THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

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Spanish Historical Context

The opposing parties in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s were the Republican government, supported by a coalition of leftist parties called the Popular Front, and a fascist rebel army, known both as the Nationalists and the Falangists, led by General Francisco Franco. Behind this conflict lies more than a century of civil wars fought over the status of the Spanish monarchy and by extension the power of the Catholic Church in modern Spain.

Going all the way back to 1808: Napoleon's army pressured the Spanish King into ceding control of the country to his empire. Historians have described this as "a cynical and arbitrary transfer of power"[1] which threatened the deep ideological investment of Spaniards in their monarchs. The monarchy was linked closely with Catholicism, the national faith, so the ousting of the King was perceived as a threat to the Church as well. While the ruling class shifted their allegiance to Napoleon, ordinary Spaniards rose up in revolt and through four years of guerrilla warfare defeated the French. The rebels of 1808 were ideologically diverse--the most ardent Catholic conservatives fought alongside liberals who were in favor of a democratically elected parliament to govern alongside the monarch. They also came from all walks of life—urban and rural, rich and poor.

Although this victory over the French offered "a myth of enormous potency, available to radicals and traditionalists alike,"[2] it was not enough to establish a coherent political future for the country. When the King died, a succession crisis followed in which liberals and conservatives each fought in favor of the monarch they thought would best serve their own agenda. As in the war with the French, thousands died, and two more civil wars were fought over the course of the 19th century.

By the end of the century, the quality of life of most Spaniards lagged well behind that of those in other major European nations. In 1900 the average lifespan in Spain was under 35 years old, well below the European average.[3] There were also number of regional cholera outbreaks and food shortages, and despite the development of a national railroad infrastructure, the national economy stagnated. And yet, although they were willing to fight over the future of the monarchy, "the bulk of the population remained utterly uninterested in the political process"[4] itself.

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[1] Phillips, Williams D. and Carla Rahn Phillips. *A Concise History of Spain*. Second ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016. Print. 268.
[2] Carr, Raymond. *Spain: 1808-1939*. Oxford History of Modern Europe. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966. Print. 105.
[3] Casanova, Julián and Carlos Gil Andrés. *Twentieth-Century Spain: a History*. Trans. Martin Douch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. 23.
[4] Esdaile, Charles J. *Spain in the Liberal Age: From Constitution to Civil War, 1808-1939.* Print.155.

In 1898, Spain suffered a humiliating international military defeat when the United States liberated Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines from Spanish rule. The Spanish called this event the *Desastre*.[5] Meanwhile, radical politics had come to Spain, and workers' parties began to organize under the principles of socialism, communism and anarchism. Regional protests and even anticlerical terrorist violence were increasingly frequent. The left-center party, now known as Republicans, now hoped to phase out the monarchy, but they were more tolerant of a slow transition. In 1923, right-wing General Miguel Primo de Rivera staged a military coup, and, "[w]eary of strikes, street warfare…, and sterile political haggling, most Spaniards greeted General Primo's takeover with overwhelming support."[6] Modeling his regime on Mussolini's Italy, Primo de Rivera installed a single political party, the Patriotic Union, which attracted politicians from across the political spectrum, essentially repeating the uneasy coalition of 1808. Pragmatism had finally come to outweigh principle in political life. The result was an oppressive dictatorship which lasted for seven years.

Under an uneasy interim government guided by a weakened monarchy, an election was held on April 12, 1931 and a Republican government was elected, thanks largely to secular urban liberals. The Second Republic (the First was a short-lived experiment in the 19th century) lasted for two years. Women were granted the right to vote for the first time, and reform programs were proposed to improve the lives of rural laborers. But by 1933, when Hitler had come to power in Germany, many Spaniards had become disenchanted with the Republic. Too many promises had gone unfulfilled, and Catholic traditionalists were dissatisfied with the extreme secularization of the state. The next election resulted in a left government, but a widely-supported military revolt was staged with General Franco at the head of the fascist rebel forces. The Civil War between the Republican government, supported by workers' parties, and the Falangist rebels for three years. It became an international *cause celebre* for the left-leaning literati, most famously George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway.[7] Ultimately, the Republican armies were decimated. The war resulted in a dictatorship headed by General Franco which lasted for most of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, the nationalists were emphatically supported by the Catholic Church.

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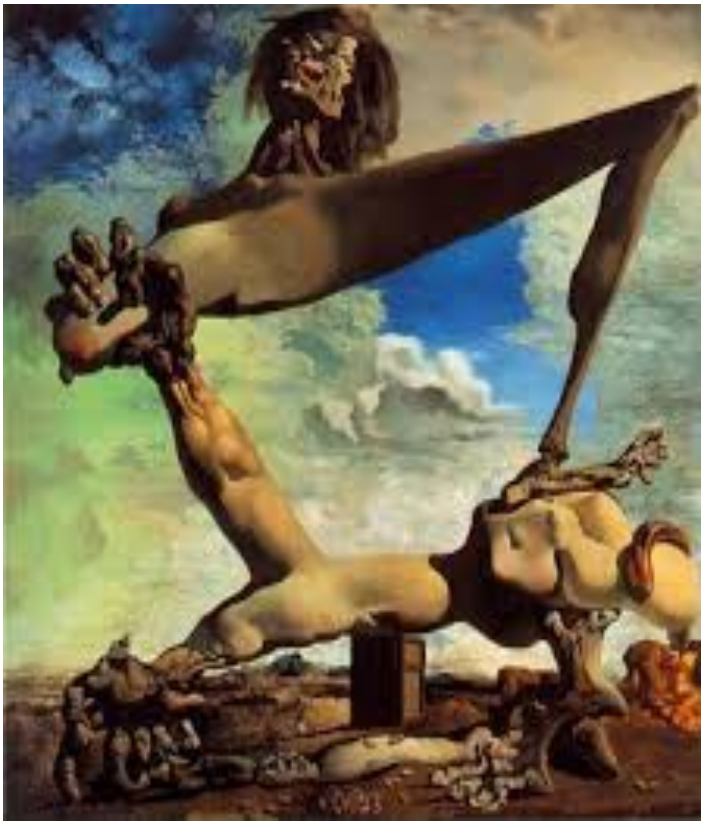
[5] On an individual level, poor Spaniards found new economic opportunities in the colonies had during the 19th century, especially in Cuba. This is referred to in "Bernarda Alba" in Martirio's gossip about Adelaide's father (page 336). For poor Spaniards, the loss of Cuba especially was a double blow.

Among the few Spaniards who benefited financially from the loss of Cuba was Federico García Rodríguez, the playwright's father. García Rodríguez' principal crop was the sugar beet, and "[t]he loss of Cuba to the United States in 1898...meant that the importation of cheap sugar from the island had come to an end….[B]y the time Lorca was born in...1898, his father had become one of the wealthiest men in the village." (Gibson, Ian. *Federico García Lorca: a Life*. New York: Pantheon, 1989. Print. 6.) Bernarda Alba occupies essentially the same socioeconomic position in the village as Lorca's father did.

[6] Phillips and Phillips, 321.

[7] See Orwell's memoir *Homage to Catalonia* and Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* American photographer Robert Capa also did some of his most famous work during the Civil War.



Salvador Dalí, Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War, 1936.
Oil on canvas. 110 x 84 cm. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Anti-fascist Republican propaganda posters.

Federico García Lorca: Biography

1898 - FGL born on June 5 in Fuente Vaqueros, a small town on the outskirts of Granada in Andalucía, the southernmost region of Spain. His father, Federico García Rodríguez, is a wealthy landholder, and his mother Vicenta Lorca, is a teacher who introduces her son to literature and the arts, especially music. The poet has one brother, Francisco, and two sisters.

1907 - The family moves to Asquerosa, a nearby village. Lorca experiences the move as a loss. He is baptized in the local church.

1909 - 1919 The family moves to Granada. Enters the University of Granada to study law, to satisfy his father's wishes. Becomes a proficient improviser on the guitar and piano. Tours Spain with his music professor, writing poems which will ultimately make up the material for his first published book.

1919 – 1926 Transfers to the University of Madrid and moves into the Residencia de Estudiantes, home to Spain's most important young intellectuals and artists. Writes and produces his first play, "The Butterfly's Evil Spell." Publishes his second book of poems. Begins work on the ambitious *Suites*, which will not be published until the 1980s. Together with composer friend Manuel de Falla, organizes a conference to celebrate the *cante jondo*, a musical tradition which is the basis of flamenco music. Delivers the lecture "Deep Song." Begins to write poetic reflections of the *cante jondo*, in a major break from his earlier style. He reads and recites these regularly but they won't be published until 1931. Meets Salvador Dalí, with whom he will have a deep friendship, which was possibly at times a romantic relationship as well; Dalí begins to include images of Lorca in his paintings. Receives his law degree. He will never practice. Under Dalí's influence, begins to experiment with drawing and surrealism.

1926 - 1928 Publishes "Ode to Salvador Dalí." Writes and stages "Mariana Pineda," an historical drama, his first collaboration with actress Margarita Xirgu, with sets by Dalí. The play is received well. His drawings receive a gallery showing in Barcelona. The three-hundredth anniversary of the death of the poet Luis de Góngora is celebrated widely, and the artists identified with the event are known as the 'Generation of '27'. He is the youngest poet in the group. Publishes the book *Canciones* (*Songs*), with many poems with insider meanings dedicated to his fellow poets and artists. Publishes *Romancero Gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*), which draws on anonymous medieval Spanish poems. The book makes him an international literary celebrity. Writes three 'impossible' one act plays: "Buster Keaton's Stroll," "The Maiden, the Sailor, and the Student," and "Chimera." Begins a relationship with Emilio Aladrén Perojo, a sculptor. Co-founds the short-lived literary journal *gallo* (*rooster*). Friendship with Dalí ends badly, as Dalí moves to Paris to join the thriving artistic community. Dalí and Luis Buñuel create *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), a revolutionary surrealist film. Lorca assumes that the film's title cruelly refers to him, and is meant to link him to the impotent male protagonist.

1929 – 1930 Travels to New York. Enrolls as a student at Columbia. Privately suffers from depression while maintaining an active social life. Writes the poems which will be published after his death as *Poet in New York*, which give voice to his experience of the city as a terrifying and heartless, with the exception of Harlem. Writes "Ode to Walt Whitman" in which he writes positively about being gay while also expressing disgust for gay men who form communities and identities based on their sexuality. Writes the 'impossible' modernist plays *As Five Years Pass* and *The Public*, possibly as a partial response to the surrealism of *An Andalusian Dog*, which also explores the theme of frustrated love and desire between men. Visits Vermont briefly as an escape. Learns virtually no English, despite lessons. Withdraws from Columbia and travels to Cuba, which reminds him of Andalucía, and writes about the black culture he finds there.

1931 – 1933 Returns to Spain. Begins to share his New York poems, and finally publishes the *cante jondo* poems which are well-received. Writes a puppet play, *Christopher's Little Stage*. Shares *As Five Years Pass* and *El Público* with friends, who respond negatively. Co-founds *La Barraca*, a student theater troupe funded by the Republic which brings Spanish classics to rural villages. Moves back in with his parents in Madrid between tours. Two scenes from *El Público* are published. Writes and produces avant-garde drama "The Love of Don Perlimpín with Belisa in the Garden." Finishes and produces *Blood Wedding*. Travels to Buenos Aires and stages *Blood Wedding, Mariana Pineda* and *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* there to great success. For the first time in his life he is financially independent. Begins vexed romance with straight-identifying Rafael Rodríguez Rapún, a member of La Barraca.

1934 – 1935 His friend the bullfighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías dies of fatal wounds in the ring, resulting in a "Lamentation," one of his most ambitious long poems. Finishes and produces *Yerma*, the second play in a projected trilogy which began with *Blood Wedding*, is produced with Xirgu in the lead role to great acclaim. Writes and produces *Doña Rosita the Spinster; or, the Language of Flowers* with Xirgu's company. Writes the first act of the intended third play in the rural trilogy, *The Destruction of Sodom*, which he abandons. Begins relationship with Juan Ramírez de Lucas and plans to travel to Mexico with him. Begins the "Sonnets of Dark Love."

1936 -- Writes *The House of Bernarda Alba* and shares it twice in readings with friends. Killed on August 19 just outside Granada by 'nationalist' soldiers.

Adapted from Klein, Dennis A. *Blood Wedding, Yerma* and *The House of Bernarda Alba: García Lorca's Tragic Trilogy*. Twayne's Masterwork Studies. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991.

Federico and Vicenta Lorca: the Figure of the Mother

A letter from Vicenta Lorca to her son at University in Madrid:

You haven't told us to whom you've given the book [his first book of poems], and if it will take them a long time to publish it; you'll appreciate that, as a woman and moreover as your mother, I'm more interested in all these things than anyone else. We think it's a good idea for you to publish the book yourself, for you know that your father is happy (provided that you all work) to help you in whatever way is necessary. We are delighted that you feel you have the strength to recognize that you possess the abilities and faculties of a pure, exquisite artist; because that way you'll hurl yourself with great courage into the fray that awaits you, without being put out by the criticism of the ignorant, or the malevolence of those who envy you, who in such cases almost always abound. I pray to the Virgin that everything will work out very well for you and that you'll stay calm so that nothing upsets you for any reason at all.[8]

Mother as Daughter, Mother as Teacher, Mother as Jocasta[9]

"[In 1933] his mother's hair was now fully gray, and her pretty face gently etched by the passage of time. When Lorca talked about her to others, 'it was as if he was talking about his daughter, a very young daughter whom he must watch over with great care,' a friend observed. 'She formed me poetically,' Lorca had said of Vicenta Lorca in 1932. 'I owe her everything I am and everything I become.'"[10]

"The poet...asserted that his close relationship with his mother made it impossible for him to feel heterosexual passion—a claim which [his friend Rivas] Cherif dismissed as cheap Freudianism but that none the less the poet had made publicly...two years earlier, when he said that while his brothers and sisters were free to marry, he belonged to his mother."[11]

Vicenta Lorca, her half-fictional neighbor, and her son's fate

"...Lorca had no qualms about using [Frasquita Alba's] surname in his play, despite pleas from his mother that he 'change her last name, too, change it!'"[12] "It is now thought that the play's overt reference to his neighbors in Asquerosa may have played a part in Lorca's assassination."[13]

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[8] Gibson 100.

[9] For the mother/daughter relationships in "Bernarda Alba", see Gabriele, John P. "Of Mothers and Freedom: Adela's Struggle for Selfhood in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*." *Symposium*. Fall 1983. 188-199. Gabriele writes through the lens of contemporary feminist ego psychology: "...Bernarda insists that her youngest daughter has died a virgin. So even in death she impedes Adela's autonomy" (195).

[10] Stainton, Leslie. *Lorca: a Dream of Life.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. 314.

[11] Gibson 421.

[12] Stainton 431.

[13] Delgado. Maria M. *Federico García Lorca.* Routledge Modern and Contemporary Dramatists. New York: Routledge, 2008. 104. Delgado points to a recent documentary, *Lorca: the Sea Stops Still* (2006, dir. Ruiz Barrachina), as her primary source.

LORCA'S AESTHETICS

The **duende** does not come at all unless he sees that death is possible. The duende must know beforehand that he can serenade death's house and rock those branches we all wear, branches that do not have, will never have, any consolation.

With idea, sound, or gesture, the duende enjoys fighting the creator on the very rim of the well. Angel and muse escape with the violin and compass; the duende wounds. In the healing of that wound, which never closes, lies the invented, strange qualities of a man's work.

The magical property of a poem is to remain possessed by duende that can baptize in dark water all who look at it, for with duende it is easier to love and understand, and one can be sure of being loved and understood. In poetry this struggle for expression and the communication of expression is sometimes fatal….

But he can never repeat himself. This is interesting to emphasize: the duende does not repeat himself, any more than do the forms of the sea during a squall.[14]

Duende can mean many things. It can be a mythical creature like a goblin or an imp, and Lorca embraces this meaning in his short experimental play "The Love of Don Perlimplín for Belisa in the Garden," in which two *duendes* chitchat, resembling the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[15] *Duende* can mean 'charm' in the sense of enchantment (*Larousse Concise Spanish-English Dictionary*). *Duende* also belongs to a group of words that capture different aspects of 'good fortune' in Andalucía, along with *buena sombra*, *sal*, *salero*, *gracia*, and *buen ángel*.[16]

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[14] García Lorca, Federico. "Play and Theory of *Duende*." Trans. Chrstopher Maurer. *Deep Song and Other Prose.* New York: New Directions, 1954.
[15] Svich, Caridad, trans. *Federico García Lorca: Impossible Theater.* Great Translations Ser. New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2000. 32-33.
[16] Mitchell, Timothy. *Passional Culture: Emotion, Religion, and Society in Southern Spain*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990. 13.)

Poetry

Lorca believed that the artistic voice of the Iberian peninsula was consistent, trans-historical, and cross-cultural. For him, the Arabic poetry of medieval Muslim Spain and the 17th century Catholic poetry of Luis de Góngora and San Juan de la Cruz were expressions of the same Spanish soul—and he believed those highly formal styles were continuous with Spanish folk songs, especially the wild gypsy *cante jondo*, and the late-medieval anonymous rhymed *romances* (ballads).

When Lorca wrote about Góngora's poetry, he articulated a core artistic practice of his own: building a complex poem around a simple 'skeleton' using startlingly juxtaposed images which stand out and take over the mind of the reader or the auditor.[17] But this pursuit of the image came to a poet who was also a gifted musician, and it is the intersection between the music of poetry and the poetic image which electrifies Lorca's verse.[18] Here is the first section of Lorca's most famous poem, "Romance Somnabulo," in which he applies the Góngorist style to the form of the traditional *romances*:

Verde que te quiero verde.	Green, how much I want you green.
Verde viento. Verdes ramas.	Green wind. Green branches.
El barco sobre la mar	The ship upon the sea
y el caballo en la montaña.	and the horse in the mountain.
Con la sombra en la cintura	With the shadow on her waist
ella sueña en su baranda,	she dreams on her balcony,
verde carne, pelo verde,	green flesh, hair of green,
con ojos de fría plata.	and eyes of cold silver.
Verde que te quiero verde.	Green, how much I want you green.
Bajo la luna gitana,	Beneath the gypsy moon,
las cosas la están mirando	all things look at her
y ella no puede mirarlas.	but she cannot see them.[19]

In *Bernarda Alba*, there are several examples of *Gongorísmo*: 'lizard' and 'horse' are classic Lorca images, and the phrase 'stars like fists' is a metaphor in this style. While writing the play, Lorca declaimed that in it he'd achieved pure "realism," a play with "not a drop of poetry!"[20] but the play relies on those occasional bursts of Gongorist imagery to remind us that some kind of liberation is possible from the prose prison of ruled by Bernarda.

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[17] García Lorca, Federico. "The Poetic Image of Don Luis de Góngora." In *Deep Song and Other Prose*. Trans. Christopher Maurer. New York: New Directions, 1975. Lorca associated this aspect of Góngora's verse with the poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the French symbolists, and this common heritage is what links Lorca's poetry to international literary modernism. For Lorca, modernism was no more than a rediscovery of something Spaniard artists had been doing for centuries.

[18] Many of García Lorca's books of poetry refer to music in the title: *Poema del Cante Jondo, Suites, Canciones, Romancero Gitano*, and virtually all of his plays include songs. *Bernarda Alba*'s fearful symmetry demands three songs, one per act.

[19] García Lorca, Francisco and Donald M. Allen, eds. *Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*. New York: New Directions, 2005. This poem was translated as "Somnambule Ballad" by Stephen Spender and J.L. Gili, pages 70-71.

[20] Gibson 435.

Theater


Pretending to be dead while vacationing with Dalí[21]. Playing La Sombra in Calderón's allegorical "La Vida es Sueño."

Lorca's inspirations for playwriting began in childhood, with the popular traveling puppet plays of Andalucía,[22] with the Catholic mass, and with rituals of shrine worship, all of which he would emulate at home through elaborate stagings, forcing his siblings, mother and even the household staff to watch.[23] He also developed a strange habit of staging his own death, which he would continue in adult life.[24] His mature influences as a playwright were eclectic, from Cálderon de la Barca and Lope de Vega to the films of Buster Keaton. He even drafted an avant-garde silent film script, "A Trip to the Moon."

Although Lorca only read Shakespeare in translation, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and especially *Romeo and Juliet* were crucial influences. He cited Juliet as an influence on his Mariana Pineda,[25] and Shakespeare's Juliet herself is a pivotal character in the avant-garde, 'impossible' play *The Public*. She is also an important model for the Bride in *Blood Wedding* and for all of Bernarda Alba's daughters. In fact, Juliet is arguably the common denominator in Lorca's theater, the protagonist of his recurring tragedy of desire.

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[21] Gibson, image 7.

[22] For a brief description of a puppet play and the lives of travelling players, see Gerald Brenan's *South from Granada* (London: Readers Union, 1958), pages 79-82.

[23] García Lorca, Francisco. *In the Green Morning: Memories of Federico.* Trans. Christopher Maurer. New York: New Directions, 1980. 54.

[24] Gibson 145-146. Corpses appear throughout Lorca's poetry. He had a life-long obsession with and terror of death. When he performed his death for Dalí, the painter was so struck by the experience that he made an image of Lorca the focal point of his canvas 'Still Life (Invitation to Sleep),' initiating a phase of several years in which Lorca would be evoked in Dalí's work, just as Lorca would write an "Ode to Salvador Dalí" and try his hand at drawing in a version of Dalí's style.

[25] Dennis, Nigel. "Politics." In *A Companion to Federico García Lorca.* Ed. Federico Bonaddio. Colección Támesis. Serie A: Monografías, 236. London: Tamesis, 2006. 175.

Ultimately it was his work as co-Artistic Director of the La Barraca student theater troupe which taught Lorca the most about theater as a complete enterprise. The company was funded by the Second Republic, with some help from Lorca's friends in the administration. He found a new voice through collaboration and presentation of Spanish classics for both the rural poor and the political intelligentsia of Madrid. There is a genuine pride in Lorca's talk about his work with the company that is rare in Lorca's self-criticism about his writing:

Of course the public likes it. I also appreciate the public: workers, simple people in all the towns, even the young boys, and the students and the workers who also study. Young elegant gentlemen—hollow inside—they don't do anything for us. They come to the theater and say, "Well, it wasn't bad." They learn nothing. They don't understand what is great about the Spanish theater. They call themselves Catholics and monarchists, and yet they are so complacent about our work. So where I like to work is in the villages—to see a villager who stayed behind after the playing of one of Lope's romances, and can't contain himself and bursts out "How well that was said, how well that was done![26]

[26] Robertson, Sandra Cary. *Lorca, Alberti, and the Theater of Popular Poetry.* American University Studies. Series II. Romance Languages and Literature. Vol. 170. New York: Peter Lang, 1991. Quoted on page 190. My translation.

The plays that made Lorca famous internationally, the 'rural trilogy,' occupy the same poetic landscape as the *Gypsy Ballads*, especially the first two: *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma*. Lorca liked to joke along psychoanalytic lines that he had 'an agrarian complex,'[27] and for a time he intended to complete the trilogy with a play about the Biblical destruction of the city of Sodom.[28] When he came to his last two completed plays, *Doña Rosita, the Spinster; or, the Language of Flowers* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Lorca had explicitly turned to his own childhood as an inspiration, and in one unfinished play, *Dreams of My Cousin Aurelia*, the list of characters includes a young boy by the name of Federico.

Sexuality and Art

García Lorca, "The Kiss" (1927)

Biographers and critics disagree about the extent to which Lorca's (homo)sexuality is encoded in his writing, and they also disagree about how he felt about his own sexual preferences and conduct. But no one doubts that sexual desire is one of his major themes.[29]

In his mid-thirties—around the time he wrote *Blood Wedding*—Lorca coined the term *epéntico* to describe himself, defining it as someone who 'could create but not procreate.'[30] The origins of the term are unclear, but Ian Gibson suggests that Lorca had the linguistic term 'epenthesis' in mind. Epenthesis occurs when an extra consonant is inserted into a spoken word that is not represented in the written word. This is common in dialects, for example, 'something' can become 'somepthing' and 'drawing' can become 'drawring.' Perhaps Lorca meant that with the *epéntico,* something not written into the social and biological code has made itself known in public discourse: aesthetic capability. The idea that sexual impulses might be channeled into artistic and intellectual pursuits has its origins in Ancient Greek homosexual culture, and was revived in the 20th century by Freud in his theory of sublimation.

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[27] Gibson 22.

[28] Anderson, Andrew A. "The Strategy of García Lorca's Dramatic Composition 1930-1936." *Romance Quarterly*. Vol. 33. No 2. 1986. 211-229.

[29] The chapter "The Poet and Sex" in Arturo Barea's *Lorca: the Poet and His People* is an attempt to contextualize Lorca's work in the Catholic-dominated hypocritical sexual culture of his place and time without attending to his biography at all. (Trans. Ilsa Barea. New York: Grove, 1949. 34-76.)

[30] Gibson 421.

Lorca's Politics

Anecdote: Federico stumbles into a protest

Sunday, 12 April 1931 was a fine day throughout almost the whole of Spain as the people flocked to the polling stations….

Later in the day the poet experienced in his own flesh what it was like to be at the receiving end of a mounted charge by the Civil Guard. He was sitting with [his friend] Rafael Martínez Nadal on the terrace of the Café Granja del Henar, in the Calle de Alcalá, not far from the Bank of Spain, when a Republican demonstration came towards them from the Puerta del Sol, heading down the street in the direction of the Plaza de la Cibeles. Nadal suggested that they join the crowd, and was surprised when Federico agreed. As they entered the Paseo de Recoletos, with Lorca and Nadal in the front row, a Civil Guard detachment suddenly appeared, blocking the way. There were shots and the marchers fled in panic, Nadal among them. When he looked back he saw the poet trying to escape as fast as his congenitally stiff gait would allow him (even fear could not galvanize him into running), his white suit making him a perfect target for the guards.

[Another friend] witnessed the poet's arrival back at the Granja del Henar—ashen-faced, dusty, his shirt unbuttoned, and wiping the sweat that poured from his forehead with a handkerchief lightly stained with blood (he had fallen and scraped a finger). [he] recalled:

He began to tell us in a loud voice what had happened, with a verbal exuberance, precise details, a vocabulary and a mimicry that were absolutely fantastic. He expressed terror in words that gushed from his mouth, and such was the emotion he generated in the café that someone made him get up on one of the marble tables so that everyone present could hear the account he had begun. I can honestly say that in all the work of García Lorca I have found nothing that could equal what, in a seemingly inextinguishable flood of words, he said in only a few minutes, turning from one side to the other.[31]

A friend observed that when Lorca talked, he moved his hands as if playing an accordion.[32]

[31] Gibson 312.
[32] Stainton, third insert, page 6.

The Origins of *The House of Bernarda Alba*

In Lorca's own words, around the time he finished the play:

In the house adjoining ours [in Asquerosa] lived 'Doña Bernarda,' a very old widow who kept an inexorable and tyrannical watch over her unmarried daughters. They were prisoners deprived of all free will, so I never spoke to them; but I saw them pass like shadows, always silent and always dressed in black…at the edge of the yard there was a shared well, with no water, and I used to go down into it to watch that strange family whose enigmatic behaviour fascinated me. And I observed them. It was a silent and cold hell in the African sun, a tomb for the living under the harsh rule of a dark jailer. And so was born…*The House of Bernarda Alba*….[33]

Lorca misremembered or deliberately misconstrued some details, and borrowed many others for the play:

Frasquita Alba…was not a widow…for she married her second husband in 1893, and died a year before him, in 1924. By reputation she was, though, somewhat domineering and doubtless strict towards her children, of which there were seven, five daughters and two sons. The names of three of the girls were used by Lorca in the play: Amelia, Magdalena and Prudencia….Frasquita's daughter Amelia was married to José Benavides, whose surname Lorca gave to Bernarda's recently dead husband, Antonio María Benavides. Again, José Benavides was known locally as 'Pepico el de Roma' because he came from the village of Romilla or Roma la Chica, and this was the source of Lorca's Pepe el Romano. Two more local characters were the inspiration for the play's Enrique Humanes…and Maximiliano—the real-life 'Maximiliano' lived on the other side of Calle Iglasias, down from the Lorca family house—the husband of the village-girl Paca la Roseta. Two of Lorca's other female characters also had real-life sources, even though they were not women from Asquerosa itself: a distant relative, who apparently suffered from erotic hallucinations, was the inspiration for Bernarda's half-crazed mother; and Poncia, Bernarda's housekeeper, was undoubtedly based on servants in the Lorca household, and particularly on his favourite, Dolores Cuesta.[34]

There was a particular piece of gossip about the family which most interested Lorca:

[O]ne of the daughters of Frasquita Alba's first marriage, Amelia, had married José Benavides, from the village of Romilla…, whose inhabitants are called *romanos*. When Amelia died, Benavides, known familiarly in Asquerosa as 'Pepico el de Roma', married her sister Consuelo.[35]

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[33] Edwards, Gwynne. *Lorca: Living in the Theater.* London: Peter Owen, 2003. 189.
[34] Edwards 189-190.
[35] Gibson 436.

The World Premiere

These are images from the 1945 Argentinian world premiere production, starring Margarita Xirgu in the title role. Xirgu also produced.

According to a relative, the first performance ended as follows (my translation):

"After Bernarda's final "Silence!," the public that overflowed the Teatro Avenida of Buenos Aires burst into applause, dedicated to the poet-playwright and the actress. La Xirgu approached the proscenium and, with a voice full of tears, exclaimed: "He wanted this play to open here and it has opened, but he wanted to be here to present it, and bad fate ['fatalidad'] has stopped him. A fate which makes many of us grieve. Damn the war! [Maldita la guerra!]" An avalanche of flowers poured onto the set."

Maria Delgado writes that Xirgu was "instrumental in establishing the beginning of the García Lorca cult by ensuring that his death was marked with a minute of silence during the performances of his work." (*Other Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth Century Spanish Stage*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. 49-50.)

Character Names

Bernarda Alba (60[36])

Bernarda = The name has a few proposed etymologies – in German, 'intelligent maiden'; in French, 'strong as a bear.' There have been at least eight St. Bernard's.

Alba = Means 'light' or 'dawn' (same linguistic root as the English 'albino' and 'alabaster.') Also the last name of a famous Spanish war hero of the 16th century, the third Duke of Alba.

Maria Josefa (80)

St. Mary, mother of Jesus, and her husband St. Joseph. The names have roots in the Hebrew Bible: in Miriam, sister to Moses, and Joseph, beloved son of Jacob, the third patriarch. (These figures are also important in the Qur'an.) Miriam may mean 'wished-for child,' 'bitter,' 'rebellious' or 'strong waters/sea.' Yosef means 'he will add, the increaser.' Playwright Migdalia Cruz, in her preface to her adaptation of the play, *Another Part of the House*, suggests that we interpret the name as,"This person will add to their learning by experience…."[37]

Angustias (39)

A very rare and antiquated name, derived from *angustia* which means 'anguish, anxiety.' Here is the range of meanings of 'anguish' proposed by the Oxford English Dictionary:

1. Excruciating or oppressive bodily pain or suffering, such as the sufferer writhes under.
2. Severe mental suffering, excruciating or oppressive grief or distress.

The name relates to both the character's emotional state and to her weakening body.

Magdalena (30)

The etymology is 'elevated, magnificent, a tower.' Mary Magdalene was Jesus' most ardent female supporter. She was with him at the crucifixion, and according to the Gospel of John he appeared to her upon his resurrection. She is typically identified with an unnamed prostitute in the Gospel of Luke who is reformed through repentance and faith in Christ. The word 'Magdalen' has been used to indicate a number of European fruits—pears, apples, and peaches among them.

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[36] The only age supplied by Caridad Svich in her translation is Angustias' (39). But the Dramatis Personae in the original manuscript includes a specific age for every character. The relevant manuscript page is reproduced in the Alianza Editorial edition, ed. Mario Hernández, 182.

[37] Ramirez, Elizabeth C. and Catherine Casiano, eds. *La Voz Latina: Contemporary Plays and Performance Pieces by Latinas*. 311. Many of the etymologies in this document are drawn from Cruz.

Amelia (27)

The name possibly originates in a Germanic word 'amal' meaning 'work,' but the more common Latin origin is the verb 'meliorare,' meaning 'to make better.'

Martirio (24)

As Maria Josefa points out in Act III, the name is closely related to the word for 'martyr.'

Adela (20)

From the Germanic 'adal,' meaning 'noble.'

Servant (50)

In the Spanish text she is known as "La Criada," the servant.

Poncia (60)

In the Spanish text, the character's name is "La Poncia." Nicknames play a critical social role in Andalucían pueblo culture, binding individuals to their identities within the group. Nicknames are used lovingly and in hate, and with all shades in between.[38] *Poncia* is a relatively obscure Spanish word for 'bridge,' which is precisely Poncia's social function within the house, and between the house and the pueblo as well.

Prudencia (50)

'Prudence' means "good sense in practical affairs," often with an added quality of cautiousness.

[38] See "Nicknames and the Vito" in *The People of the Sierra* by Julian A. Pitt-Rivers, pages 160-177 (Second Ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1954) and "Nicknames" in *Aggression and Community: Paradoxes of Andalusian Culture* by David D. Gilmore, pages 77-95. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

Offstage Character Names

Tronchapinos (page 325)

Tronchar pinos = to cut down pine trees, so the name means 'the one who cuts down pine trees.' It's probably a nickname.

Antonio María Benavides (page 326)

Antonio = Saint Anthony of Padua was a medieval Portuguese saint of lost things and people. In Spain and Portugal he is a 'marriage saint,' famous for reconciling couples.

María = See above, under Maria Josefa.

Benavides = 'Good Life'

the widower from Darajali (page 328)

Darajali = a real pueblo in the Fuente Vaqueros region. The village name is Arabic in origin.

Pepe el Romano (first appearance page 328)

Pepe = diminuitive for José (Joseph). St. Joseph is husband to St. Mary, mother of Jesus. He is the patron saint of workers. Migdalia Cruz suggests "the supplanter" as a further meaning. Although it is a common Spanish name, it is interesting that Maria Josefa and Pepe el Romano share a hidden name in common.

el Romano = a nickname. The name evokes several layers of symbolic meaning, beyond the fact that Lorca adopted the nickname from the real-life person in the anecdote which inspired the play.

The first level of reference may be to the Roma or Romani people, known also (sometimes pejoratively) as gypsies. The gypsies played a central role in Lorca's poetry from an early stage in his career. His two most famous books, *Poem of the Cante Jondo* and *Gypsy Ballads*, draw directly on elements of Roma culture and experience, and *Blood Wedding* was written in the same vein as well. The gypsies had long been a subject for 19th and early 20th century romantic Spanish poets who tended to idealize marginalized people, but Lorca's poetry is different. He actually grew up with gypsies, and believed that the Roma originated the seed of the Spanish *duende*.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, "Gypsies" (1933)

The foreigners (*forasteros*) in the village, discussed by Bernarda and Poncia (page 334), may or may not be gypsies. Pepe el Romano is definitely not a gypsy, and yet his name makes us think of them. Lorca is playing off of the knowledge he could assume his audiences would have of how important gypsies had been in his earlier work.

There are two further layers to the meaning of the word 'Romano.' The first reaches even further back in the history of Andalucía and into Lorca's childhood. On the road from Granada to Fuente Vaqueros, the town where Lorca grew up and which the village of the play is based on, stands an old Moorish watchtower known as the Torre de Roma. Lorca played there as a child, and in a childhood essay he recorded that "according to the locals the tower was inhabited by a giant lizard that violated the tombs in the little cemetery of Romilla and ate the female corpses but 'respected' the male."[39]

The Torre stands guard over a large central estate in the rural regions around Granada called the Soto de Roma. In his travel book *Lorca's Granada*, Ian Gibson suggests two reasons for that the tower was named 'Roma.' One possible origin is an etymology in a medieval Arabic word for 'Christian.' The other possible etymology is a medieval Arabic word for 'pomegranate.' Gibson is skeptical about this one, but perhaps Lorca knew it and had it in mind when he wrote Martirio's line: "Yes! I say it without shame. Yes! Let my heart burst open like a bitter pomegranate. I love him!" The final link in the symbolic chain? The word for pomegranate in Spanish is *granada*. If 'Roma' is also linked to Martirio's line, we could consider Pepe as the symbolic incarnation of the city of Granada.

Paca la Roseta (page 334**)**

Paca = Diminuitive of 'Francisa.' Roseta = Rose, flower commonly associated with love and desire. A nickname.

Maximiliano (page 334)

[No notes]

[39] Gibson, Ian. *Lorca's Granada: a Practical Guide*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992. 127-128. References to "Gibson" in the footnotes indicate his biography of Lorca unless otherwise indicated.

Don Arturo (page 335)

Don = A term of respectful address. This is the only person any character calls 'don' (or 'doña,' the female equivalent). "People assert that the courtesy title of *Don* is the privilege of those who hold a university degree, who have a 'career'….If a person is raised to the status of a career he no longer belongs entirely to [the pueblo] but to the wider community of the educated. People no longer feel equal with such a person."[40]

Adelaide (page 336)

In the Spanish text her name is Adeleida, making the connection to Adela even more obvious. German etymology is "of a noble kind." The city of Adelaide, Australia was named in 1836, which popularized the name at that time.

Enrique Humanes (page 337)

Enrique = German etymology is 'home ruler.' Humanes = Catalan for 'human.'

Evaristo el Colorín (page 347)

Evaristo = from Greek Evaristus, which means 'well-pleasing.' el Colorín = the colorín is a kind of finch, and Evaristo's favorite pastime, after marrying Poncia, is breeding finches: therefore, a nickname. It also means 'red-head, ginger.' Finally, the term is part of a nonsense phrase that marks the end of a children's story in many Spanish-speaking countries: "Colorín Colorado, esta cuento se ha terminado.'

Librada (page 367)

Librada = Root means 'the chosen one.' A very old-fashioned name.

[40] Pitt-Rivers, 72-73.