

Lorca's play on tragic love

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Lorca's play on tragic love, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, is his last complete play. It is interpreted as a metaphor of repression with its theme focused on frustration, honour and death. The play contains both the passion and the torment in the intense struggle of a group of women held in check even from the thought of love by a tyrannical mother, Bernarda. The play investigates and provides a response, but not a solution, to the problems of oppression, transgression, sexuality and being a victim. Bernarda's strict rule is as powerful as the wilful nature of the youngest woman who betrays the family.

Her ability to satisfy her sexual desire symbolically shatters the order of extreme repression and absolute control. Her rebellion and death mark the reasons and effects of the repressed atmosphere. Ultimate protest, despair, and madness emphasize the even more extreme control, unhealthy fear, mindlessness, and especially silence that befall the women who remain in the house. However more scrutinizing approach to the issue of victim in the play reveals that not only Bernarda's daughters appear as victims but Bernarda herself being a victimizer is a victim.

Bernarda Alba is the mother, a dramatic personality, whose words carry the authority of the supreme ruler and whose life shows little emotion. In this austerity she rules her household, never sparing from her wrath anyone who attempts to revoke the stifling atmosphere she has superimposed on herself and her daughters. As a result, all - Bernarda, the daughters, the servants - exist in darkness and depression ultimately leading to sterility of emotions and finally to suicide.

Bernarda is a selfish and tyrannical matron who eventually forces her daughters into the despair. They lose every vestige of hope; this loss leads

directly to the moral death of each daughter and to the physical death of the youngest. Slowly, but unequivocally, Bernarda drains the minds and hearts of her daughters until they become as white and barren as the walls of their physical prison the metaphor of which is conveyed by the visual nature of the house with its thick walls and a few windows and doors leading to the outside world.

However, this significant visual image exceeds its literal meaning and, above all, represents a sociocultural institution keeping all the main characters of the play in subordination to social dogmas and rules. Within the confines of its walls Bernarda and her family repeat the old traditions, like many generations of women that preceded them. This repetitive and collective act obliterates the uniqueness of the individual for the sake of preserving patriarchal hegemony.

When reading *The House of Bernarda Alba* it becomes obvious that the play's most powerful strength is in its dialogues, while the characters are limited in their movement and space within a closed location. By dint of auditory means, Lorca reaches the explication of the contrast between girls and their mother. This contrast is emphasized by the other devices like contrast of black and white, and these two colours are highlighted throughout the play: the black dresses of the women in mourning, in contrast to the very white walls of the house.

Moreover, Bernarda's authoritarian voice stands out as she commands, " Silence! " [p. 161] at the opening, throughout, and end of the play, closely related in each case to the death of one member of the family and the spiritual death of those living. Despite Bernarda's call for silence, other

sounds succeed in penetrating the thick walls and contribute to define the nature of their society and the dichotomy between life inside and outside the house. Bernarda's house is a household without men. This is by fate as well as by author's intention to establish controversial circumstances.

Upon the death of her husband, she must assume the patriarchal role of protecting her daughters' honour and forbids the presence of men within the confines of the house, thus limiting the world her daughters are allowed to know. Her house is clearly governed by patriarchal forces. Pepe el Romano, the male character we do not see but hear about, is the strongest motivating force in the play. Bernarda's authoritarian discourse stubbornly reproduces what she learned from her father and her grandfather.

This concept associates property with social class, as Bernarda is well aware. When one of her daughters has the opportunity of marrying, she does not allow it: " BERNARDA, loudly. - I'd do it a thousand times over! My blood won't mingle with the Humanas' while I live! His father was a shepherd. " (p. 191). The situation within the walls of her house would have been quite different had Bernarda found enough men of her social condition to marry her daughters. Lorca indicts society, and the reader might be inclined to condemn Bernarda as well.

Although she is not aware of it, Bernarda is a victim turned victimizer. In the same way that her daughter, Adela, is symbolically suffocated by her mother's oppression, as she commits suicide by hanging, Bernarda's maternal feelings have been suffocated by society. As a widow, she uses her newly found powers to perpetuate those values that benefit men. She becomes their accomplice. Her husband was a womanizer, and she claims

that men should enjoy the freedom of the streets. Women should be confined in the house, against their natural instincts.

Bernarda is, at best, an imperfect man, as exemplified in her failed attempt to use the gun —a phallic symbol. BERNARDA: The gun! Where's the gun? She rushes out. La Poncia runs ahead of her. Amelia enters and looks on frightened, leaning her head against the wall. Behind her comes Martirio. ADELA: No one can hold me back! She tries to go out. [...] A shot is heard. BERNARDA, entering: Just try looking for him now! MARTIRIO, entering: That does away with Pepe el Romano. ADELA: Pepe! My God! Pepe! She runs out. PONCIA: Did you kill him?

MARTIRIO: No. He raced away on his mare! BERNARDA: It was my fault. A woman can't aim (p. 210) Within the play another mother figure, Maria Josefa, vehemently distances herself from Bernarda and approaches Adela, thus leaving Bernarda without support and helpless. She sings a lullaby while holding a “baby” (a lamb) in her arms, an act that Bernarda - devoid of maternal instincts - seems incapable of performing. Bernarda as a mother figure becomes dehumanized and therefore closer to the dimensions of a grotesque caricature.

At the beginning of the play the maid La Poncia threatens Bernarda's public image with her gossip. At the end of the play, and despite Bernarda's call for silence, we know that the neighbours have awakened. The thick walls have been rendered useless and the tyrannical figure of Bernarda fall a prey to societal judgement. Bibliography LORCA, Federico Garcia Three Tragedies: Blood Wedding, Yerma, Bernarda Alba. Translated by J. G. Lujan and R. L. O'Connell. New York, New Directions Publishing, 1955.

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