, the moon, and the horse are common ones and usually announce the approach of death, the letting of blood, or the fulfillment of a tragic destiny. An atmosphere permeated by sadness provides an excellent background for death and the flowing blood which often accompanies it.

Lorca employs color and color symbolism in his theatre to reinforce his themes, to enhance the emotion of his characters,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-46.

and to place his images in a visual context. He sometimes does so in obvious ways: the green of young wheat blades denotes fertility; the white of orange blossoms reflects the warm happiness of an Andalusian summer. But it is often necessary to delve deeper in order to understand some of the symbolism of Lorquian color. Not until one is well into La casa de Bernarda Alba does one understand the significance of the color white, which represents the barrenness and futility of this family of wretched women.

It is, then, the use of color by Lorca which I will examine further in the following chapters. Because, by its very nature, the paper must be one of limited scope, I shall make no attempt to discuss all of Lorca's dramatic works. I have chosen, therefore, to limit my investigation to five plays which are typical of his total theatrical productivity: two farces, written before Lorca had developed his full prowess as a dramatist, and the later, justifiably famous folk trilogy, upon which is based his reputation as one of the greatest twentieth-century European dramatists.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FARCES

In the spectrum of Lorquian drama, the earliest in time and the least complex in plot and dramatic technique are his farces. Yet, had they not been written, his later works might never have been acclaimed masterpieces by critics and audiences throughout the western world. The elements which first appear in such farces as La zapatera prodigiosa and Amor de Don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín reappear in a more developed and sophisticated form in the tragic trilogy of Bodas de sangre, Yerma, and La casa de Bernarda Alba. Indeed the farces form the framework upon which the latter is constructed. The sensuous love songs of Belisa which so inflame the elderly Don Perlimplin and the degrading little ditties chanted by the townspeople in order to defame and destroy the reputation of the shoemaker's wife are expanded to play significant roles in Bodas de sangre and Yerma. As Lorca progresses from farce to tragedy, folklore gains in stature. Snatches of it can be found in the farces--the shoemaker's superstition of the spinning chair, the emerald dagger with which Don Perlimplín kills himself, the blackbirds

which are interpreted as bad omens. In the tragedies folklore is vital. Marriage customs make the wedding in Bodas de sangre a mockery; in desperation Yerma seeks succor from ancient pagan rites which only serve to intensify the futility of her longing for a child. The woodcutters in Bodas de sangre, which function as a Greek chorus, are presaged in the Duendes of Don Perlimplín.

In Lorca's first farce, La zapatera prodigiosa, the protagonists have no proper names. This tendency away from individuality and towards universality culminates in Bodas de sangre where only one of the characters, Leonardo, has a Christian name. The tragedy is heightened when it can be extended to all mankind rather than to a select group of distinct personalities. Emotional conflict, the basis for the dramatic effect in the folk trilogy, is centered in the female characters. Lorca begins to perfect this dramatic technique in his farces. The shoemaker's wife in La zapatera prodigiosa shares the conflict with her husband, but it is the effect on her which is truly significant. And it is Belisa, not Don Perlimplín, who experiences the major emotional upheaval.

By reading his complete dramatic works chronologically, one can observe Lorca maturing and gaining in confidence as

he progresses from farces to tragedies. This is clearly seen in his usage of color. Lorquian theatre is replete with color, but a lesser symbolic significance is attached to its appearance in the farces. Perhaps because Lorca had not yet reached his full potential as a writer, he was unwilling to experiment in the farces with anything which might draw attention away from the all important comic elements. But as he became more sure of his ability to successfully produce a total dramatic effect, he lavishly employed color in his later works.

The first farce I want to consider is Lorca's earliest, La zapatera prodigiosa. The original version was produced in Madrid on December 24, 1930.<sup>1</sup> It carries the subtitled "Farsa violenta en dos actos y un prólogo," but the violence is not in the action; rather it is in the conflict between the worlds and emotions of the shoemaker and his wife. The theme is an old one--a young wife married to an old husband--embellished with a surface exploration of the bond between a woman and a child. The conflict in the drama is one between fantasy and reality. The young wife, who lives in fantasy, does not

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lima, The Theatre of Garcia Lorca (New York: Las Americas Publishing Company, 1963), p. 120. The version with which we are familiar today was presented on November 30, 1933, in Buenos Aires.

realize and will not accept the consequences which her attitudes and actions have on the community in which she lives. The shoemaker, on the other hand, is painfully aware of the reality of the situation in which the careless behavior of his wife has placed him.

The first act is set in the shoemaker's house. His wife, accompanied by the angry shouts and insults of those outside, enters. She pauses in the doorway to hurl back their biting comments and then breaks into tears of self-pity at being married to such an old man. She ceases crying when the neighbor's child arrives, bringing a pair of shoes to be repaired. With him she is tender and loving until, in his innocence, he blurts out what she cannot accept--that she will never have any children of her own. As the child flees from her in order to escape her anger which this insult has caused, the shoemaker appears and the two principal characters confront each other. The contrast in their clothing--she wears a bright green dress, and he a velvet suit--serves to emphasize the contrast in their personalities. She taunts him by referring to the many suitors she has had. He testily responds. The level of the argument rises until the shoemaker begs his wife to be calm before the neighbors hear them. She flounces from the room, leaving him to ponder his lamentable situation.

His meditations are interrupted by the arrival of a neighbor, one of his wife's most antagonistic foes. He pours out his troubles to her and also gives her a discount on some shoe repair work. Unknown to them, his wife has been listening to their conversation. Like an avenging fury, she charges into the room. The neighbor flees and the unfortunate shoemaker is left to try in vain to convince his wife that she should change her behavior. She ignores his counsel and leaves, declaring that she will cook him no dinner that night.

At this point the imposing figure of El Alcalde appears, full of pompous advice on how to handle wives--he has had four--and ready to admire the shoemaker's wife when she returns to flirt with him. The mayor exits, and the shoemaker prepares to hear whatever new torment his wife may devise for him. Knowing full well that it is a superstition of her husband's, she twirls a chair, which causes him no end of mental agony. A street band catches her attention, and she puts aside the chair. The shoemaker runs from the room as his wife dances around it, recalling meetings with her former suitors.

The music stops; Don Mirlo appears at the window. Like El Alcalde, Don Mirlo is one of the many men in the village who appreciate the young girl's charms--she is only eighteen and the most beautiful girl in town. She listens to his

amorous speeches until he commits a faux pas and sneezes on her neck. The vacancy at the window caused by his sudden departure is soon filled by another suitor who pleads his cause. She is surprised to learn that her excessive friendliness and flirtations can be interpreted as wantonness. But it is just such conduct that has caused the shoemaker pain, for he knows that scandal is already besmirching her name.

The shoemaker finally abandons his wife. He can no longer bear the burden of his marriage. The young wife knows nothing until she calls her husband to dinner, the dinner she had sworn not to prepare. It is not the shoemaker who responds to her calls; rather it is the child who enters and informs her of the action which her husband has taken. Her reactions range from anger and self-pity to a real sense of loss. Too late, she realizes that she did love her husband.

As the second act opens, the shoemaker's shop has become a tavern, operated by the deserted wife. It soon becomes obvious that the men who frequent her establishment come there not for refreshments but to be near the lovely proprietress. Needless to say, the Zapatera enjoys even less prestige in the eyes of her fellow townspeople. Throughout the second act the child emerges as the only true friend of the shoemaker's wife. And it is only to him that she shows any tenderness.

It is ironic that she accepts none of her suitors and remains loyal to her husband even when public opinion is completely against her.

The true action begins with the entrance of a travelling puppeteer who is the shoemaker in disguise. He has returned to his village to further shame his wife by presenting her story with puppets. The villagers crowd into the tavern to see the show. The Zapatera alternates between bouts of condemnation for the wicked wife in the play and fits of tears for her missing husband. But the performance is interrupted when a woman accuses the Zapatera of being the cause of a knife duel now taking place in the street. The crowd rushes outside, leaving the two principals to face each other. An argument ensues until the shoemaker becomes convinced that his wife has remained loyal to him. The child brings news that the townspeople are coming to eject the Zapatera from their midst. These ominous tidings move the shoemaker's wife to show concern for the strange man in her tavern. The shoemaker thereupon reveals his true identity and the farce is complete. The shrewish young wife berates him for having deceived her, and he resigns himself to his former situation. He must accept his wife's abuse if he is to receive her love.

Color has two main purposes in La zapatera prodigiosa.

It serves to magnify the contrast between the shoemaker and his wife and the worlds in which they live, and it symbolically augments the total effect of the drama. The violent colors in which the Zapatera dresses herself, the multicolored neighbors who enter and leave at moments of crisis, the bright yellow butterfly about which she sings, all illustrate the intensity and fantasy of her world. These contrast with the drab and neutral colors associated with the shoemaker and his prosaic world.

It is, however, the other function of color which is most fascinating to the reader of this drama; indeed to the reader of any Lorquian drama. Yellow is one of the shades which Lorca uses descriptively to enrich his farce. The Zapatera is as proud of her blond hair as she is of her other attributes. She tells the child of the beautiful golden rings that the shoemaker brought when he was courting her. They shone like four suns. But yellow is also a symbol of fleeting happiness. The child chases a butterfly, a beautiful yellow butterfly, into the shoemaker's shop. She attempts to catch it with a hat just as she is trying to grasp happiness.

Mariposa del aire  
qué hermosa eres,

mariposa del aire  
 dorada y verde.  
 Luz de candil,  
 mariposa del aire,  
 ¡quédate ahí, ahí, ahí . . .<sup>2</sup>

This elusive butterfly is a unifying factor in Lorca's use of color. As the butterfly is variegated with different hues, so is what it stands for endowed with nuances of meaning. The butterfly has beautiful splashes of color on its wings, the red ones signifying the passion that surges through the Zapatera. "Es amarilla, con pintas azules y rojas . . ."<sup>3</sup> However, the first reference to red as passion is found at the beginning of act one. The afternoon light is orange, indicating an atmosphere of latent intensity. The Zapatera enters in a rage, her raven hair adorned with two large red roses. In the second act the association between red and passion is reinforced. The Zapatera wears a flaming red dress as she goes about the business of violently rejecting the suitors that frequent her tavern. The burning ire of the shoemaker against his wife's former actions is reflected in the set of his puppet show, for its walls are red ochre.

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<sup>2</sup>Federico García Lorca, La zapatera prodigiosa in Obras Completas, Vol. III, 5th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1946), I, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

The uneventfulness of the shoemaker's world is seen in his clothes. In the first act his suit is a short black velvet one with only a small red tie to enliven it--a mirror of his existence before he married his incendiary mate. "El venía con un traje negro entallado, corbata roja de seda buenisima . . ." <sup>4</sup> Even the Zapatera comments on the uniqueness of his tie. Red is, of course, used descriptively. The Zapatera digs into her red snuff box with pleasure, and the heels of her imaginary suitor are embellished with copper spurs that shine red in the sun.

Blue has no symbolic significance in this farce but appears three times to heighten the visual context of the work. In contrast to the dullness of her husband's dress, the Zapatera's imaginary suitor has thrown across his shoulder a beautiful cape with a marvelous blue wool collar. The elegant dark blue suit of the alcalde is appropriate to his position. And the elusive butterfly has patches of blue as well as red on its wings.

Green, as it does in Lorca's other works, carries a dual meaning. It is the symbol of youth and fertility. The vital Zapatera is dressed in green throughout the first act. But

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., II, p. 152.

the futility of her fruitfulness is echoed in the song the child sings to the butterfly.

No te quieres parar,  
pararte no quieres.  
Mariposa del aire  
dorada y verde.  
Luz de candil,  
mariposa del aire,  
¡quédate ahí, ahí, ahí! . . .  
¡Quédate ahí!  
Mariposa, ¿estás ahí?<sup>5</sup>

The above mentioned butterfly, the symbol of the Zapatera's happiness, is described as being golden and green. It refuses to stay its flight and thus bears away with it all of the Zapatera's youthful hopes. The remaining reference to green occurs in the puppet show. The shoemaker is setting the scene for his production and describes the atmosphere.

Un lunes por la mañana  
a eso de las once y media,  
cuando el sol deja sin sombra  
los juncos y madre selvas,  
cuando alegremente bailan  
brisa y tomillo en la sierra  
y van cayendo las verdes  
hojas de las madroñeras,  
regaba sus alhelíes  
la arisca talabartera.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., I, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., II, p. 169.

Once again the color green helps to augment the feeling of ripeness and life.

White often plays an important role in Lorca's plays. In this, his first work, it has already begun to signify sterility and hopelessness. The pedestrian quality of the shoemaker's life is evident early in the first act. The walls of his home and workshop are completely white, as are the streets of his village, the village which is so hostile to his wife. It is she who now disturbs this death-like aura which had surrounded him even before his marriage. She remembers her first meeting with him. He rode a white horse, the harbinger of the barrenness that accompanied him.

"Cuando le veía venir montado en su jaca blanca . . ." <sup>7</sup>

Its significance is emphasized when she recalls her abandonment by her husband. ". . . El paró su caballo y la cola del caballo era blanca y tan larga que llegaba al agua del arroyo." <sup>8</sup> Since white is the color of unfulfilled potential, the Zapatera's position is made more poignant. Her only happiness in the early part of the farce stems from her encounters with her suitors. As she whirls to the music of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

a street band, she enacts a fanciful scene with Emiliano, one of the men of her fantasy. ". . . mañana que traigas la jaca blanca, la que a mí me gusta."<sup>9</sup> In asking for a white horse she restricts herself to a fantasy world. She will receive no fulfillment from the man who in reality rode into her life on a white mount.

Black are the Zapatera's flashing eyes, and black is the prancing steed of one of her suitors. Except for these cases, black and its related shades serve as conveyors of the gloom and oppression, which drain the Zapatera's vitality. The barren white walls of the shoemaker's home are broken not by windows that let in the light and gaiety of the village, but by windows and a door of total grey. They are clouds of oppression which force the young wife to manufacture her own excitement. Don Mirlo, one of her scandalous diversions, dresses entirely in black to complement his name, Mr. Black-bird. In trying to gain the favor of the Zapatera, he has only a dampening effect on her bubbling spirit. The shoemaker himself dressed in black the first time he met his wife, another clue to the conflict that was to arise. The negative connotations of black are reinforced by the shoemaker's

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., I, p. 130.

own words when he equates it with sinfulness. "Vino de uvas negras como el alma de algunas mujeres que yo conozco."<sup>10</sup>

The impact of color in La zapatera prodigiosa is not as strong as it is in other Lorquian works, perhaps, because it is one of the very first in which he tried to emphasize his theme by the use of colors. As one progresses to a later farce, Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín, it can be seen that Lorca's facility with color has developed with time and experience.

Don Perlimplín was first produced in Madrid on April 5, 1933. It is similar to La zapatera prodigiosa in that the theme is again the problem of an old husband married to a young wife, and both husbands resign themselves to their respective situations. But there the similarities stop. In Don Perlimplín physical and narcissistic love are treated in contrast to the romantic love of the earlier farce. Unselfishness on the part of the husband plays a role in this work, which is in direct contrast to selfishness exhibited by both partners in La zapatera prodigiosa.

This play opens with a prologue in which the characters are introduced and the stage is set for the action which is to

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., II, p. 164.

follow. Don Perlimplín, a bachelor in his fifties, and his trusted housekeeper, Marcolfa, are engaged in a conversation. She is grieved that her master has remained unmarried and has decided that he must marry Belisa, the beautiful young girl who lives next door. Marcolfa presents such an enticing picture of the enchantments of married life that Perlimplín declares himself to Belisa. Before he realizes what has happened to his sedentary life, Perlimplín has concluded the arrangements for his marriage with Belisa's mother. The date is set; and as the prologue closes, Perlimplín asks himself, "¿Y qué es esto que me pasa? ¿Qué es esto?"<sup>11</sup>

The first scene of the only act opens on Perlimplín's wedding night as he and his new bride prepare for bed. He confesses to Belisa that he married her without really loving her but that now he has come to understand the meaning of love. From this point Perlimplín is obviously deeply enamored of his wife. Belisa has heard five whistles from outside, signals from her five lovers who are waiting to visit her that night. The couple retires and two pixies mercifully pull a grey curtain across the stage to hide the action from

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<sup>11</sup>Federico García Lorca, Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín en Obras Completas, Vol I, 7th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1952), prólogo, p. 150.

the audience. When the curtains are opened again in the morning, it is obvious that Perlimplín has lost his honor. In earlier versions of the farce Perlimplín awakens with two large horns on his head--a visual testimony that he is now a cuckold.<sup>12</sup> Perlimplín notices that the doors leading to the room's five balconies are open, that a ladder descends from each balcony to the ground, and that at the foot of each ladder lies a hat left by one of Belisa's lovers. He queries his wife, but she, fatigued by her nocturnal activity, goes back to sleep. As the first scene closes, Perlimplín is well aware of his wife's infidelity and rejection of him.

The second scene opens with Marcolfa crying. She regrets that she has caused the situation which has so dishonored her beloved master. She tells him of the five men who visited his wife and is surprised to learn that he not only knows about them but seems relatively undisturbed. He explains that he understands Belisa--she cannot love him because she can only love herself. Until Belisa ceases to love her own person and gains a giving soul, Perlimplín cannot hope to win her as his true wife.

At this point in the play Perlimplín's unselfish desire to help Belisa become a complete person is evident. The

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., i, p. 161, note 1.

remainder of the action is a direct result of his plan to give Belisa a soul and thus enable her to love.

The second scene continues with Perlimplín concealed from Belisa. She enters and expresses concern over a new but unknown lover who has been writing her letters. Her husband reveals himself and teases her with a note addressed to her. After he gives it to her, she tells him all about her new lover and her desire to ascertain his identity. Perlimplín assumes the role of friend rather than husband and promises to help, for he says he is well acquainted with the mysterious young man who writes so ardently of his passion for Belisa. The scene closes as he leaves, promising Belisa that, in time, all shall be resolved.

The third and final scene is the culmination of Perlimplín's plot to teach Belisa to love another as she loves herself. Marcolfa tells the girl that her lover will be in the garden at a certain time. Belisa arrives at the appointed hour. A figure of a man, her lover, wrapped in a flowing red cape crosses the stage. As soon as the muffled figure disappears, Don Perlimplín enters. Belisa has begun to feel the pangs of real love for another person. Her husband is cognizant of these stirrings within her breast. For Perlimplín this is a triumphant moment--Belisa has begun to emerge as a

complete woman. Perlimplín rushes from the garden, vowing to kill Belisa's lover so that his love will be hers forever. Belisa is confused and frightened by this apparent change of attitude by Perlimplín and shouts that she will kill him before she will allow him to murder her lover. Soon the swathed figure in the red cape returns, clutching an emerald dagger stuck in his heart. He falls, and Belisa sees that it is Perlimplín who is mortally wounded. Slowly she realizes that her husband has sacrificed himself so that she might come to a true understanding of love. At the moment of his death, Belisa belongs entirely to Perlimplín. It was he that had written the passionate letters; it was he who wore the red cape and came to meet her in the garden; and it was he she came to love.

Color in Don Perlimplín is employed sparingly in a purely descriptive sense to bind the audience more closely to the action on stage. Lorca augments the feeling of darkness and night in the first scene by having the pixies pull a heavy grey curtain to hide the action from view. The little creatures conceal themselves in dark blue cowls after their duty is completed to further enhance the haziness of the scene. The second scene contains Belisa's picture of her mysterious lover. He must be a vital youth--an image of manhood for the

viewers of the drama. The reflection of Perlimplín as an old man can be seen in the description of his house. All his furniture is black, rather than the bright, gay colors of youth.

It is, however, color used as symbols that is the significant factor in this farce. Except for one instance in which black is used as a symbol of future catastrophe--a flock of black paper birds, an omen of bad luck, flies across the stage as the prologue comes to an end--Lorca restricts himself entirely to three important colors--white, red, and green. Focusing on these three colors alone heightens the total effect of the work.

Except for a single citation to Don Perlimplín, white is used throughout this farce in association with Belisa. The wig which Perlimplín wears in the first act is white--a reference to his age as well as to the style of the day. Marcolfa describes Belisa to her master. "Esa es la mujer de mi señor: la blanca Belisa."<sup>13</sup> Here white is used by the servant as a synonym for beauty. A white complexion belongs only to a member of the upper class who has the leisure time to indulge herself in beauty ointments and who

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., prólogo, p. 144.

has no necessity of working under the burning rays of the sun. Belisa's mother describes her daughter as a white lily. She is as marmoreal as this flower of death in her inability to truly love her husband. When Perlimplín learns, on the morning after his marriage, that he has become a cuckold, the cold white light of dawn streams in upon him. Belisa has made a mockery of their marriage, and it is as sterile as these rays of light. The letter written by the unknown lover contains the following remark: "Belisa, no es tu alma lo que yo deseo, ¡sino tu blanco y mórbido cuerpo estremecido!"<sup>14</sup> She possesses no soul, only a delicately molded alabaster body.

In this farce red is undeniably symbolic of blood and tragedy. Perlimplín impersonates a young and virile lover --a lover who dresses in a flowing red cape. Again and again the cape is mentioned. Long before the final curtain, the audience is aware that blood will flow and that it will rush forth from Perlimplín's veins to spread its crimson stain on the already red cloak. By his suicide Perlimplín sacrifices himself for Belisa. He loses his life, but she gains a soul. In the final moment before his death, he rejoices in

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., ii, p. 173.

the knowledge that his love is now fully reciprocated.

Hope motivated Perlimplín's self immolation--the hope that it would change the course of Belisa's life. Green is the visual expression of hope. The walls of Perlimplín's house are green; even in the midst of his dishonor he lives with hope. When the play opens, he is dressed in green, symbolizing his hopes for his marriage and his desire to regain his lost youth. Even his dagger is ablaze with emeralds, the jewels of hope. He succumbs with words of hope on his lips. "Perlimplín me mató . . . ¡Ah, don Perlimplín! Viejo verde, monigote sin fuerza, tú no podías gozar el cuerpo de Belisa . . ." <sup>15</sup> Perlimplín, the "viejo verde," the rejuvenated old man, the disguised young lover, has been Belisa's salvation.

If one compares Lorca's employment of color in these two farces, La zapatera prodigiosa and Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín, with that in the three tragedies which comprise the folk trilogy, he senses the lack of depth in the farces. But it is necessary for the reader to look at these two early works in the overall context of Lorca's theatre as a whole. It is only then that one can begin to

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., iii, p. 185.

appreciate this dramatist's gift of using color to strengthen his works.

### CHAPTER III

#### BODAS DE SANGRE

Bodas de sangre, the first of Lorca's folk dramas, was written and produced in Madrid in 1933. Dominated by violence and tragedy, it is a tale concerned with the tangled and intermingled passions and loves of country people who are symbolic of the Spanish peasantry of both yesterday and today. In order to extend this symbolism further, all of the characters except one are given such general names as Novio (groom), Madre (mother), and Mujer (wife). Because of a blood feud between two families, a widow is left with only one son. He, the Novio, is in love with a young woman, the Novia, who lives in the hills with her father. The mother is suspicious of the prospective bride because she had been previously engaged to Leonardo. It was Leonardo's family that was responsible for the death of the Madre's husband and other sons. Now, however, Leonardo is married to the Novia's cousin, and the mother's suspicions hardly seem justifiable.

The first act sets the background for the tragedy which is to follow. The groom and his mother travel to the home of

the bride and her father in order to make arrangements for the wedding. The Novia receives them in an agitated state. This scene is then paralleled by another in which Leonardo becomes quite nervous when he learns of the approaching marriage of his wife's cousin.

The feeling of disaster is intensified, and in the second act the stage is set for the ultimate tragedy. It opens on the morning of the wedding day at the Novia's house. As she struggles to constrain her conflicting emotions, Leonardo enters. A bitter scene ensues between the two. The bride is torn by her duty to marry the groom and by her love for Leonardo. The passion which had once united them, only to become banked with Leonardo's marriage, now flames anew. Suddenly the action changes and we observe the happiness shared by those who have come from all parts of the district to take part in the wedding festivities. But this happiness is only momentary. Act two closes with the two families and their friends separating into two groups once again. The Novio leaves to pursue and take vengeance upon Leonardo and the Novia, who have fled together on Leonardo's white stallion.

In act three the tragedy is culminated. Both Leonardo and the groom die a bloody but poetic death. The embittered

mother is left completely alone, knowing that her fields will lie fallow forever because there will never be a son or grandson to cultivate them. The Novia must endure a meaningless, fruitless existence always aware that she caused the death of two men.

Lorca effectively used color in Bodas de sangre in order to create visual experience through colorful descriptions, and to depict symbols which ultimately lead to the tragic destinies of the protagonists.

Of all the hues he employed, Lorca attached the least symbolic meaning to yellow and its related shades. Yellow and gold are mentioned only a few times during the drama. In four of these instances the mention of color is solely for descriptive reasons. The walls of the mother-of-the-groom's house are yellow; the groom's watch chain is gold; the tablelands surrounding the bride's home are tan; and the lace used to tie on the wedding crown of orange blossoms is gold. The repetitious song of the wedding guests contains two other incidences.

El novio  
parece la flor del oro.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Federico García Lorca, Bodas de sangre in Obras Completas, Vol. I, 9th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1961), II, i, p. 68, p. 70.

The bridegroom is described as a golden flower, a poetic way of saying that he is a virile young man of great value who is ready to take a wife.

Red is used symbolically more often than yellow, and it too serves to make the scenes of Lorca's play an exciting adventure in sight. One of the gifts the groom gives to his prospective bride is a pair of reddish-bronze earrings. Rosey shades are used for the walls in Leonardo's house, the curtains in the bride's home, the flowers covering a cross. The guests' wedding song mentions garnet sashes. Copperware gleams on the walls of Leonardo's house. Red flowers abound.

When used symbolically, red refers to the inevitable tragedy and blood letting. Leonardo describes himself as an hombre de sangre. He realizes that he cannot avoid the tragic fate which awaits him; a violent death is his destiny. The father of the bride, miserable at his daughter's folly, rages that Leonardo is a man of mala sangre--blood which has already been tainted by the deaths of the Novio's father and brothers, blood which will eventually consume not only Leonardo himself but also those who come in contact with him.

In two of the lyrical sections of the work, the lullaby sung to Leonardo's child by his wife and mother-in-law and the songs of the guests at the wedding celebration, are

several references to flowing blood. Lorca habitually used flowing blood to predict or accompany death; Bodas de sangre is no exception.

Las patas heridas  
 las crines heladas,  
 dentro de los ojos  
 un puñal de plata.  
 Bajaban al río.  
 ¡Ay, como bajaban!  
 La sangre corría  
 más fuerte que el agua.<sup>2</sup>

These above references to blood found in the lullaby are twice repeated. Blood in this context leaves no doubt that even this innocent child will not be spared by impending fate. Leonardo has a magnificent white stallion and is well-known for his horsemanship. The bleeding horse in the lullaby is thus symbolic of the consequences which will result from Leonardo's abduction of the Novia.

Direct references are made several times during the wedding preparation to the possible results of infidelity on the part of the bride.

Porque llega tu boda  
 recogete las faldas  
 y bajo el ala del novio

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, ii, pp. 36-37, p. 44.

nunca salgas de tu casa.  
 Porque el novio es un palomo  
 con todo el pecho de brasa  
 y espera el campo el rumor  
 de la sangre derramada.<sup>3</sup>

Ironic are these words of the servant as she goes about her work, for they are more true than anyone suspects. The fields do indeed await the murmur of flowing blood.

The moon as a harbinger of imminent death speaks with anticipation of the blood that is to be let.

Pues esta noche tendrán  
 mis mejillas roja sangre . . .<sup>4</sup>

This mention of blood once again refers to and reinforces the inevitability of the tragedy as do the words of the woodcutters, whom Lorca employs in the manner of a Greek chorus. They speak of the power of blood over men. "Se estaban engañado uno a otro y al fin la sangre pudo más . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Red appears throughout the last scene. Two small girls sit winding a skein of red wool.

Madeja, madeja,  
 ¡qué quieres hacer? . . .

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., II, ii, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

Madeja, madeja,  
¿qué quieres cantar? . . .

Madeja, madeja,  
¿qué quieres decir?<sup>6</sup>

The bloody thread of fate has woven its tragic cloth. Nothing remains for it to do except to tell of two bodies wrapped in shrouds which now lie stiff and cold.

Black, the color of mourning, is used in this Lorquian work with little symbolic significance in most places: the children are black from playing in the sun, the river is black water at night, the groom and his mother both wear black when they arrange the wedding--the best clothes they had. Interesting is the fact that the bride was married in a black dress, her best, but the groom felt his black shoes not gay enough for a wedding. However, black does assume some meaning in the third act.

No se despierte un pájaro y la brisa,  
recogiendo en su falda los gemidos,  
huya con ellos por las negras copas  
o los entierre por el blando limo.<sup>7</sup>

Even the treetops mourn the tragedy taking place below them.  
The once pure sand also turns black as its grains are

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., ii, pp. 108-109.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., i, p. 97.

saturated with the congealed blood of the dead. "Sobre la flor del oro, sucia arena."<sup>8</sup> In this intense black is the color of finality; the bridegroom, the golden flower, is covered with dirty sand.

Closely connected with black, but more subtle, are Lorca's references to greys and shadows. They serve to chill the atmosphere and create a feeling of doom. The lace of the bride's mantilla, a dark wind; the grey valleys in the lullaby; shadowed cactus outside the bride's house; the groom's face: all hint of the pall of death.

A more obvious connection with death is blue. Lorca skillfully uses blue light with each appearance of the moon to intensify the growing disaster. The moon first appears with a blue splendor surrounding him. The blue light becomes more intense during his second appearance and seems extremely strong and frigid during his third and final appearance. The moon serves as a precursor of death. It is, however, an obvious messenger as it speaks and makes its purpose clear.

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

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., ii, p. 112.

para que esta noche tengan  
 mis mejillas dulce sangre,  
 y los juncos agrupados  
 en los anchos pies del aire.<sup>9</sup>

The coldness of death is hinted at by the other incidences of blue. The Novia's house is ice-blue; blue jars adorn the inside; blue branches are Leonardo's veins. In the final scene the two children who wind the red wool are dressed in dark blue and sing of blue mountains, once again suggesting the finality and completeness of the tragic happenings.

Lorca used the color green to symbolize two distinct, and in the case of Bodas de sangre, opposing concepts: fertility, both of the race and of the soil, and fate. Fertility is shown by the mother's frequent mention of growing things, things pertaining to the land, such as young wheat blades with which she equates her son. "Benditos sean los trigos . . ." <sup>10</sup> But it is most directly considered in the wedding song sung before the wedding.

Que despierte  
 con el ramo verde  
 del laurel florido.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., i, pp. 96-97.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., ii, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., II, i, p. 60, p. 66.

Traditionally a song is sung to the bride on the morning of her wedding. It is a wish for a happy and fruitful marriage and here is futilely repeated for the two lovers in the last act.

¡Ay triste muerte!  
 ¡Deja para el amor la rama verde!

¡Ay muerte mala!  
 ¡Deja para el amor la verde rama!<sup>12</sup>

Green symbolizing fate plays a very important part in this work. The first appearance is the green water of the river in the lullaby. It stands for the flowing destiny which waits to receive the main characters.

¿Quién dirá, mi niño,  
 lo que tiene el agua,  
 con su larga cola  
 por su verde sala?<sup>13</sup>

But it is in the third act that green as the color of fate truly comes into being.

¡Ay luna que sales!  
 Luna de las hojas grandes . . .

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., I, ii, p. 36.

¡Ay luna sola!  
 ¡Luna de las verdes hojas!<sup>14</sup>

The fact that green as fate surrounds the white moon in this instance demonstrates clearly the tragedy awaiting the two young men. Death's messenger, the moon, hides among the green leaves. When death itself appears, she comes in the form of an old beggar woman dressed completely in green. Finally the tragic fate is culminated, and the woodcutters lament the death found among the green leaves.

¡Ay muerte que sales!  
 Muerte de las hojas grandes.<sup>15</sup>

Interrelated with green is the color white as the symbol of death. However, I want to investigate its other uses first. Of course, Lorca used white to describe certain things--the walls in the bride's house, her father's hair, her petticoats and bodice, the light at midday.

The color white in different contexts symbolizes various things. One of the most obvious of these is the purity associated with a bride. In Bodas de sangre this use becomes increasingly ironic as the action progresses. The wedding

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

song holds these references:

Que despierte  
con el largo pelo,  
camisa de nieve . . .<sup>16</sup>

La novia, la blanca novia,  
hoy doncella,  
mañana señora.<sup>17</sup>

Al salir de tu casa,  
blanca doncella,  
acuérdate que sales  
como una estrella . . .<sup>18</sup>

In accord with the purity of the bride, white is found as a symbol of wedded bliss. This use is also ironic; happiness is not to be part of this ill-fated marriage. Lorca increases the irony by referring fourteen times to the orange-blossom crown the groom gave to the bride. Examples are the conversation between the bride and her servant, "¿Por qué preguntas si trajeron el azahar?";<sup>19</sup> the stage directions, ". . . Sobre el peinado de visera lleva la corona de azahar."<sup>20</sup> the wedding song,

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., II, 1, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

La novia  
 se ha puesto su blanca corona  
 y el novio  
 se la prende con lazos de oro.<sup>21</sup>

the groom's question at the wedding celebration, "¿Te gustó el azahar?"<sup>22</sup>

White is also the color of virility and masculinity. Leonardo's stallion is white, thus showing the physical power of both the animal and his master. More important, however, white, when referring to the horse, is a representation herein of death. It first appears in the lullaby,

¡Ay caballo grande,  
 que no quiso el agua!  
 ¡Ay dolor de nieve  
 caballo de alba!<sup>23</sup>

and then becomes an integral part of the action by being the cause of an argument between Leonardo and his wife. It next appears, almost supernaturally, at the bride's window just as she learns that her servant has seen Leonardo and his horse there before. That this horse will be the vehicle of death becomes more evident when it carries Leonardo to the wedding

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., ii, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., I, ii, p. 37.

before the arrival of the other guests in order that he may see the bride alone. Indeed, it is this white horse that speeds the lovers to their fate in the forest.

Shrouds cover the bodies of the two slain men; they are white. A silvery dagger rests between the eyes of a horse in a lullaby. Steely white knives are mentioned throughout to intensify the tragic atmosphere. Splinters of light whiten the forest in which the lovers hide. In these ways, too, white symbolizes all-powerful death.

Without the color symbolism in Bodas de sangre, Lorca's masterpiece would have been just another play about an unfaithful bride and a vengeful groom. Each carefully chosen reference to a color added to the development of the tragedy until in the end nothing remained but a lonely old woman living in a hut on barren land and a wretched girl facing life with a heavy conscience.

## CHAPTER IV

### YERMA

The year 1934 saw the birth of Yerma, the second of Lorca's great trilogy of folk tragedies. It differs from Bodas de sangre in that the entire tragedy is centered around and is concentrated upon one woman, Yerma. She is frustrated by her inability to conceive a child with her impotent husband, Juan. Honor demands that she remain faithful to him, but her yearnings for motherhood tempt her to leave him for her childhood sweetheart, Victor. The latter is a virile young male who could and would fill the barren void within her, and would, therefore, provide purpose and meaning to her life.

An air of tragedy is evident in the scene. In a dream Yerma sees a shepherd who leads a child dressed in white across the stage in front of her. The shepherd is, of course, Victor, the sweetheart of her youth. Yerma awakes, and the action begins. The first few words exchanged between Juan and Yerma illustrate the ever-increasing rift in their marriage. Yerma is becoming obsessed with her need for a child. Juan, on the other hand, cannot feel sympathy for her

since he not only has no desire for a child but is incapable of giving her one. Later the emptiness of Yerma's life is starkly emphasized as she talks to her friend María, who has just learned that she is with child. Victor then appears, and with a few poignant words their former feelings for each other are revived. The desperate conflict within Yerma is now apparent.

Of major importance to the first act and the drama as a whole is a scene between Yerma and an old peasant woman. This old crone, the mujer pagana, is the representation of fertility in the drama, and is supposedly possessed of magical and supernatural powers. Yerma has now been married for three childless years. The old pagan woman tells Yerma that her desires can never be fulfilled through the vicarious experience of others. The harpy strongly denounces Juan for his impotency and hints that there may be other means for Yerma to realize her dreams.

The second act develops the implications presented in the first. Juan has brought his two spinster sisters to his house in order that they may keep Yerma constantly under surveillance. He suspects that there may be something between Victor and Yerma even though neither of them has crossed the bounds of propriety. Juan is also fearful that his reputation

may be blemished by the wagging tongues of the townspeople. What can they be saying about him, a man whose wife often leaves her house as if in search of something. Indeed the townspeople are aware of the problems within Juan's house. This is shown by the conversation and songs of the washer-women around the fountain. The extent to which Yerma's obsession has grown is also shown by a scene in this act in which María visits with her child in the home of Yerma. She confesses that she feels uneasy about coming here because of Yerma's obvious, pathetic envy. The act ends with Juan, who knows of Yerma's problem but cannot respond to it, forbidding Yerma to leave the house because he believes that she does so to dishonor him. However, ignoring his command, she leaves and seeks supernatural help in having a child.

In the third act Yerma learns from a conjurer that women have born children with aid from magical powers. Juan finds and accuses her of dishonoring him. Yerma defies him to find any evidence that she has acted with dishonor. When she answers his inquiry with the pleading statement that she is only searching for him, he rejects her. Her last hope is gone. The last scene is an almost barbaric fertility rite enacted on a mountainside. Yerma watches; and as she does, the pagan woman of the first act reappears and tells Yerma

that her son is waiting. Yerma, honor bound to her husband, cannot accept the woman's offer. Juan emerges from his hiding place. He has come to take Yerma back to his ashen life. She cannot bear to go; and, when she realizes finally that Juan wants no son, she strangles him. Juan's death is a three-fold tragedy. Yerma has now lost her husband and has symbolically killed any unborn children she might have had. She has also committed emotional suicide, for only a dreary, barren physical existence remains for her. It is indeed fitting that the drama be entitled Yerma, for the word itself means a desert or a wasteland.

Lorca did not employ color as extensively in Yerma as he did in Bodas de sangre, but he, nevertheless, attached great significance to that which he did use.

The chill of a tragic atmosphere is produced by vague reference to shades of grey and shadows. In the first act Yerma listens as Victor sings,

¿Por qué duermes solo, pastor?  
 En mi colcha de lana  
 dormirías mejor.  
 Tu colcha de oscura piedra, pastor  
 juncos grises del invierno  
 en la noche de tu cama.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Federico García Lorca, Yerma in Obras Completas, Vol. III, 6th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948), I, ii, p. 37.

Added to this is the reference in the second act to the dress of Juan's sisters-in-law. They come to the fountain dressed in mourning. The tragic overtones of darkness become clear when that shade is applied to honor. Juan speaks twice of the burden of his honor "Y que las familias tienen honra y la honra es una carga que se lleva entre todas. Pero que está oscura y débil en los mismos canos de la sangre."<sup>2</sup> It would take a man of iron to bear this burden. "Porque se necesita ser de bronce . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Tragic also are the references to fertility, which Lorca symbolizes with green, for Yerma's life will be barren through no fault of her own. María speaks to Yerma of her husband's eyelids, which tremble like two green leaves when she is near him. Yerma will never know what it is to make her husband tremble. Green wheat heads, used again in Yerma as in Bodas de sangre, flutter at the approach of Juan's two sisters --"Si los trigos verdes tuvieran cabeza, temblarían de verlos venir,"<sup>4</sup>--an ironic way of referring to the sterility which afflicts Juan's whole family. Another mention of fertility

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., II, ii, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., II, i, p. 50.

occurs in the washerwomen's song. "Porque se endulza el tallo de las ramas."<sup>5</sup> And another is found in the enactment of the fertility rite in the third act. "Ay, como se queja entre las ramas!"<sup>6</sup> This particular incidence directly refers to Yerma. She laments her barrenness everywhere she is. Lorca used green to symbolize fate in a sole instance in Yerma. "Son como esas hojas grandes que hacen de pronto sobre los sepulcros."<sup>7</sup> This may be slightly significant of Yerma's approaching death.

Of all the colors used in Yerma, yellow is the one employed most uniquely. Herein yellow symbolizes new life. In speaking to Juan about her wishes for a child, Yerma points out that even the useless weeds wave yellow blossoms in the wind. The old peasant woman tells Yerma that she has nine sons that are like nine shining suns. "Tengo nueve hijos como nueve soles . . ."<sup>8</sup> When Yerma and María go to the mountain to view the fertility rites, they hear,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., III, ii, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., II, i, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., I, ii, p. 27.

Sobre su carne marchita  
florezca la rosa amarilla.<sup>9</sup>

This yellow rose, symbol of Yerma's unborn child, appears and reappears in the fertility rite, in Yerma's speech, and in the washerwomen's song.

El cielo tiene jardines  
con rosales de alegría,  
entre rosal y rosal  
la rosa de maravilla.<sup>10</sup>

Señor, que florezca la rosa  
no me la dejéis en sombra.<sup>11</sup>

Por el monte ya llega  
mi marido a comer.  
El me trae una rosa  
y yo le doy tres.<sup>12</sup>

Accusingly Juan says to Yerma, "En las calles no hay flores que cortar."<sup>13</sup>

Intimately related with yellow are shades of red, which also symbolize life instead of death as they did in Bodas de sangre. The references to red are those of blood. María

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, ii, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., i, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 82.

tells Yerma that the knowledge of pregnancy is in the blood. In having a child a mother gladly gives half of her blood, half of her own life, to bring forth a new one. When she is speaking to the conjurer, Yerma learns of a woman who conceived while she stood in a creek bed with her clothes drenched in blood. "Vino. Con los zapatos y las enaguas empapadas en sangre . . . pero con la cara reluciente."<sup>14</sup> Blood and life are a single unity. Yerma laments the imprisoned blood and, therefore, the imprisoned life within her,

*¡Ay, qué dolor de sangre prisionera  
me está clavando avispas en la nuca!*<sup>15</sup>

During one of the many discussions between Yerma and Juan about her problem, Yerma pleads for blood, for only through this can she gain a child. "Es tu sangre y tu amparo lo que deseo."<sup>16</sup>

Red is also related to green in that it represents fertility. Twice such references are found in the songs of the washerwomen.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., II, ii, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 84.

Por el aire ya viene  
mi marido a dormir.  
Yo alhelfes rojos  
y el royo alhelfí.<sup>17</sup>

Y nuestro cuerpo tiene  
ramas furiosas de coral.<sup>18</sup>

Descriptive passages are also full of red hues. The river carries red mud in the winter. Roses and carnations are often red. Women of low reputation wear red rouge upon their cheeks.

White, as it is found in Yerma, denotes two concepts, sterility and the joy connected with motherhood. That Juan is impotent becomes clear soon after the play opens. "Ahora tienes la cara blanca como si no te diera en ella el sol."<sup>19</sup> Yerma's song also refers to white and sterility. "Los blancos montes que hay en tu pecho."<sup>20</sup> Even this early in the development of the drama, Yerma fears that her white breasts will never nourish a child. Yerma's house shines, its walls whitewashed many times. In this sterile house lives a frustrated woman caught in its trap.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II, i, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., I, i, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

The song of the washerwomen is replete with allusions to white.

Quiero vivir  
en la nevada chica  
de ese jazmín . . .

Es tu camisa  
nave de plata y viento  
por las orillas . . .

Para que un niño funda  
yertos vidrios del alba.<sup>21</sup>

The women sing of the joy of a fertile marriage and the thrill that each new child brings. This song of happiness demonstrates just how desolate is Yerma's existence. She will never know such joy. That this is true was already suggested at the beginning of the drama in the dream sequence. Therein the child dressed in white appeared only momentarily. He did not linger; he just looked at her and moved on. Her desperation is vented in her meeting with Dolores, the conjurer, ". . . y se les llene la cara y el pecho de gotas blancas."<sup>22</sup> and is echoed in the lyrics of the fertility rite.

¡Ay, qué blanca  
la triste casada! . . .

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., II, i, pp. 50-53.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., III, i, p. 77.

Véte sola detrás de los muros  
donde están las higueras cerradas  
y soporta mi cuerpo de tierra  
hasta el blanco gemido del alba.  
¡Ay, cómo relumbra!  
¡Ay, cómo se cimbre la casada!<sup>23</sup>

Yerma cannot experience the joy offered in the song, for her honor restrains her. She has no other recourse than to murder Juan so that her hopes will die and she with them.

This Lorquian work, too, lives as a dramatic masterpiece because of the abundance of color symbolism. The tragic burden Yerma bears is delineated clearly by Lorca's employment of symbols which contrast with Yerma's barren, fruitless search. Such symbols are ones of new life, fertility, and joy--experiences of which Yerma's life must ever be devoid.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., ii, p. 94.

## CHAPTER V

### LA CASA DE BERNARDA ALBA

After almost a decade of curiosity, the last of the folk dramas, La casa de Bernarda Alba, was produced in 1945 in Buenos Aires by Margarita Xirgu, the outstanding Argentinian actress and Lorca's beloved friend and companion. This play is unique in that its only on-stage characters are women. All action involving the one male takes place off stage. This drama is a portrait of the life of a family of five frustrated spinsters who live under the iron hand of their mother, Bernarda, who is obsessed with her warped and narrow-minded concept of virginity and innocence.

The first act opens as Bernarda and her daughters are returning from the funeral of Bernarda's second husband, the father of the four youngest daughters. Bernarda promises to seal the premises for eight years of mourning which the girls must pass embroidering linens for their hope chests. The romance between Augustias, the eldest daughter, and Pepe Romanos has already developed, and their wedding date has been set. Pepe, a strong, handsome young man, is marrying Augustias only for the money which she inherited from her

father, Bernarda's first husband. Augustias is, however, unaware of this and believes that Pepe loves her as much as she does him. Bernarda's extreme miserliness and class-consciousness is also illustrated throughout the first act by means of her stinging diatribes against the servants.

The second act brings closer to the surface the seething turbulence in which Bernarda's family is embroiled. Pepe is uppermost in each of the daughters' minds. Adela, the youngest, is so agitated by the preparations for Augustias's wedding that she sequesters herself in her room. Martirio, another of the psychologically distraught daughters, steals Augustias's picture of Pepe. When her guilt is discovered, she says it was a joke; but her excuses seem feeble. Poncia, the peasant maid and only truly human character, tries to warn Bernarda of the approaching disaster, but Bernarda pays no heed.

The suppressed emotions of the daughters lead to the tragic events of the final act. While Bernarda is talking to a neighbor, the noise of the white stallion is heard as he hammers the stable door with his hooves. His hoof beats announce approaching death. Because Pepe is not supposed to come that night, the entire family retires early. When all is quiet, Adela, on her way to a tryst with Pepe, appears.

When she is seen again, her hair disarranged, there is a bitter argument between her and Martirio. Martirio angrily denounces her sister for meeting Pepe in the stable. Adela hysterically responds that Pepe loves her and that honor no longer is important. Their vehement quarreling arouses Bernarda. She grabs a gun, runs to the door, and fires at Pepe, who is fleeing in the darkness. Her aim is faulty, and Pepe escapes unharmed. Thinking that he is dead, Adela returns to her room. A few moments later, an ominous thud is heard. Fearfully all the women of the household rush to Adela's room. Rather than face life without love, Adela has hanged herself. Bernarda shows no maternal concern at her daughter's suicide, but loudly proclaims to the world that her daughter has died a virgin. The church bells will toll twice at dawn, announcing the news.

The tragedy of La casa de Bernarda Alba is greatly enhanced by Lorca's rich symbolism in which color is the all important element. The color symbols are not as complex as in the other two folk dramas, but their meaning is much more emphatic than in either Bodas de sangre or Yerma.

Lorca uses two colors with little symbolic significance. The first of these is lavender, the color of a pair of amethyst earrings that belong to María Joséfa, Bernarda's demented

mother. The other color is yellow, which Lorca uses to describe the gold brocade inlay of a coffin, the color of torch flames, and the blazing sun as it falls from the sky like lead.

The uses of color all contain some degree of symbolic reference; for example, blue and green are significant to the development of the drama. Just as in Bodas de sangre, blue is used as a vague reference to death. As the third act opens, the usually white walls in Bernarda's house are bathed in a soft blue light, a sign of approaching disaster. Green, on the other hand, again symbolizes fertility. ". . . mañana me pondré mi vestido verde y me echaré a pasear por la calle. ¡Yo quiero salir!"<sup>1</sup> Adela is the only one of the daughters who still retains vestiges of normal human passions. The green dress she plans to wear is symbolic of her fertility. Two other references to green are to be found in this work. Poncia, the maid, while speaking to the girls about the reapers who come to town each year, says of one of them, "El que la contraba era un muchacho de ojos verdes, apretado como una gavilla de trigo."<sup>2</sup> The statement refers to a virile

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<sup>1</sup>Federico García Lorca, La casa de Bernarda Alba in Obras Completas, Vol. VIII, 6th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1949), I, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., II, p. 66.

young boy who, with several of his companions, had carried off a woman to the olive groves on the previous night and there had seduced her. An equally obvious reference to fertility in regard to the reapers appears in the song of the chorus.

Ya salen los segadores  
 en busca de las espigas;  
 se llevan los corazones  
 de los muchachas que miran<sup>3</sup>

Bernarda's daughters are overly excited by the stories about the reapers--a natural consequence of their years of isolation.

Black is another color used in symbolic contexts. It is, of course, the color of mourning. The women in the first act come dressed in black to pay their respects to Bernarda. Adela is advised to dye her green dress black in order to escape Bernarda's wrath. Bernarda refuses a flowered fan in favor of a black one on grounds that it is not proper for a widow. María Josefa owns a black dress which she plans to take with her to set up a new life with a new husband.

Most of the other incidences of black serve as forerunners of the tragedy. Adela rebels against being isolated in the sala oscura. A double meaning is found in another of the daughters' comments on the weather, for the storm brewing

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

inside the house is much greater than the one outside. Magdalena reports, "Había un nublo negro de tormenta y hasta cayeron algunas gotas."<sup>4</sup> On the night that the turbulence erupts Adela and Bernarda both wear black scarves over their heads, signifying their part in the terrible outcome.

The two remaining references to black are employed in a different manner. They imply life rather than death. The first is found when the girls reminisce about happier times ". . . y el negro luchando con el león . . ."<sup>5</sup> The negro man in María Josefa's needlepoint represents life as none of the daughters have ever seen it, as do the snapping eyes of the boys in one of Poncia's proverbs.

References to blood constitute the majority of the instances of red in La casa de Bernarda Alba. It often assumes a double meaning, symbolizing both death and life, but life outside of Bernarda's suffocating presence. The first hint of tragedy is found in the first act. "Sangre en las manos de fregarlo todo."<sup>6</sup> This complaint of the servant implies that the sterility in Bernarda's house stifles

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., I, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

all life forces. Adela, speaking vehemently to Poncia about her passion for Pepe, says, "Mirando sus ojos me parece que bebo su sangre lentamente."<sup>7</sup> This refers to both the approaching disaster and to the passion of which her life is devoid. Poncia tries futilely to warn Bernarda of the trouble in her household. "¡No llegará la sangre al río!"<sup>8</sup> As the conflict between the sisters grows, the servants begin to murmur among themselves. They say that women without husbands will forget even the blood that unites them if an opportunity for their escape arises. Indeed they do. Martirio, after discovering that Adela has met Pepe, denies their sisterhood. "¡No me abracés! No quieres ablandar mis ojos. Mi sangre ya no es tuya."<sup>9</sup> Calamity is imminent; and when it comes, death's companion, flowing blood, comes too. "Hubiera volcado un río de sangre sobre su cabeza."<sup>10</sup> In telling Adela that Pepe has been shot, though in reality this has not occurred, Martirio does in truth, pour a river of blood on Adela; she causes her to hang herself.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., II, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

The remaining examples of red are used in direct contrast to the barrenness and futility of life in Bernarda's house: the flowers on the fan which Bernarda rejects as improper; the wreath worn by a village girl as she returned from a night spent with her lover; the fire in Adela's breast when she thinks of Pepe; the flowers in María Josefa's hair when she tries to escape Bernarda's house. Twice references are made in song to an existence outside of Bernarda's household.

Abrir puertas y ventanas  
 las que vivís en el pueblo,  
 el segador pide rosas  
 para adornar su sombrero.<sup>11</sup>

. . . y en la playa nos meteremos  
 en una choza de coral.<sup>12</sup>

By far the most significant color in La casa de Bernarda Alba is white. Even the title suggests the sterility of white which pervades the entire play, for Bernarda's name, Alba, comes from the Latin word for white, albus. As each act opens, one is acutely aware of the glaring whiteness of the rooms in her house. One is reminded of an egg, nature's sterile container--this is what Bernarda tries to make of her house, a

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., II, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., III, p. 111.

sterile container for the purity of her old-maid daughters. Throughout the play references are constantly made to whiteness and cleanliness. On the day of the funeral the house is scrubbed and polished from top to bottom, and the patio is whitewashed. Even the glasses in which lemonade is served are white. That white is used to symbolize virginity, which in this play is synonymous with sterility, is seen in one very important incident. When Adela's body is found, Bernarda is obsessed with having the townspeople believe she died a virgin. She shouts, "*¡Mi hija ha muerto virgen! Llevadla a su cuarto y vestirla como una doncella. ¡Nadie diga nada! Ella ha muerto virgen. Avisad que al amanecer den los clamores los campanas.*"<sup>13</sup> She will be dressed in white for her burial. Such usage of white is reinforced by references throughout the work to white brides' veils, pearls, and the whiteness of petticoats.

An interesting use of white is found in the pearls of Augustias's engagement ring. Why did Pepe choose pearls instead of diamonds to seal his bargain? Perhaps they symbolize the tears that shall flow when tragedy strikes.

From the more subtle use of white as a herald of death the play jumps to stronger ones. That Pepe is to be a catalyst

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

for whatever happens is seen in act two. "A Pepe le gusta andar con la luna."<sup>14</sup> Indeed almost all of his actions were conducted at night, so it could truly be said that he walked with death's messenger, the moon. The most obvious precursor of death is the white stallion, which was used also in Bodas de sangre as a death symbol. He hammers on the stable door with his hooves calling for the 'house's inhabitants to heed his message. Returning from outside, Adela announces, "El caballo garañón estaba en el centro del corral i blanco! Doble de grande, llenando todo lo oscuro."<sup>15</sup> In a way the stallion represents Pepe. Both the animal and man are symbols of male virility, and it is Martirio's and Adela's attraction to Pepe that brings about the final tragedy.

Color is indeed a most important element in La casa de Bernarda Alba; and as previously stated, it is white which predominates, although other colors are mentioned. The drama centers around Bernarda's warped concept of purity, symbolized by white. Her only purpose in life is to maintain the virginity of her daughters, again symbolized by white. Death is heralded by the hammering hooves of the mighty, white stallion. The dead Adela is dressed in white. When all action has

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., II, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., III, p. 101.

ceased in the glaring, whitewashed walls of this sterile prison called a house, Bernarda Alba retires within it in order to cut off further contact between herself and her remaining daughters and the outside world. The house becomes a living tomb. White sterility has replaced all hope of pulsating life. Bernarda has learned nothing from Adela's death. She remains la señora Alba, and this is the true tragedy of La casa de Bernarda Alba.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have discussed Lorca's use of color in two of his farces and in each of the individual dramas which make up his great folk trilogy. In all of them, color has been employed to effectively add visual interest and excitement to the stage production and to symbolically portray or suggest the ever-recurring Lorquian themes of life, death, fertility and sterility. Frequently these functions are merged or overlapped.

The drama quickens when color is used on stage. When he describes a set, Lorca always notes the color of the walls: yellow is the Madre's hut in Bodas de sangre, and white are the imprisoning barriers which comprise the homes of both Bernarda Alba and the shoemaker. In the latter cases, white is also used symbolically. Obvious care is given to the color choice for each costume in order that it may fit the role of the character. Had the bride in Bodas de sangre worn any other color but white when surprised at her toilette by Leonardo, the contrast between her actions and her honor would

have seemed less glaring. The Zapatera's smoldering passions are dramatically emphasized by the violent crimson of her clothes. The green dress of Adela in La casa de Bernarda Alba isolates and distinguishes her from the others in that stricken household.

The above examples are, however, those which would not be neglected by any conscientious dramatist. Lorca's attention to small details raise him above the well-trained but uninspired author. Little blue jars adorn a wall; copperware gleams in a kitchen; a golden watch chain dangles from a young man's suit pocket; frosty lace borders a baby's diaper.

It is, however, the symbolic use of color that makes Lorca a superb dramatist. White, the most important color in both Bodas de sangre and La casa de Bernarda Alba, is necessary to the tragic themes. The presence of the great white stallions in both dramas is essential, for they are the heralds of death. The role of the white horse which appears at the window and later carries the lovers to their fate in the forest in Bodas de sangre is identical to that of the white stallion in La casa de Bernarda Alba who pounds on the stable door and later rends the darkness of the night as he gallops wildly around his corral. The forerunner of this favorite Lorquian symbol of death makes his first appearance

in La zapatera prodigiosa, where he represents the suppression of the Zapatera's passions. The white walls in the shoemaker's home, which bear mute testimony to the emptiness and hopelessness of his existence, assume greater tragic significance in La casa de Bernarda Alba. In passing from farce to tragedy, white ceased suggesting sterility and barrenness and became the definite symbol of these two negative motifs.

White symbolizes a different but no less significant concept in Yerma. The joys of motherhood and the frustrations caused by its absence form the basis of the drama. Yerma shall never know the tenderness and love felt by a mother for a suckling child. Warm, white milk will never flow from her snowy breasts. While white represents love and life, it does contain ominous overtones. It is the very suppression of life-giving forces which results in the tragic consequences of Juan's murder and Yerma's ensuing emotional suicide.

As it does in Yerma, white also has different meanings in Bodas de sangre and Don Perlimplín. In the former it is the visual representation of the joy and happiness that should attend a marriage, for example, the white of the crown of orange blossoms which the groom presents to the bride. But negative connotations accompany these positive ones. The marriage is doomed from the moment that Leonardo's name is

mentioned. And Belisa's beauty is only of the body, not of the soul.

Red, too, emerges as a principal component in two of the folk tragedies, symbolizing death in Bodas de sangre and life in Yerma. The title itself, Blood Wedding, suggests violence and the spectral figure of Death. The images of the bleeding horse (in the lullaby sung to the child) and the moon seeking blood to warm its cheeks vividly point to the disastrous outcome. In truth, allusions to blood are quite prevalent in Bodas de sangre. One can almost feel it trickling onto the sand from the oozing, gaping wounds of Leonardo and the Novio. Each reference to blood in Yerma intensifies or explains Yerma's obsession for a baby. She pleads for Juan's blood to provide her with child--a child which would bring a new life into her home and which would renew her own. María reiterates the tie between blood and the bearing of children, and Yerma feels her barrenness even more intensely. Life and blood--these cannot be separated in Yerma. Lorca's use of red originated in the farces. In Don Perlimplín the red cloak that envelops the mysterious lover can only refer to the blood that Perlimplín will spill for Belisa. The passions that surge in the Zapatera's breast are the components of her life. So it is red that is a dynamic symbol for opposite

ideas, life and death.

As green is the complement of red, so is fate the complement of death. Lorca so cunningly inserts green as a symbol of fate that its very scarcity in the folk dramas makes it stand in relief. The green leaves of the forest shelter, the beggar woman garbed in green in Bodas de sangre --death, the fate of those who hide among these leaves. Bernarda's daughter, Adela, wears a green dress--her fate, an untimely death.

Green also exists as the symbol of fertility. The green dress of the Zapatera is a visual representation of her fruitfulness. The verdant wheat blades which quiver in the wind are in both Bodas de sangre and Yerma. Lyrical sections in these dramas often refer to leafy boughs to demonstrate the prolificity of nature.

Lorca follows Moorish tradition in Don Perlimplín by using green as the color of hope. The hilt of the dagger which Perlimplín plunges into his heart is covered with emeralds. Thus, the dagger, an instrument of destruction, contains within itself the seeds of hope. He dies with the knowledge that his hope has been fulfilled. Belisa has, at last, understood the meaning of love. Now, she can and does truly love her husband.

Many more examples of Lorquian color could be cited, but such a detailed list would be redundant and unnecessary since each drama has already been examined individually. Nor would this encyclopedic list further exemplify Lorca's skill and talent as a dramatist of the first rank. Only a few critics believe that color is insignificant in the plays of Lorca. Among them is J. B. Trend who says:

The word verde (green), for instance, has been taken for a psycho-analytical symbol. Actually when Lorca said that a thing was green, we knew that it was green, and that was that; it did not occur to us that he was consciously or deliberately symbolizing anything.<sup>1</sup>

I place myself with those who emphatically disagree with the above premise. Lorca's employment of color was surely no obvious or chance occurrence. Color is too closely intertwined with dramatic action and thematic progress to be easily ignored. Lorca's masterly use of poetic color, his deft and sensitive handling of Spanish, but at the same time universal, themes, his artistry as a poet--these are the qualities, developed in the farces, which cause Bodas de sangre, Yerma, and La casa de Bernarda Alba, his folk trilogy, to be recognized not only as masterpieces of the Spanish stage, but also as classics of modern drama.

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Trend, Lorca and the Spanish Poetic Tradition (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 6.

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COLOR IN SELECTED DRAMAS OF FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

by

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the use of color and its significance in certain selected dramas of the twentieth century Spanish dramatist, Federico García Lorca. I shall make an intensive study of two farces--La zapatera prodigiosa and Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín--and three full-length tragedies--Bodas de sangre, Yerma, and La casa de Bernarda Alba.

Lorca used color in all of his theatrical works to heighten the visual experience of the audience. This he did by paying careful attention to the details of description, both of the sets and costumes and of the action. Besides this simple employment of color, Lorca attached great symbolic significance to certain colors that appear in all his works. He used white, green, and red most vividly to represent various concepts--sterility, beauty, hope, fate, fertility, blood, death, and passion. With these three colors as a firm base, Lorca expanded his imagery with other hues such as yellow, blue, and black to portray such concepts as happiness, death, and oppression. It will be clearly seen that Lorca's color usage is a primary characteristic that makes his theatre outstanding within the world's dramatic store.