



A PSYCHOLOGICAL READING OF FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA'S BLOOD WEDDING

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Abstract: The study introduces an example of Spanish theatre in the twentieth century. It presents Federico G. Lorca's Blood Wedding (1933), which is a unique play due to its panoramic presentation of rural life and tradition in Andalusia. The study tries to answer the following key question: From a psychological perspective, how do the characters behave in the play? Thus, the study basically aims to answer the question by applying the main concepts of Psychoanalysis to the characters. Also, it tackles some patriarchal images and women suffering. The play is based on a true story of struggle between two families, which took place in Almeria. It talks about two men who love a girl and try to get her. The play ends tragically with the death of those two protagonists, leaving women to suffer alone and surrender to their fate. Finally, the paper ends up with a conclusion that sums up the findings of the study.

Keywords: Traumatic Memories, Projection, Defense Mechanism, Guilt Complex, Thanatos.

Introduction

Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) was a Spanish poet, composer, playwright, and painter. He was born in Fuente Vaqueros, Granada province, Andalusia, which has a great influence in shaping his literary character. His literary works are full of Andalusian elements, including settings, names, traditions, etc.. Lorca is considered one of the foremost twentieth century poets and dramatists in the Spanish language. He has an essential role in establishing what's called "Generation of 1927¹" or "Generación del 1927" in association with others. Lorca's literary writing can be divided into poetry, which includes "Gypsy Ballads" (1928) and "Lament for a Bullfighter" (1935), and tragedies including Blood Wedding (1933), Yerma (1934), and The House of Bernarda Alba (1936). With the advent of the Spanish Civil War (1936), Lorca was executed due to his liberal tendencies, and the charges of being queer (Luebering 142-43).

¹ **Generation of 1927** is a group of poets and writers in Spain, who quickly shined as stars in the 1920s. The name is taken from the year when many of them composed significant literary works, affected by Surrealism, Symbolism, and Futurism (Webster 454).

Blood Wedding is an example of Spanish theatre which focuses on traditions and rural life that face many challenges. It is divided into three acts, which all consist of seven scenes. The events of the tragic play are set in Andalucía in the 1930s and based on a true story. The play is about a mother who is afraid of losing her younger son as she lost the rest of her family members through a dispute that took place between two families many years ago. The son or the Bridegroom loves a girl who belongs to the Felix's family, that is responsible for murdering his father and eldest brother. It is worth mentioning that the girl or what's called "the Bride" was engaged to her cousin, Leonardo Felix, who broke up with her and married another one a few years ago. The Mother agrees to ask for her hand after a great deal of persuasion in an effort to unite the two families. Everything works out fine until the wedding night when Leonardo, eloped with the Bride which causes a tragic end.

Analysis

Blood Wedding starts with a yellow room where the Bridegroom asks his mother to give him a knife to cut and eat grapes in the vineyard. The Mother attacks directly knives as shown in the play "Knives, knives... Curse them all, and the wretch who invented them..." (Lorca 5). Instead of being a way of life through cutting grapes and preparing food, knives become a symbol of death by killing both the father and brother of the Bridegroom. In other words, the power of the knife is a key topic in the play. It has taken most of the male characters of the text. It is the number one enemy for the Mother. At the same time, the Bridegroom believes that it is dangerous but a necessity of life. Mentioning the knife at the begging of the events foreshadows bloody news at the end. Psychologically speaking, the Mother deals with traumatic memories. They can be transmitted from the unconscious mind to the conscious when someone stimulates them, as happened with the Mother. In this case, social and individual awareness is needed to face the problem, and avoid such hysterics suffer (Bohleber 328). The Mother is unable to forget such painful memories as indicated below:

MOTHER: If I lived a hundred years I could speak of nothing else. First, your father... and then, your brother... I'll never be quiet. The months pass and pain still pricks my eyes, to the very roots of my hair. (Lorca 6)

Furthermore, the Mother wishes her son to be a girl, or at least, she does not want him to go outside her home. There, he could sit and sew, which reflects a reverse in gender roles as a direct result of what happened to the Mother. From a psychological perspective, she may suffer from fear of abandonment, which refers to feelings of losing friends or close people, whether physically or spiritually. It is highly connected with fear of death or fear of being alone. In this case, the Mother is afraid of losing her son, which leads her to be in isolation (Tyson 17). The Bridegroom tries to stop talking about such a thing previously, stating:

BRIDEGROOM: Let's change the subject. (Lorca 5)

The above is psychologically taken under the concept of defenses. To be more specific, selective perception is the applicable term for this behavior. The last is defined as the process of "hearing and seeing only what we feel we can handle" (Tyson 15). The Mother insists that whenever she hears anything connected to the Felix family, she feels pain. The following line supports such an idea "... yet I feel, when she's named, as if I'd been struck on the forehead with a stone" (7 Lorca). Although the Mother suffered a lot, she still holds on to Andalusian traditions. First, she has dedicated herself to raising her son, believing that "One woman for one man, and that's it!" (8). Secondly, she asks about the mother of the Bride, focusing on the

concept of “like daughter like mother”. She wants a girl who knows how to bake and sew. The third is related with asking her son to make a large number of children. Her grandsons will revive the earth while the granddaughters will be devoted with domestic life. Finally, the Mother advises her son never to kiss the Bride unless she becomes his wife.

The first scene of act one ends with a female character who enriches the story of the text with some significant details. She is the Neighbour who could be a voice of wisdom. The details begin by answering the questions of the Mother, by stating that the Bride’s mother “didn’t love her husband”. It foreshadows that something will be wrong in marriage. Then, she adds that “the girl had a fiancé a while back”, who was “Leonardo... of the Felix family” (10-11). She asks the Mother to avoid being a stumbling block to marriage because Leonardo was not guilty. He was a child when the scuffle broke out. She adds that:

NEIGHBOUR: Don’t stand in the way of your son’s happiness. Say nothing to him. You are old. I, too. You and I must be silent.(12)

The word “silent” is quite significant because it reflects the role of woman in patriarchal society. In other words, woman is oppressed, which contradicts the principles of feminism. A postcolonial feminist activist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942-), attacks the silence of woman, stating that women have to speak and represent themselves. She focuses on the intellectual woman in formulating an identity and stopping ignoring women’s right to equal opportunities. She adds that woman may revolt against any authority that restricts her (104). In *Blood Wedding*, women are fated to accept their ill fate, as happened with the Mother or the Bride when she tried to revolt against traditions and eloped with Leonardo.

The second scene of act one starts with Leonardo’s wife and her mother-in-law. Both were singing to Leonardo’s child, who could not sleep at night. The lyrics indicate a bad omen to the next events of the play, as mentioned “Sleep, my rose... They went to the river. Ay, how they went! Blood running, quicker than water” (13 Lorca). The quotation is highly connected with the Mother after the death of her son (the Bridegroom), as if saying, "sleep my child" who did not sleep at the wedding night because he was chasing Leonardo and the Bride. Thus, the settings of time and place of the song echo those at the end of the play.

Events on the ground are moving quickly when Leonardo finds out that his cousin is getting engaged. He certainly couldn’t control himself when he sharply interrupted a girl who was talking about the preparations for the wedding. The scene shows that he suffers psychologically from irritability¹. It is worth mentioning that Leonardo is the unique character who has a name. On the contrary, the others are described according to their social rank or functions, such as Mother of the Bridegroom, Bridegroom, Bride, Wife of Leonardo, Father of the Bride, Neighbour, etc. It means that he is a person deprived of social roles. He is going to break traditions, preferring his own interests (Edwards 20). His wife starts thinking that he stays in love with his cousin. She immediately assumes that something was not right and asked him:

WIFE: (To Leonardo) What’s wrong? What ideas are milling around inside that head of yours?
Don’t push me off, so, knowing nothing... (Lorca 18)

The third scene of the same act begins with the Mother who wears plain black, which is an indication of mourning in a typical traditional village of Andalucía. To remember grief is a matter of respect for the dead

¹ **Irritability** is “an emotional process that is characterized by a proneness to experience negative affective states, such as anger, annoyance, and frustration, which may or may not be outwardly expressed” (Barata).

which traces its roots back to hundreds of years. The Mother describes the journey to the Bride in which she does not see a tree or a house. In other words, the road is a wasteland which is highly connected to crimes and murder. Killing her husband and son paved the way to the dry plains. The main message of the playwright behind such words could be that killing humans means killing nature. Her husband focused on rehabilitation of degraded agricultural land by planting trees and making farms. The next conversation supports such a claim:

MOTHER: Your father would have covered it with trees.

BRIDEGROOM: Without water?

MOTHER: He'd have found some. The three years he was married to me, he planted ten cherry-trees. (Recalling.) The three walnut-trees by the mill, a whole vineyard, and an orpine...
(Lorca 21)

The orpine has deeper symbolism in which it represents a long life. Also, it has other synonyms, such as "Live Long" and "Life Everlasting" (Grieve 773). They all serve to present an irony in which the man who planted these kinds of flowers, unfortunately, lived a short life. The same theme continues in the house of the Bride's father. The two families hope that the marriage will join both families and their lands. The father of the fiancée attacks those who sell their land, believing in buying only. He supports the idea that humans can revive a dead land by stating "but strong arms could make it good" (Lorca 23).

The father of the Bride presents a traditional Andalusian daughter who gets up each day at dawn to make breakfast. She speaks softly and knows the duties of domestic life. The Mother describes her son as a man who has never had a relationship with a girl. He never even touched a cup of wine. Everything is fine but the Bride looks tense. It is reflected in her reaction against her maid when the last asked her to see the marriage gifts, through refusing and biting her hand in agony. It could be an indication of rejecting marriage, as if she is remembering her first fiancé. It seems that she is still in love with him. The scene gets complicated when the Maid tells the Bride that Leonardo was seen near the house at night. More challenging, Leonardo appears on his horse:

BRIDE: Silence! Damn your tongue! (The sound of a horse is heard.)

MAID: (At the window.) Look, Lean out. Was that him?

BRIDE: It was!

The aforementioned words are psychologically important. Leonardo's behavior could be taken under the concept of the "id" which is connected with breaking the community rules and norms of society. In this case, he follows his desires unconsciously, including "overt aggression" and "sexual passions". The Bride's thoughts about Leonardo may put her in the same box of analysis. The scene ends with these signs without any action on the ground. The following events start with the Maid who prepares the Bride for the wedding. The Maid stands for the voice of society. She gives advice to the Bride about a wife's duty. Also, she asks her to be happy and avoid sadness. In a psychological way, the Maid stands for the "superego" which is controlled by the "morality principle" (Guerin et al. 158).

The Bride tells the Maid that she loves the Bridegroom, but the truth is the exact opposite. She is a paradoxical character who knows how to manipulate others. She seeks to take revenge on Leonardo who left her and married another woman. She wants him to witness her marriage just as she witnessed his. The first guest of the wedding was Leonardo, who came early. He starts his speech by blaming the Bride for being

the reason behind their separation. He states that she forced him to take this step, as mention “Forced to it by you” (Lorca 33). Such a case could be taken under the concept of “projection”, which is psychologically used to describe people who accuse others behind their failure. It is a kind of defense mechanism that unconsciously decreases anxiety through avoiding the truth (Tyson 15).

The same thing happened with the Bride, who accused Leonardo’s pride to be blame for breaking up with him. He knows that someone is guilty. He believes that his pride led him to remorse, which is highly related to a “guilt complex”. The last occurs when “an overactive superego creates an unconscious sense of guilt” (Guerin et al. 185). The following quotation shows Leonardo’s feelings about separation:

LEONARDO: To be silent and consumed by fire is the worst punishment on earth, of those we inflict on ourselves. What use was pride to me, not seeing you, and you alone, lying there night after night? None at all! It served to stoke the flames higher! ... When the flames reach the heart, they can’t be quenched! (Lorca 34)

Up to now, the Bride asks Leonardo to leave her undisturbed when the Bridegrooms reached with a group of his folks who are singing. Furthermore, she requests the Bridegroom to go to the church quickly in order to be his wife. The Mother begins to question why are Leonardo and his wife here? The Father of the Bride answers that “Today is a day of forgiveness!” (39). The Mother replies that she is able to tolerate but not to forgive. The importance of that lies in that she still suffers from traumatic painful memories. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, tolerate means “to allow somebody to do something that you do not agree with or like” (Hornby and Ashby 1368). Whereas, forgive is “to stop feeling angry with somebody who has done something to harm, annoy or upset you” (504). That implied, her suffering at the time was more mental than physical.

The betrothed went to the church as they planned. Leonardo’s wife asked her husband to join her to follow the wedding. He refused to go by cart. The real meaning of his behavior is that he does not like to go with her. Insisting on her opinion, she says:

WIFE: And I’m not the woman to go to a wedding without my husband. I can’t take much more!
(Lorca 41)

This quotation could be analyzed from the point of view of Psychoanalysis. Fear of betrayal is the suitable concept to be applied on such a case. It is a disturbing sense that is based on the lack of confidence between the two sides (Tyson 16). In this condition, such a relationship is not based on love, depending on the philosophy of that there is no love without trust, which was adopted by Nietzsche¹ (Fraser 165).

However, both Leonardo and his wife came to the wedding where the Mother and the Father predicted that they would bring various problems. The Mother believes that crime is a matter of inheritance. She realizes that appearances are deceptive. The text explains that she has long suffered from being alone due to the social norms that keep women silent, but in recent times, the Mother tries to stand against everything preventing her from expressing her feelings. She has nothing to lose, stating that “... I have to speak out. And today above all. Because now there’ll be no one left in the house but me” (Lorca 44). Here,

¹ **Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** (1844–1900) was a German philosopher who has a dramatic impact on shaping modern philosophy due to his controversial ideas.

there is a revolutionary character who seeks her rights. She is the model of Spivak's concept of womanhood, who is able to represent herself.

Trying to change the subject, the Father of the Bride believes that it is the wrong time to discuss such a thing. The Mother and the Father sit down and start to talk about grandchildren. The Father prefers a lot of sons to revive the land. In fact, it is a reflection of patriarchal society. Unlike him, the Mother wants daughters who do not know how to use guns like sons. They only know how to sew and embroider where they live a domestic life. For her, it is like saying "Crime is related to men". This struggle between good and evil has been going on since the time of Cain and Abel. To put it in another way, the conflict between Leonardo and the Bridegroom echoes the first murder committed on Earth, which means that it is an eternal struggle.

The wedding continues by presenting a beautiful traditional heritage which is associated with the bridal pin. Somehow, it is not only widespread in Andalusia, but it is also scattered throughout many countries, including those in the Arab world. According to tradition, the lucky girl who takes the pin from the Bride, will get married before others. Some girls are waiting to get what they want, while others do not know the rules of the game. The following words assert such a claim:

SECOND GIRL: For what? But either pin means one will be married doesn't it?

BRIDE: Either.

FIRST GIRL: It's just that one of us will marry before the other.

BRIDE: Do you wish to so much?

SECOND GIRL: (Shyly) Yes. (Lorca 50)

The Bridegroom appears behind the Bride where he embraces her. Leonardo's wife comes to ask whether her husband is there or not. She does not find him, then, she leaves nervously. The Bridegroom tries to dance with his beloved but she refuses even to kiss her. She says that she wants to rest. She goes from the doorway, leaving her supposed husband alone. The Mother of the Bridegroom, the Father of the Bride, and the Maid arrive respectively. They all believe that something is wrong. The Wife of Leonardo comes again and tells them that her husband and the Bride eloped to an unknown place. The hidden desire of the Mother appears when she asks her son and his relatives to follow those who have fled and kill them. No excuses are allowed and it is a suitable time to take her revenge. The scene symbolizes a blood relationship when the whole clan follows the Bridegroom and becomes under his command. Thus ends the last scene of the second act.

The first scene of the next act starts with the same theme of blood ties, which are still stronger than anything. The playwright presents three characters (woodcutters) who work as a chorus. They comment on the events of the play in detail. First, they provide the spectators that Leonardo and the Bride follow their blood relationship. Secondly, a move in this direction would lead to death. From a psychological point of view, human desires tend to either life or death. The last is often called "thanatos¹", which is defined as a power that leads people towards aggression and self-destruction (Tyson 22). One may conclude that the fate of those couple is doomed to fail and self-destruction. The words below outline the role of the woodcutters in giving key opinions:

¹ **Thanatos** is taken from Greek mythology, which refers to the personification of death (Platt 186).

FIRST WOODCUTTER: They tried to deceive themselves, but in the end blood proved stronger.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: Blood!

FIRST WOODCUTTER: They followed the urge of their blood. (Lorca 56)

The woodcutters add that the Bridegroom's face becomes pale, which indicates the gloomy future of the family. He believes that there is an external force driving him to revenge. He insists that he stands for his brother and father, who died unfairly. It is worth mentioning that the scene atmosphere became darker when the Moon disappeared, reflecting difficult times for all the characters. At the same time, Leonardo states that he was taken to the Bride against his will. He tried to forget her and create a barrier between their houses. He adds that "But then I climbed on my horse and the horse came to your door" (Lorca 65). Thus, the playwright tries to say that man is fated in a way or another. Bearing in mind, Leonardo's attempt to escape his fate echoes Oedipus's effort to prevent fulfilling the prophecy of the oracle, who predicted that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother. However, despite the fact that Oedipus left his family, but the prophecy is took place at the end.

The scene ends with Leonardo hugging the Bride and recognizing his destiny. The last scene of Blood Wedding affirms that a woman is a victim of social traditions. Leonardo's mother-in-law is aware of the situation. She directs her speech to Leonardo's wife, who became the first woman victim after what happened. First, she lost her husband. Subsequently, spending the rest of her life alone is a matter of traditions, as happened with the Mother of the Bridegroom. Finally, raising her children will be another burden. The following quotation endorses that view:

MOTHER-IN-LAW: (Forcefully)

You, take to your house.
Bravely, alone in your house.
To grow old and to weep.
Through the locked door.
Never. Not dead or alive.
... (71)

The second woman victim is the Mother, who heard the news of killing both men with deep bitterness. Then, there was nothing but to sleep free between four walls. She is no longer afraid of knives or weapons because she lost all of her family members. She says with sorrow "They're all dead now. I'll be able to sleep at night, sleep free of the fear of guns and knives" (73). The Mother is aware of the domestic life in which she stands for traditions. Whereas, her son could be a symbol of modernity who looks to the outside world. He serves as a barrier to her social conventions. Modernity is prevailed and reflected in the text but the consequences are tragic. Thus, the Mother's point of view is respected and has many messages to future generations.

In that regard, leaving home and looking at the outside world has become a common theme since the social and cultural changes that took place after the industrial revolution. In "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" (1800), William Wordsworth (1770–1850) presents a protagonist (Michael) who lost his son (Luke) when the last refused rural life and tried to discover the outside world. This is what happened with the Mother and her son when she tried to stop him from going out at the beginning of the play. Thus, she lost him when he

went out at the end. The same motifs of Blood Wedding can be found in John Millington Synge¹'s *Riders to the Sea* (1904). First, both plays took place in rural life. Secondly, the hands of women are tied to facing the new challenges and the surrender to their destiny in losing their sons. Finally, the fate of the fathers is repeated with the sons. The same thing happened with mothers and daughters (Delgado 74).

The last woman victim is the Bride, who plays the role of the oppressed and the oppressor. She became the oppressor when she led her husband to death. She tried to revolt against traditions or her father but her revolution is doomed to fail. To dig deep, she is the oppressed because she lost her honour, husband, and father. Moreover, she feels guilty and asks the Mother to take her revenge by killing her because she does not deserve to be alive, stating "Take your revenge; here I am! Look how tender my throat is" (75). Psychologically speaking, "guilt complex" could be a suitable term for such a case. It happens when "an overactive superego creates an unconscious sense of guilt" (Guerin et al. 158).

Conclusion

It is important for the reader to understand the psychological behavior of the characters. The aims of the study could be achieved through applying the following concepts; traumatic memories, fear of abandonment, irritability, id, projection, defense mechanism, guilt complex, Thanatos, etc. *Blood Wedding* echoes any ancient Greek tragedy in which it contains three acts. Also, it includes some characters who play a role of the chorus, such as the Woodcutters, the Moon, the Beggar-woman, and some girls. They enrich and give significant comments on the events of the play.

The Mother is a safety valve that stands for social norms and simple life, including issues of marriage, fertility, and agriculture. Leonardo has a truly satanic ability and energy that is based on forbidden love. He even connects himself to fire and flames, which is a direct reference to the devil. The Bride has a complementary role to Leonardo. Like his mother, the Bridegroom makes sacrifices for the sake of tradition and society. As a result of what is done, women remain in tatters in which they are victims of some social restrictions. Finally, the play ends with many moral messages and unique life lessons, leaving the audience to think about them.

¹ **Edmund John Millington Synge** (1871 – 1909) was one of the pillars of twentieth century drama who had a great influence on reviving Irish literature (Synge).

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