

DRAMA *Works*

Plays Through Practice

BLOOD WEDDING

by

LORCA

EXTRACT

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Extract

WORKING THROUGH THE PLAY IN A PRACTICAL WAY

Before starting the practical work that follows, it is assumed that all students will have read the play and will have some idea of the plot and the characters.

If there hasn't been time to read the whole thing, then at least it is a good idea to have read the plot synopsis and the character sketches earlier in this guide.

As the group works through the play in a practical way, make sure that they all keep accurate records of any decisions made and of the exercises themselves. They should realise that decisions made are not set in stone and will need adjustment, especially when the work-through of the text is completed.

See the Notes on Page 2 for details of the editions and page numbers used.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE Pages 3-9 [Pages 33-39]

Colour is a very strong presence in all of Lorca's work. Yellow is a sun colour, bright and warm - but also masculine. In most mythology, the sun is masculine whilst the moon is feminine. The Mother's dwelling on masculine virility is thus high-lighted. Yellow is also the colour of ripe wheat, which the Mother also likens men to. Certainly the Bridegroom is ripe and eager for marriage. But ripe wheat is cut down and so will the Bridegroom be. The colour yellow is thus the colour of life and of death-in-life - the kernel which lies at the heart of all living things. This is the way Lorca works. His cryptic seeming stage directions for setting conceal a depth of allusion which must be worked at. It is always worth brainstorming all of the symbols that litter his work; that way you will come up with the multi-layers which are common to him.

From the beginning the Bridegroom is linked to cultivation - the male principle in peasant communities always being the tending of the fields and crops. Here he is heading for the vineyard that he's bought and is happy to dine on the grapes. There is a suggestion of ripeness and fertility carried through in this opening to the play.

Try this opening up to 'Give me the knife':

lightly - the lines throw-away - like a modern son calling out to his mother that he's just off to work. The responses from the Mother echo this lightness

excitedly - the vineyard represents his hope for marriage. His readiness for the fruition of marriage is shown by the ecstatic way he thinks of eating the warm ripeness of the grapes. The mother's response could be indulgent, maternal

cautiously, solicitously - in this version the son is always anxious about his mother, who has remained caught up in the past and has become too clingy of her last remaining son. The mother's responses are anxious

Which do you think works best?

Mother's reaction to the mention of a knife is instant. Knives are such a potent image in the play - for death, for the cruelty of Fate, for the sharpness of the Mother's desire for revenge - as well as being something physical and real, a kind of symbol of the male organ and of male aggression.

The first mention of 'the knife word' from the bridegroom must be consistent with the tone you have decided on in the opening lines. He could be mentioning it lightly - after all, it's an everyday tool - or cautiously. Or it may be that he says it lightly but realises immediately what a mistake he's made, because his mother is locked into this endless cycle of bitterness and always reacts like this to the word. Oops! Thus the laughter with which he accompanies the line 'To cut them' might be embarrassed laughter

- laughing off his mistake - or just the good happy mood he is in, having bought the vineyard he has wanted.

Experiment around this whole opening section now, trying out all the permutations.

Once Mother has started, there is no stopping her. It is up to you whether you want to make this opening portentous or keep it light, even slightly comical, as we witness the Bridegroom's sighs and impatience with the whole groove in which his mother appears to be stuck.

Try out the Mother's speech as one continuous flow, up to 'the serpent inside the chest' Top of Page 4 [Top of Page 34.]:

**muttering under her breath, as if this were something she says often,
 like a mantra**

**becoming more and more vociferous, her face twisting with pain, her
 body rocking in rhythm**

In each case, she is looking for the knife - but in the second version, her pain might interrupt the search at times.

'The serpent inside the chest' image is one of the clever ways in which Lorca builds up his multi-layered images. The serpent is the knife, the chest a piece of kitchen furniture, but now discuss all the ideas that serpent, knife and chest suggest. Even the shape of a knife, its silvery gleam, is part of the image of snake/knife and the lodging of the knife in a solid thing like a chest suggests both its literal 'hiding', its own solidity and the solidity - and yet vulnerability - of a man's chest. It links with the solid strength of 'a man who's a bull' in the next speech and marvels at how such a slight thing as a knife can stop so much massive power. The lurking of the knife in the kitchen drawer reminds us of the lurking of a snake in the grass.... and so on, and so on....

When she says 'I don't know how you dare carry a knife on your body, nor how I can leave the serpent inside the chest,' she is referring to the temptation to use the weapon - its sly subtle temptation like the serpent who tempted Eve. But it is both temptation and invitation: carrying a knife on his body is like an invitation to other knives to lodge themselves in his body.

An understanding of the images Lorca uses, and the way they work to create an atmosphere, is essential to the designing of the play as well as your own understanding of it. **As you go along, make a list of the images that recur throughout, so that when you are considering your set design, costume and so on you can consider whether colour and imagery ought to be an actively suggestive feature.**

I think that carnations and geraniums, two flowers which Mother associates with her dead menfolk, though they are available in our garden bouquets in a variety of colours are, for her, the scarlet of blood. The most striking colour for both these flowers is red.

'... hopelessness pecks at my eyes... even at the roots of my hair.' With this line Mother creates a startling image of death - as if she died with her menfolk who may, more literally have lost their eyes to scavenging birds and who, as she says in the next speech, are lying under the ground 'full of weeds... turned to dust.' The contrast between the grey, dusty colourlessness of weeds compared with geraniums - the colour of live blood coursing through the veins - is potent. A similar resonance is created by contrasting the dryness of dust and the liquid of blood, which is life - though this works by suggestion, as does so much of Lorca's imagery.

The Bridegroom's 'Are you going to stop?' is described as 'forceful'. He has clearly had enough. Is it a cry of anger? Of despair? Or the whimper of someone who cannot bear, yet again, to hear this litany? **Experiment with this, using the line as an**

interruption to Mother's flow. Your decision will affect how the previous 'Is that it?' is said. If angry, the earlier line will be irritated, or bad-temperedly trying to divert her - perhaps even by forcing a laugh.

Finally the Bridegroom asks 'Do you want me to kill them?' **Try this:**

calmly, even reasonably, but with an edge of exhaustion - as if he has heard his mother speak such things so many times that he will do anything now to shut her up

challengingly, matching her passion, at the end of his tether - so wound up that he will happily rush out and find the murderers now to kill them

challengingly again, but more seriously, looking into her eyes - trying to shock her into realising what she appears to be asking him to do and its possible consequences

Your choice will affect the way Mother answers. For instance, if he answers with passion and looks as though he might even rush out there and then, she would restrain him with equal passion - the passion of terror that she could lose him too.

How do you think Mother's over-protectiveness of her son will reveal itself physically? Does she cling to him? Or simply touch him tentatively and use her voice as her rope to bind him there?

Carefully read in pairs from ...'The murderers, in gaol, as large as life, looking at the mountains...' to the Bridegroom's 'Come on!' All the hatred for the murderers that Mother feels must colour the first line, strongly enough to bring about the Bridegroom's response. **Then experiment with the tone of her fear for this last remaining son.**

Having tried out different ways of doing this, try the same short section out in purely physical terms. Express what is going on with your bodies and facial expressions alone. Exaggerate to the highest capacity - e.g. Mother clinging and wrapping her self around him, her son extracting himself from her, detaching her arms like tendrils, which return to cling again, his expression one of:

disgust?

embarrassment?

disbelief 'don't be silly'?

attempting to turn it all into a game, a joke?

then play around with the 'levels' of this physical approach. If what I have just described is number 10 level - full on - then try out a very under-played version - perhaps number 2 or 3 - then number 5, number 8 and so on.

Once you have experimented physically, put movement and words together [it would be best if you could learn these few lines] and experiment again. The four expressions from the son suggested above are also the possible tones in which he might say 'Come on!'

You ought to do this for a number of sections as you work your way through the text. That way you will hit upon a 'level' that feels right for this passionate play. Try to avoid being too English about the presentation of the play - this text throbs with heat and Spanish passion - there is nothing cool or laid back about it. Hopefully, by constantly physicalising like this and playing with levels, you will break through the embarrassment that is endemic in our culture.

Which of the levels you have been playing with is the level of 'naturalism' do you think?

Mother's anxiety is turned into a subdued tone for 'I'd like you to be a woman...' A daughter would give her none of the anxiety she feels for a son. The triviality of the things she suggests they would do both tell us something about the life of women in this culture and period and acts as a contrast to the lives of men. Note how all the

descriptions of men are done in terms of Nature, to reflect the fact they are constantly working in the fields and with their crops. They are described as flowers, bulls, and, on the next page, wheat. In this way men are linked with the earth, as if like crops or flowers they grow naturally out of it. Animals like bulls bring men down to brute passions, unthinking creatures who are slaves to their passions, glorying in the power of their muscular bodies.

In contrast, women have protected, safe lives indoors, away from Nature, away from the sun, the masculine symbol, and light. Only in their fertility are they linked with the earth - bearing children to their men as the soil bears its crops.

The Bridegroom offers to take his mother down to the vineyards to assuage her fears. There, she can keep an eye on him. But to be in the vineyards is not her place. His father used to take her there but the inference is that it is where they made love, and where he made a baby with her - a further link between the fertility of the vines and of herself.

Thus 'Would you put me under the vineshoots?' has the suggestion of fertility and of age. Is he going to bury her under the vines to make the soil rich and fertile, or is he going to, like his father, lay her down there sexually? Obviously, if you decide the latter, then she would be joking, teasing, the emphasis on the word 'me'. **Try this last line with both inferences - in either case I think she is trying for a light tone, teasing.**

The Bridegroom responds with a matching lightness. Try 'You old woman... etc':

**he swinging her around, her laughing but delighted by the show of strength, the repetitions of the word 'old' purely teasing and affectionate
making a kind of dance of it, and using the line as an accompanying rhythm, the bridegroom half lifting, half manipulating her through, say, a tango
lifting her and giving her a little shake before returning her to the ground. He is still irritated by her protectiveness and her obsession with the past - that is what should come through the tone, a kind of affectionate reproof
with reverence and a kind of awe, handling her as if she was a precious object, respectfully**

Discuss your thoughts after these experiments.

Is there a hint of criticism in Mother's 'That's what I like. Men to be men; wheat wheat'? Discuss whether you think that her overprotectiveness could have made the Bridegroom into a little bit of a sissy. She could be torn between her memory of her own 'real' men and the young man she has raised and perhaps stifled. Should there be a physical contrast between the Bridegroom and Leonardo, the former being the young green wheat and the latter being the older riper wheat? In other words, since it is clear that the Bridegroom is still virgin, perhaps kept that way by his mother's watchfulness over him, should we be seeing Leonardo as more of a man - on a par with the dead father and brother of the Bridegroom? Leonardo has already fathered a child and proved himself sexually, after all.

So the Mother's attitude to her son carries both inferences. She wants to keep him young, a boy, to protect him, but she also admires men who are like forces of nature, not even faithful to one woman: 'Your grandfather left a son on every street corner.' Part of her pain in this first section is her realisation that she cannot stop the tide of his growing-up.

**Look at the Bridegroom's 'What about me, mother?' Try it:
impatiently and firmly - she keeps wittering on about the past when he wants to bring her back to the present. He is not going to let her**

**divert him again
proudly - an attempt to show her that he is a man too. Accompany this
by drawing himself up, standing firmly
anxiously - she keeps evading the issue of his desire to marry the Bride
and he is afraid she will sidestep again
Which works best?**

The Mother's 'You? What?' shows the depth of her distraction. She is so focused on the past that she is not being sensitive to her son's present needs.

Mother's 'No' is clearly as doubtful as the next 'I'm not sure.'

The first ominous note about the Bride is set here. She is everything that a good wife-to-be should be, with the right housewifely skills, and yet.... at the mention of her name 'it's as if they were pounding my head with a stone.' She goes on to explain that the reason for this distress is because she will be left alone, but we are meant to note the very strong response Mother has and see it as more significant than just the son's leaving home.

Take time now to discuss what you feel about the Mother's protectiveness over her dead. She will not leave them. Every day she visits their graves and, one feels, renews in this way her sorrow and her desires for revenge. The language of revenge that she uses is very extreme indeed. How would you want to play this ruling aspect of Mother? She is the driving force of the violence in the play. She is locked into the past. In the end she brings about the end of her own remaining son, because her desire for revenge is stronger than her protective love for him. How naturalistic should she be? Or is she an archetypal character - the spirit of Vengeance itself perhaps?

Lorca was steeped in the traditions of his country where, in the cut-off rural districts far from civilisation, little had changed in thousands of years. He has been at pains to describe this to us: the traditional roles of men and women, the jealousies and feuds which could last through many generations. These blood feuds, which took literally the Old Testament idea of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' and took it to its logical conclusion 'a life for a life,' were still rife until surprisingly recently in Spain [and many old cultures still hold a lot of the same beliefs and traditions even today]. Brainstorm this idea, looking at the traditional ideas of men's place and women's place in a marriage and attitudes to faithlessness in marriage too.

Lorca famously based this play on a newspaper article he had read. It struck him as a piece of violence that was as timeless as the gypsy melodies and songs which were another of his passions. It is noticeable that no one knows why there is a feud between the Felix's and the Mother's family. We know that murders have taken place but not why. The feud might have stretched over generations. The reasons for it are no longer important; the habit of hatred itself is self-perpetuating.

I always feel when I am reading this play that Lorca is creating a piece of mythology. The lack of names backs this idea up. The way the characters are swept along and are unable to prevent themselves also confirms this idea. It is as if the characters are trapped in a cyclical story which, over thousands of years, has played again and again and which is inescapable until the pattern is broken - which doesn't happen in this play.

All of this needs to be discussed and thought about. It is essential to decide whether the Mother is a person, in a naturalistic sense, who can share some part of the blame for what happens - because she is trapped in the past and refuses to move on - or whether she is the Spirit of Revenge, a kind of symbol for the ways of the past, who is as caught up in the pattern as everyone else in the story.

**Having had that discussion, try Mother's speech near the bottom of Page 5 [Page 35] beginning 'No. I can't leave your father...':
as if she is caught up in a myth, a blood ritual, using a kind of chant or monotone which builds to the end but remains dignified. Keep it**