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LORCA'S *CASA*

As an anthropologist of Andalusia, I am struck by the social and cultural accuracy of Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, its almost ethnographic quality. Lorca, noted for being expressly and incurably Andalusian, resisted the intellectual current that tried to 'Europeanize' Spain.[1] For him, 'los toros', 'el baile español', and his own writings were expressions of a Spanish, not to say Andalusian, 'duende'. The root meaning of 'duende', an abbreviation of 'dueño de la casa', is the spirit of an abandoned house and, by extension, of a place.[2] Lorca elaborates the term as a kind of ancient 'spirit of a place' which can possess the singer, the dancer, and the poet in a creative passion.

La casa de Bernarda Alba is recognized as the most realistic of Lorca's plays. Although Bernarda's 'casa' is hardly a typical Andalusian village household, most of her values were typical of her society. It was entirely proper for a respectable woman in her position to manage her household strictly and insist that the servants keep it clean, to defend its reputation, ensure the sexual purity of her daughters, and promote advantageous marriages for them. The question, then, is: what is wrong with Bernarda's 'casa'? The usual answer is that Bernarda is wrong, that she is a monster who in effect executes her own daughter. The most facile version of this argument treats Bernarda as the product and instrument of a repressive traditional society, one that should give way to more enlightened practices. It regards the message of the play as follows: 'If Bernarda had had a more enlightened attitude to sex, if she had treated it as a simple physical pleasure, if she had accepted that her daughters had rights to their personal space, then everything would have been all right. As a mother she should make sure that they understood the facts of life and knew how to avoid pregnancy, but she needed to accept that they were owners of their own bodies, that what they did with them was their own business, and she should have limited herself to helping them to come to terms with their own feelings. If that meant that Angustias, Martirio, and Adela each had Pepe spend the night with them in their rooms, so be it.' This is simply incorrect. The play is not about a clash between traditional and modern attitudes to sex. It is true that Adela expresses some rather modern views, such as '¡Yo hago con mi cuerpo lo que me parece!'[3] and '¡Mi cuerpo será de quien yo quiera!' (p. 606) (though note that the first is in response to questions about being ill and the second is perfectly consistent with the long-standing insistence on marriage being a matter of free consent), but she also makes unmodern statements, such as '¡En mí no manda nadie más que Pepe!' (p. 632) and 'Él dominará toda esta casa!' (p. 632).

Most literary criticism of the play understands it as a conflict between repression and freedom. To take two eminent examples: for Gwynne Edwards the play is about society as imprisonment against which nature, and particularly human passion, struggles,[4] for Morris, too, the house and its village society are prisons from which

[1] C. Brian Morris, *Son of Andalusia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

[2] In folk-stories, 'duendes' are dwarf old men or children who may arbitrarily help or hinder people. The term is used in Andalusia to describe the inneffable grace and enchantment of some performers, especially singers and dancers of gipsy flamenco music.

[3] Federico García Lorca, *Obras completas*: *Teatro*, ed. by Miguel García-Posada, 4 vols (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1997), II, 605.

[4] *Lorca: The Theatre beneath the Sand* (London: Boyars, 1980), pp. 234–76.

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some of the characters struggle to escape.[5] Both see gender oppression as an element in this, though Morris develops this argument more explicitly and adds class oppression to the picture. Repression and the struggle against it are certainly the main theme of the play, but from an ethnographic perspective there are problems with some aspects of these two critical appraisals. Both sometimes treat the particular as the general: because some things go wrong, everything is wrong; because some people are repressed; the society is repressive. It then becomes tempting to regard any convention or moral stricture as repressive and bad, and any defiance of same as liberating and good. In my opinion, this is not what Lorca is saying about his culture and society.

Thus Edwards interprets the story of Paca la Roseta as expounding 'uninhibited passion' using images of 'liberty, power and creativity' (p. 247). Morris regards her as a 'compliant adulteress' (Morris, p. 137) who is stigmatized by Bernarda for her sexuality. But she is not simply a woman seeking sexual fulfilment or even a wife having an affair. She happily complies with a group of men who come to her house and carry her off for a night of sex with all of them. To do so they have to tie her husband up, so however creative her group sex, it is destructive in relation to her husband. Compliant she may be; free she is not.

Edwards regards the Criada's words about her dead employer as 'unrestrained lament', 'grief' and 'lamentation for lost love', as an expression of 'spontaneous feeling' stifled by Bernarda (pp. 244–45). Morris, too, views her words as a lament and an expression of anguish (*García Lorca*, pp. 35, 75; *Son of Andalusia*, p. 140). Both treat what she says to herself about Benavides having lifted her skirts behind the corral as of a piece with what she says immediately after when the mourners come in followed by Bernarda. The two utterances are very different, however. Her words to herself end a monologue in which she complains bitterly about her lot as a poor woman in comparison to her employers. Just before she mentions her skirts being lifted, she says '¡Fastídiate! Antonio María Benavides, tieso con tu traje de paño y tus botas enterizas. ¡Fastídiate!' (*Obras*, p. 587). These words to herself sound to me more like gloating rancour than lament. Then, when the mourners come in, her demeanour shifts. She starts to shout and rend her hair as she utters words that have the form of a lament. These words, though, are for public consumption. The Criada, like Poncia, is being two-faced; it is doubtful that she loved Benavides, regrets his passing, or recalls sex with him as a pleasing experience.[6] Bernarda, of course, would have been perfectly aware of the tensions in the relations between employers and servants, and probably did not believe the Criada's 'lament'.

Again, Edwards regards the episode of La Librada's daughter as a powerful picture of human helplessness that contributes to the general sense in which the characters are 'the playthings, the puppets, of forces greater than themselves which are also an inescapable part of human nature'; the girl is 'a prisoner of male passion, exposed to it and to its consequences' (p. 256). Morris also emphasizes the girl's

[5] Morris, pp. 133–44, and *García Lorca: La casa de Bernarda Alba* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1990).

[6] Edwards also states that Benavides 'sought release in the embraces of the servant from the prison of Bernarda's prudery' (p. 245). Perhaps, but that does not mean the servant welcomed his attentions, instead of putting up with them. The position of women servants was ambiguous. As members of their master's household, they were subject to his authority, and they performed duties that in poorer households were done by wives and daughters. They were not, like daughters or other female kin, protected by incest taboos. So they were sexually accessible, as were wives, but their masters were not likely to marry them. Though some servants may have wanted sex with their masters, the potential for resentment was always there.

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sexual transgression but focuses more on the retaliatory action of the men. These, he suggests, 'act according to double standards' in inflicting their 'gruesome punishment' (*García Lorca*, p. 35), which elsewhere he also calls 'barbaric' (*Son of Andalusia*, p. 137). He contrasts the girl's treatment with that of Adelaida's father, who is said to have killed the husband of his first wife but was never punished.

These comments conflate the sexual transgression with the murder, and in doing so overstate both human helplessness and gender discrimination. Bernarda believes that La Librada's daughter is being punished for sexual sin, but as I shall show, that is her mistake, and we should not join her in making it. Sex may be a natural force, but in this culture it was one that people should, could, and usually did control. If sometimes they did not, that was a sign of human fallibility and irresponsibility, a shortcoming that became an aspect of the person's identity. It meant a loss of standing; it did not mean automatic ostracism and persecution.[7] When illegitimate children were born, their mothers seldom murdered them. In any case, it was the murder, not the sexual transgression, that provoked the punishment. The contrast with Adelaida's father shows that the two murders were not regarded as equivalent. In this culture a woman murdering her own infant has committed much greater violence than a man murdering another who is a sexual rival. Nor is the violent action of the crowd in punishing the girl an atavistic reversion to barbarism. Both the action and the violence are civil, a means by which the community deals with the transgression of one of its citizens. If that action is performed by men, it is simply because civil action is their particular responsibility. In a different vein, Morris argues that Lorca's target is the Andalusian landowning class. He emphasizes Bernarda's wealth, but believes that she was trapped by the structure of her society. He dismisses Poncia's suggestion that she should have moved as ineffective, for in his view any other place would have been just as repressive (*Son of Andalusia*, pp. 140–41). This is not quite correct. Bernarda is trapped in her village, and would be equally trapped in any other village, by her relative *lack* of wealth. More wealthy landowners could and did escape.

My general point, then, is that in as much as the play is 'realistic', Bernarda's culture and society should be seen as working systems that do not make impossible demands on everyone who lives in them. Sometimes things go wrong, but mostly they do not. Some people are intolerably repressed, but most are not. To understand the play, what happens has to be put in its cultural and social context, to appreciate the nuances of events in working systems. Bernarda and her family are products of their culture, but other, happier, products are possible. The play shows that her neighbours behave in more reasonable ways, that circumstances had, in the past, been better. To understand what is wrong with Bernarda's 'casa', we need to know more about what would have been right. This is where anthropology can help.

Others, too, have drawn on anthropology to interpret Lorca's work, with some reference to *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Garry Marvin, also an anthropologist of Andalusia, and Catherine Davies have argued that to understand the work of Lorca fully requires 'recognizing and analysing his perception and interpretation of the

[7] In this regard, the poor and the wealthy were far more tolerant than those in the middle classes. To be sure, they had less to lose. The wealthy unmarried mother still had the wealth to attract suitors, or, failing that, to ensure the marriage prospects of her child. The poor unmarried mother never had that wealth. It was only the unmarried mother of moderate means who severely reduced the chances of marriage for herself and for her child.

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natural world in the context of an Andalusian world-view wherein, according to anthropologists, control is a preeminent theme.'[8] They focus on the relation of humans to animals such as the horse and the bull, exploring the subtle interplay between animal imagery, sex, and gender in several poems and the three rural dramas *Bodas de sangre*, *Yerma*, and *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. A slightly different approach has been taken by the anthropologist Joan Frigolé Reixach, who has looked at *Bodas de sangre* from the perspective of the ethnography of marriage strategies in relation to social class. He compares the story in the play to the real life event on which it is based, noting that Lorca made a series of very significant changes. He argues that Lorca did this to show the inflexibility of the system:

> Para determinadas clases sociales, la fuga como alternativa al matrimonio parece no contar. La inflexibilidad del sistema de clase no permite una solución paralela a la ley, como es la fuga como procedimiento consuetudinario, sino sólo una salida explicitamente contra la ley, con toda sus consecuencias. [. . .] No hay otra salida que la que ofrece el sistema, ni salvación fuera del mismo.[9]

Frigolé Reixach cites *La casa de Bernarda Alba* as showing parental authority explicitly, in contrast to *Bodas*, where it is only implicit, intervening to restrict marriages in terms of class. He concludes:

> Se puede apreciar cómo Lorca ha utilizado para construir esas obras, situaciones y problemas corrientes en la sociedad española. Lorca ha captado bien la lógica de un sistema clasista específico y, en vez de intentar flexibilizarla, lo que hace es mostrar la cerrazón del sistema y la implacabilidad de dicha lógica y las instituciones que la sustentan e imponen. (pp. 172–73)

These arguments will now be developed and, as *Casa* is my main concern, I shall refer to the ethnography of the Andalusian 'casa' as living space, social institution, and cultural domain. This ethnography is not of the 'modern' Spanish society based on the state, it is of a 'pre-modern' Spanish civilization based on community.[10] The description is based on my own experience as an anthropologist working in Ronda. As I arrived thirty years after Lorca wrote the play, the question of change arises.[11] The gap is less than it seems, for among my informants were many old people whose

[8] 'Control of the Wild in Andalusian Culture: Bull and Horse Imagery in Lorca from an Anthropological Perspective', *Neophilologus*, 71 (1987) pp. 543–58 (p. 543).

[9] 'Federico García Lorca y la Etnografía de las Estrategias Matrimoniales', in *Los españoles vistos por los antropólogos*, ed. by María Cátedra (Madrid: Júcar, 1991), pp. 174–75.

[10] J. R. Corbin and M. P. Corbin, *Urbane Thought: Culture and Class in an Andalusian City* (Aldershot: Gower, 1987). In this article 'pre-modern' and 'modern' are used more as contrast than as sequence, though it can be argued plausibly that the pre-modern civilization has classical roots, whereas few historians would trace the modern state further back than the late fifteenth century. It can also be argued that the modern has been gaining importance at the expense of the pre-modern for several centuries. There is another contrast with what might be called the 'postmodern', of increasing importance in the last thirty years, but this is not explored here.

[11] The Spanish social anthropologist Enrique Luque Baena did his field work in a pueblo near Granada similar to Bernarda's, in 1969–70. Luque found striking similarities between the cultural world he had studied and that represented in the play, written more than thirty years before (and referring to an even earlier time, perhaps even the preceding century), so much so that he felt able to draw on it for examples to illustrate his argument about family conflict (*Estudio antropológico social de un pueblo del Sur* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1974), pp. 141–42). Indeed, he thought all of Lorca's work had relevance to the anthropology of contemporary Andalusia: 'Una relectura de la obra de Federico García Lorca después de la experiencia del trabajo de campo en un pueblo Granadino puede poner de relieve en qué medida reflejó el poeta, haciendo uso de las mismas expresiones coloquiales que emplea la gente, las vivencias e ideales de estas tierras; quizá, como muy pocos poetas o dramaturgos andaluces, también los de la región entera' (p. 145).

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lives overlapped with Lorca's; my special interest in the past ensured that I paid careful attention to their sense of their world.[12]

The orthodox pre-modern civilization was homocentric, distinguishing a human order above nature and below divinity. Each order had a corresponding cultural space: superhuman space was 'cielo', physically above and metaphysically beyond; subhuman space was the natural 'campo', including untouched wilderness and domesticated farmland. Structurally between them was artificial human space, the 'ciudad' or 'pueblo'. Human space was further subdivided into private 'casas', the public 'calle', and religious buildings such as 'iglesias'. 'La casa', 'la calle', and 'la iglesia' were elaborate institutions with specialized functions. The 'casa' managed human relations with the subhuman, the 'iglesia' did the same for relations with the superhuman, and the 'calle' regulated affairs among humans.

The culture of this civilization is best understood as a device for raising the human above the subhuman, using the powers of the superhuman to help in this process. The power and danger of animality in human affairs was recognized. Humans were animals, subject to biological drives, dependent upon animal appetite. Without animal fecundity, theirs and that of the animals they use for food and work, humans would not exist. But a properly civilized human order was more than animal existence, and that order could be threatened by unrestrained animality.

As institution, the 'casa' created and processed the proper human identities of its members, dealing specifically with the problem of extracting and maintaining a human order of existence from bodily processes that are intrinsically subhuman. The 'casa' was the place for ordinary women to realize themselves fully, particularly in maternity, for proper women were life-givers and nurturers. Sex was a natural generative force domesticated by marriage for cultural reproduction. In the proper cultural progression a woman attracted a man sexually to marry, married to have children, raised children to become matron and grandmother: that is, a woman of substance fully realized as giver of human life. Sex was not enough for personal fulfilment, and even the married, sexually active woman still had to avoid infertility, miscarriage, and death in childbirth. The woman who quickened was better off than one who remained barren, the woman who bore children better off than one who miscarried, and the woman who raised her children and saw them married and reproducing in their turn was the most fully realized. For women, then, sex and marriage should be means, not ends. In effect, sex was suppressed in favour of maternity. The 'perfect' woman was thus the 'virgin mother', projected culturally in the Virgin Mary. Consonant with this was a general sense that maternity, indeed all matters of human life and death, were not products of human will. Women might want to be married, become pregnant, and give birth, but their will in these matters was always subject to the overriding forces of biology, human passion, and divine will.

In this cultural scheme, superior orders could exercise will on inferior orders in these matters. Humans could de-sex, breed, and kill animals. God could, in effect, do the same to humans. But humans could not do so to other humans, for to do so meant that they were either promoting themselves to divinity or demoting the others

[12] Readers concerned with the methodological problems of extrapolating from the ethnographic present to the historical past may find of interest the discussion of the issue in my book *The Anarchist Passion: Class Conflict in Southern Spain, 1810–1965* (Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1993), pp. 1–12.

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to animality: hence the cultural condemnation of contraception, sterilization, abortion, homicide, suicide, and euthanasia.

Charged with the central task of cultural creation, the 'casa' was normally removed and protected from the conflicts of the outside world. Of the three pre-modern institutions, the 'casa' was by far the most enclosed, physically and socially. It was strongly bounded by walls and roof, with barred and shuttered windows and heavy double doors hiding the life inside. The privacy of those inside was further enhanced by Andalusian architecture, which allowed light and air to reach rooms from interior patios. The common practice of whitewashing all walls and painting all window grills and woodwork the same colour meant that the size and character of the 'casa' could not be seen from the street. What was seen from the outside was not a series of discrete family houses, but a continuous wall pierced here and there by doors and windows. These buildings were intended to keep other people out, but the extent to which they did so varied with wealth. The poor were likely to live in buildings called 'corrales' or, with less undertone of animal dwelling, 'casas de vecinos'. These had a shared patio with one-room or two-room quarters for each family opening off, cooking facilities for each family in the open beside the door to their quarters, and bathroom and toilets shared by all the families. The rich lived in large houses with two or more storeys. The main entrance usually gave access to a patio with reception rooms of various degrees of formality, whereas bedrooms and bathrooms were upstairs. So while the poor could not afford much privacy at all, the rich could protect their privacy even from visitors. More, the poor could not pretend that they had more than they had, while the rich could not lose status by others knowing how much they owned. Between these two extremes were the houses of people with something to protect, with the possibility of pretence. They were houses where visitors did invade privacy. These were much more likely to be closed to outsiders, defended against the critical appraisal of neighbours.

However bounded, the 'casa' could not be totally isolated. It was not self-sufficient, self-maintaining, or self-reproducing. It had to enter into manifold relations with other 'casas', and be part of a community of casas. In particular, the life crises of its members (birth and baptism, first communions, courtships and weddings, sickness and death) required visits from relatives, friends, neighbours, and priests. The function of the 'casa' was to deal with the physical requirements of people in a peculiarly human way, but the 'calle' and the 'iglesia' had to certify that it was doing so. As the social horizons of the poor were generally limited, the 'calle' for them was usually the streets of the neighbourhood or village in which they lived. The rich might live in the same places, but their horizons were less confined to the public places around their homes.

This cultural and social structure is clearly reflected in the main themes that frame and drive the action of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. A key theme, for example, links class, sex, and animality. Bernarda states explicitly that the poor are like animals. The animal image is also used to express gender subordination, as when Martirio says that all men care about is property and a submissive 'perra' to feed them. The relation between social status and animality is then elaborated in terms of sex. A servant reveals that the dead Antonio Benavides used to lift her skirts behind the corral door, showing not only that servants are sexually exploited by their employers but also that illicit human sex is linked to the place where animals are kept. The higher the woman's status, the more she must distance herself from sex. Bernarda

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reprimands Angustias for going to the *portón* and listening to the men talking: '¿Es decente que una mujer de tu clase vaya con el anzuelo detrás de un hombre el día de la misa de su padre? ¡Contesta! ¿A quién mirabas?' (*Obras*, p. 592).

But when Poncia, tells her that she, too, had been at the door, Bernarda's reaction is different. Poncia says that, as usual, the men's talk was not of the sort one should listen to. Bernarda immediately wants to know more, and is regaled with the prurient tale of Paca la Roseta. The moral of this story is not that Paca is sexually liberated but that her sexual compliance makes her 'subhuman'. In ethnographic terms the story is one in which Paca is severed from her husband and her 'casa', the proper human realm, and taken to the subhuman 'campo' to enjoy sex with many men, as female animals do. She returns with hair undone: that is, natural rather than cultural, and bedecked with flowers, presumably wild. The 'subhumanity' is then projected beyond the community. Bernarda comments that she is the only bad woman in the village, and Poncia insists that it is because she is an outsider, adding that the men who went with her were sons of outsiders. So, providing that appropriate moral condemnation is made, Bernarda is eager to listen to the men's 'dirty' talk repeated by her servant, and does not reprimand the servant for listening to it first hand. That her daughter heard them does concern her: 'Ésa sale a sus tías; blancas y untosas que ponían ojos de carnero al piropo de cualquier barberillo. ¡Cuanto hay que sufrir y luchar para hacer que las personas sean decentes y no tiren al monte demasiado!' (p. 592). This complaint neatly links sexual interest (response to a 'piropo'), class ('barberillo'), and animality ('ojos de carnero' and 'monte': that is, land even further from the human than the olive grove to which Paca la Roseta went).

In Act II, Poncia chats with the daughters while they sew, talking of men and sex with much less disapproval than in her conversation about Paca la Roseta with Bernarda. Later, Poncia tells Bernarda that she has 'humos' in refusing to accept Enrique Humanas as a suitor for Martirio because she does not want to mingle her blood with the son of a farm hand. Bernarda replies that she has 'humos' because she can (that is, because she has the means), and that Poncia does not because of her origin in a brothel. Interestingly, the word used for brothel is 'lupanar', which is derived from the Latin for she-wolf, a word also applied to courtesans.

The animal, sex, and class link is given a further twist by the episode of La Librada's daughter at the end of Act II. An unmarried woman has a baby by an unknown father. She kills the child and hides it under stones; dogs find it and return it to the mother's door. Interpreted ethnographically, the humanity of a child produced without proper shame and marriage is deficient, so the mother treats it like an animal, killing and disposing of it without a funeral. But nature refuses this natural child, animals dig it up and return it to the threshold of 'casa' and 'calle', the human institutions that should deal with it. In fact, it is the 'calle' that takes action. The men converge on the village from the fields, a crowd forms and drags the killer through the streets, and Bernarda and Martirio urge the crowd to kill her before the guards, agents of the state, arrive.[13]

[13] Note that there is nothing atavistic about the crowd's action. It is action in the 'calle' in the physical sense and by the 'calle' in the institutional sense. It is violent, but it is a form of civil violence, not a regression to barbarism or savagery. It is certainly distinct from state action, represented by the guards, but there are also forms of excessive state violence.

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In Act III the link is more fully developed in a parallel between Pepe el Romano and the sisters, on the one hand, and Bernarda's stallion and brood mares on the other. Pepe is an outsider trying to break into the 'casa' to get at the females; the stallion is already inside, enclosed and under Bernarda's control. She is prepared to indulge the beast by letting him out when he becomes too restive, but only tethered and into the corral. Here, of course, there is a parallel in the way Bernarda deals with her mother, but the point is that she treats the mother like an animal, not that she treats the stallion like a human. She is also going to let him cover all the mares, but again at her will, not his. It will happen in the morning, until then she orders the mares to be shut away from the stallion. Bernarda is not prepared to indulge Pepe in any such way, yet it seems that Adela is moving in that direction. When arguing with Martirio, Adela had accepted that Pepe would marry Angustias while having a relationship with her, but now she is talking about leaving the house and going to live on her own as his mistress. When she defies Bernarda she takes a further step, saying that Pepe 'dominará la casa' (p. 632). This is more than displacement of Bernarda as the head of the house, for it implies sexual access to the sisters, putting them in the same position as the servant whose skirts were lifted by the previous man of the house behind the corral door, the place where Adela has just been rolling in the straw with Pepe. Faced with this multiple animalization of her daughters, like brood mares, the ill bred, servants, and the poor, Bernarda goes for the gun.

Another main theme relates gender and marriage. The play portrays a society in which men and women live separate lives, have separate domains, and carry out different activities. But it is not a society in which marriages are arranged; they must be freely agreed between a man and a woman. The problem for such a society is how to bring the man and the woman together in the first place. For this to happen, they have to at least see one another, either in public or at family celebrations, such as weddings. Here they can at least eye one another, though Bernarda censures women for looking in church or for making sheep's eyes. Men can take the opportunity to comment on the attractiveness of a woman, in terms that can range from the frankly carnal to the fancifully poetic. At its most formal, this is the 'piropo' to which Bernarda feels Angustias is all too willing to succumb. But the fear of gossip, the vigilance of women like Bernarda, the practice of gathering separately, usually mean that men and women decide to marry without having spent time with one another. The courtship practice that follows, that features talking at windows, is splendidly described in the play.

When I first went to Spain in the 1960s the separation of men from women was not quite as stringent, but some features of this courtship practice were still evident. If two people felt sufficient attraction for one another, the man would take to coming to see the woman at her home. As he had not formally declared his intention to marry and been accepted by her family, he was not able to enter the house, so he would talk to her at a door or window. What was supposed to happen at this stage was that the two got to know each other. If they found that despite the initial attraction they did not really like one another, they could then break off their relation before it became a formal engagement. Once formally engaged, the man could visit the woman in her home and take her into the street. These engagements often lasted for years, and constituted the period in which the two spent most time together as a couple. They would then marry, often because they were tired of one another's company and wanted to return to a more normal social life of women

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with women and men with men. In the past, it seems that there was less possibility of going out, and the 'talking at the window' stage was the prolonged one. For this reason it was known as 'pelando la pava', a process known to take a long time.

From the man's point of view, then, courtship and marriage is a process that draws him away from the company of men in the 'calle', suspends him for a while on the borders of the 'calle' at the barred window of a 'casa' talking to a woman inside, and joins him to her formally in her parent's 'casa' and then carnally in his own. Soon after marriage, he progresses, as Poncia puts it, from bed to table to tavern, back to the company of men in the 'calle', leaving the woman in the 'casa'. This does not mean he will not see his wife, but companionship is not the point of marriage. If marriage is not for sex or companionship, why should any woman want to marry? The answer is given in the play by Bernarda's mother, who in Act I states repeatedly that she wants to marry a manly man, a man to be happy with, and in Act III that she wants babies. Babies are the reason for sex and marriage; motherhood is the fulfilment of women.

It follows that husbands are more important to women as the fathers of their children and the man of the family than as their lovers or companions. The standard role of the husband as father is as a rather remote authority that the mother can invoke to keep children in line. She usually represents him to them as rigid, unreasonable, and demanding, someone whose whims she has no choice but to indulge. In turn, she represents children to him as childish, unreasonable, and demanding, whose whims she would like to indulge. In effect, she takes on the role of go-between and reasonable temporizer, the pleader for causes seemingly other than her own, a role that is the basis of her domestic power. Clearly, Bernarda is not a proper mother. We learn very little of her relation to her dead husband but there is one hint of something wrong in their relation as parents, when Bernarda is laying down the law to her daughters after the funeral: 'Aquí se hace lo que yo mando. Ya no puedes ir con el cuento a tu padre' (p. 590). This suggests a reversal of roles, with the mother as autocrat and father as intermediary and moderator. Bernarda is further cast in the patriarchal role with, curiously enough, Poncia in the standard mother's role. It is Poncia who is reasonable, realistic, and pragmatic, who is in touch and keeping track of what is going on. So it is Poncia who urges Bernarda to be more concerned with getting her daughters married, who finds out about Adela, and talks to her as a mother, telling her to stop being childish, to leave her sister alone, and to keep her feelings for Pepe to herself. It is Poncia who goes back to Bernarda, suggesting that Adela is Romano's real novia. She fails, of course, not just because Bernarda in the role of husband and father is more stubborn, obtuse, and unreasonable than most men would be. She fails precisely because she is not the mother and wife. When she urges Bernarda to think about marrying her daughters, Bernarda cuts her off, 'Me sirves y yo te pago. ¡Nada más!' (p. 594). After the row over the theft of Pepe's picture, Poncia asks Bernarda for permission to speak. Bernarda gives it, but at the same time fends her off, 'Siento que hayas oído. Nunca está bien una extraña en el centro de la familia' (p. 614). Poncia tries to warn her of the trouble brewing, but Bernarda will not accept the warning from her: 'Obrar y callar a todo es la obligación de los que viven a sueldo' (p. 616). Even the most autocratic of husbands could not dismiss his wife in such terms.

A third theme emphasizes the boundaries of the 'casa'. There are repeated references to walls and roof, to closing and limiting access through doors and

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windows. Bernarda is all for closure. She hopes the villagers will stay away, sets Poncia on beggars, keeps her daughters indoors in mourning, and imprisons her crazy mother. Seeing and being seen violate the 'casa' boundaries and need control. As Poncia indicates, Bernarda does not like being seen in her domain. Bernarda expresses her irritation at the intrusion of village women who will criticize everything they have seen in her house. The women of the house try to see without being seen. Angustias spies on the men through the grill of the door; the daughters rush off to the windows when they hear that Pepe el Romano is turning the corner, and they do likewise when the reapers pass by on their way back to work after lunch.

Windows are a way women can know about the 'calle' without leaving the 'casa', but Bernarda wants to keep her daughters completely away from the 'calle'. When at the end of Act II a servant comes rushing in to tell them of a commotion in the streets, Bernarda sends Poncia to find out what is happening but stops her daughters from following. Poncia and the other maids can come and go, and pass information, because they are not family. Bernarda regards contact with the 'calle' as a kind of pollution, which her low-status servants can absorb, thus protecting the purity (that is, the high status) of her family. Bernarda cannot entirely isolate herself from the 'calle'; she still expects Poncia to spy on the neighbours and bring her the tale, to listen to the men's talk and tell her what they are saying, to find out what the commotion in the street is about. So although the house is physically and socially bounded by roof and walls, its windows, doors, and servants make the boundaries permeable; they are penetrated by sounds that carry information about the 'calle': the church bells that mark stages of services, tell the time, announce deaths; the song of the reapers as they pass by; the commotion of an angry crowd. They are also penetrated by the air. Bernarda wants to shut even the air out; Adela repeatedly rises and leaves to get some air. 'Tomando el aire' is, in fact, a culturally neutral way women can explain being in the street or sitting in their doorways. 'Abierto al aire' is also a common expression of exposure, including social exposure to public gaze and comment. I remember in the 1960s how an old lady, who had just come from the town centre where she had seen a scantily dressed woman tourist, a novel sight in those days, described the tourist's attire. The old lady held her hands palm down in a line across the tops of her breasts. 'De aquí p'arriba', she said, with a little upwards flick of the fingers, then moved her hands palms up to a line across the top of her thighs, 'y de aquí p'abajo,' she continued, flicking fingers downwards, '¡abierto al aire!'.

Images of other natural forces, running water and shooting stars, opposed to the static 'casa' are also used. The strongest natural force is, of course, human life and death itself. The play opens during the funeral of Antonio Benavides, continues with the sexual passions of Adela, Martirio, and Angustias for Pepe, and ends with the death of Adela. The 'casa' must cope with these, and to do so it must interact with the 'calle'. Relatives need to come to see the dead, the bodies removed, funeral services and burial arranged, callers paying their respects received, and inheritance distributed. Suitors must come, enter, and take away members of the 'casa'. If all this is ethnographically correct, where did Bernarda go wrong?

In terms of her own culture, Bernarda was wrong to treat people like animals. Though inferiors may be thought of as animals, calling them animals is insulting and treating them so is demeaning. Any such language and action is highly improper and strongly resented by those subjected to it. So Poncia curses Bernarda when she

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speaks of her, and fantasizes that one day she will lock herself up in a room with her and spit in her face for a year, once for every insult, each mistreatment. The child born to poor parents is deficient in the sense that it is not born with the wealth to avoid economic subordination in later life. That is a misfortune, a 'desgracia', as is being born blind or losing an arm in an accident, with which it must cope, but what most matters is what the child will make of itself given that misfortune. The proper way of dealing with the misfortunate is to treat the misfortune as a fact, like hair colour or height, not as a measure of moral worth.

Bernarda's mistreatment of people is not confined to servants and poor people. Her treatment of her mother and daughters, keeping them enclosed against their will (Bernarda herself talks of tying them up with leashes or chains) is proper for animals, not people. The same is true of beating, to discipline and train animals but not people. In this culture parents seldom inflict physical pain to control their children. The very young may be scolded, the older punished by withdrawal of privileges. There is always the force of disapproval and the threat of not loving and supporting. I have heard parents threaten to slap a misbehaving child, but never actually seen them do it. Certainly anyone who beat a child with a cane or any other instrument would be thought abusive. Bernarda's mother is old and a bit crazy, and she lacks full human faculties, but Bernarda still should treat her with the respect due to the elderly in general and her own mother in particular. It is also true that Bernarda's children are her subordinates, but that does not mean they are animals or property, devoid of their own legitimate wills and personal autonomy. Animals give birth to animals, so Bernarda is undoing her own humanity by treating her mother and daughters as animals.

In effect, Bernarda is caught in a kind of cultural cleft. Humanity is a quality that in the first instance is transmitted from mother to child by proper procreation: that is, sex controlled by shame and marriage. That initial humanity must then be developed and expressed in action that both affirms one's own and recognizes that of others. A child born of improper sex may be deficient, but this culture still regards the child as human. The improper sex dishonours the parents, but the deficiency it imparts to the child is a 'desgracia', like being born to poor parents. What matters as far as the child is concerned is what it will make of itself given its misfortune.

Here, then, is the major significance of the episode at the end of Act II. The unmarried daughter killed her baby to hide her own lack of shame, her own dishonour. This was both a failure to take responsibility for her own actions, which might have partly redeemed her, and homicide, for the child she killed was human, not animal. The homicide was her real undoing. She denied humanity to her own child by killing it, thus negating her own humanity. She is like Bernarda in this respect, only more extreme, for she deliberately kills her child. This exposes her to being killed like an animal in return: hence the difference between this homicide and that committed by Adelaida's father. In killing, he denied the humanity of the man he killed, but if the man was not a close relative, he did not deny his own. In baying for the girl's blood, in shouting for her to be killed, Bernarda concentrates on the sexual transgression ('¡Carbón ardiendo en el sitio de su pecado!' (p. 619)), not the homicide. Bernarda's cultural mistake is her failure to recognize that sexual propriety is neither the only nor the overriding measure of humanity. That mistake turns her into a pre-modern cultural monster who elevates concern for the appearance of virginity over grief at the loss of a daughter, who erases the separate,

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individual identity of that daughter. In her final proclamation, it is not 'Adela', it is 'la hija menor de Bernarda Alba' (p. 634), who died a virgin.

Bernarda is not the only one who is culturally wrong. Pepe puts money over attraction in choosing Angustias, then compounds the error by pursuing Adela while continuing to court Angustias. Adela puts making love over making life. At some level, she realizes her mistake. At the end of Act II, when her mother shouts for burning coals to be put on the place where the unmarried mother sinned, Adela responds by clutching her belly, implying that the sin is in the womb, not the vagina. But in the end Adela makes sex her end and it ends her life.

In any case, there is more wrong with the 'casa' of Bernarda Alba than Bernarda's cultural mistakes about sex, compounded by Adela's and Pepe's; there is something amiss with the 'casa' itself. It is tempting to suggest that what is wrong is precisely that it is the 'casa' of Bernarda Alba, not of Antonio Benavides, that it is ruled by a woman in a patriarchal society. This, however, is an inadequate explanation for a culture that so strongly identifies the 'casa' with women, so unhesitatingly asserts that it is proper for women to 'mandar en la casa'. When we first lived in Spain, my wife was roundly scolded by a group of local women when she said she had to ask me what I wanted for dinner. They told her in no uncertain terms that I should have no say in the matter. Women also quizzed her about what seemed to them a totally misguided desire of foreign women to get husbands to help with the housework. As far as they were concerned, the men were likely to cause trouble by having views and giving orders, and the best thing to do was to keep them completely out of it.

Poncia, too, shows that women in this culture could be headstrong in their own homes even in relation to their husbands. In her relaxed chat with the sisters at the beginning of Act II she tells them she had hit her husband several times, and that once, when he said something she did not like, she killed all his birds (his hobby was raising songbirds) with a pestle. She tells the sisters that she is of the same school as their mother. Houses with powerful women are not necessarily wrong houses. Bernarda has usurped patriarchy, leaving the role of wife-mother to Poncia, who is not in a position to exercise it effectively and she brings a woman's obsessions with the appearance of the house and the sexual propriety of women to the patriarchal role. These disorders contribute to the tragedy, but the main cause is the excessive separation of the 'casa' from the 'calle'. Bernarda is extremely critical of others, which makes them fear and hate her, and she fears their criticism of her house and family. Her excessive and abnormal desire to distance her 'casa' from the 'calle' is repeatedly underlined. In the opening scene Poncia says that people stopped visiting after Bernarda's father died, that she did not want them to see her in her domain. When it was her father's 'casa' there was more interaction with the 'calle'; when it became hers, that interaction declined. Here there is another hint of the inadequacy of her husband, who presumably became the man of the house when his father-in-law died. But then a wife who owns the house she lives is in a far more powerful position than a daughter who does not.

In Act II, the servant announces the commotion in the street by saying '¡En lo alto de la calle hay un gran gentío, y todos los vecinos están en sus puertas!' (p. 617). People in normal households quite naturally go to the doors to see what is happening, and Bernarda's daughters have the same normal reaction, but Bernarda sends them instead to the patio while Poncia goes instead. So, why this excessive

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separation? Again, it is not simply that Bernarda is a woman and lacks a man's contacts with the 'calle'. As her mother puts it in her loony way, the maternal woman should be linked to her neighbours:

> Cuando mi vecina tenía un niño yo le llevaba chocolate y luego ella me lo traía y así siempre, siempre, siempre. . . . Yo no quiero campo. Yo quiero casas, pero casas abiertas y las vecinas acostadas en sus camas con sus niños chiquititos y los hombres fuera sentados en sus sillas. (p. 629)

The explanation for separation is suggested by Poncia in Act 1, when she chides Bernarda for not doing something about her spinster daughters. When Bernarda answers that there is no one good enough for them within a hundred leagues, Poncia tells her she should have moved to another town. 'Eso, ¡a venderlas!', responds Bernarda. 'No, Bernarda, a cambiar. . . . ¡Claro que en otros sitios ellas resultan las pobres!' (p. 594).

Bernarda thinks she is better than the other people in the village and the surrounding area, but were she to move to a larger place with more wealthy people, then her family would be comparatively poor, so she stays put. Bernarda is a snob in the literal sense, a good example of what is known deprecatingly in Andalusia as a 'señorito de pueblo', someone with social pretensions that sustainable only in a relatively small, poor place. There are other clues to this status. In the play Bernarda, of course, addresses everyone as 'tú'. But then everyone except her daughters calls her 'tú'. As far as the villagers and servants are concerned, she is not a superior. Another clue is in the architecture. Martirio, Angustias, and Adela wait for men at their bedroom windows. This means that they sleep on the ground floor; the house does not have a second story, or at least one that is lived in. This is typical of village houses and of modest houses in cities, but not of the imposing houses of the wealthy. A third clue is the concern for what the servants might see or say. The wealthy and well born do not worry overmuch what the servants think or what tales they carry to ordinary townsmen. They regard their social superiority as given, not something that depends on their reputation among townspeople. If they are concerned about what other people think, these will be people like themselves, a few of whom might live locally but most of whom are scattered far and wide. I have heard such people conduct family arguments in loud voices in very public places without the slightest trace of embarrassment.

Bernarda's basic problem is that she is both too wealthy and not wealthy enough. She is too wealthy to be an ordinary villager. Her farms are not family farms worked by those who own them, with perhaps a hired hand or two; her home is not a family home cleaned and kept by herself and her daughters. She employs others to do the work and she and her family do nothing but sit and sew. This makes her superior; it also makes her feel superior to villagers who are neither employers nor employees, who run independent family businesses. Yet to the extent that she criticizes them and fears their criticism, they form her social universe and define her social standing, they are the 'calle' of her 'casa' in the institutional as well as physical sense. Paradoxically, her wealth makes her more vulnerable to the 'calle' than her neighbours are in their family homes without servants or employees. If need be, they can live on bread and water but pretend otherwise; they can sell the furniture without telling anybody and can pass off a daughter's illegitimate child as an unexpected late pregnancy of her mother. People with servants and other employees coming and going are unlikely to pull off such deceptions. Bernarda's final claim

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that Adela died a virgin has little chance of being believed. Poncia might keep the secret, but what about the other servant, who like Poncia knows that Adela and Martirio both want Pepe, and may have heard the final quarrel? What about the stableman whom Bernarda orders to tether the stallion and enclose the mares, who presumably will put the mare to the stallion at daybreak, and whose quarters are likely to be close to the meeting-place of Pepe and Adela?

Bernarda is not wealthy enough to extend her social horizons beyond the village. She cannot join the wider circle of people with farms, businesses, and homes in several places, who can shift residence as family circumstances dictate: children needing better schools, daughters a wider range of acceptable suitors. Such people have the means to maintain social relations over great distances, to travel far and wide to attend baptisms, marriages, and funerals, to celebrate Christmas and Easter, to go to fairs, bullfights, and the theatre, where they and their family can see and be seen. People, that is, like García Lorca's own family. Bernarda feels herself too good for the 'calle' she lives in but cannot attach her 'casa' to a wider 'calle' of the relatively wealthy. Instead of settling for being a high-standing villager, putting great effort into cultivating good relations with neighbours and employees, and accepting Enrique Humanas and others of his kind as suitors for her daughters, she opts for separation, for exaggerating her difference from those she resembles closely. She reminds me in this respect of the bosses of labouring men, risen from the ranks but now concerned with contracts and paper work, who let the fingernail of their little finger grow as long as possible as a sign that they do no manual work. Men from wealthy landed families who had not worked so much as an hour with their hands disdained this as an affectation that would interfere with the hunting, fishing, and riding lifestyle many of them pursued.

This separation is a major cause of the tragedy. Of all the available men, only Pepe el Romano is good enough, and this condemns four of the five daughters to spinsterhood, to a futile existence of sewing and embroidering linens for marriages that will not take place. It also sets in motion the sexual danger of one male with several females, the figurative conversion of Pepe and the sisters into stallion and mares.

It is worth noting that Bernarda's marriage strategy would raise the status of her grandchildren. At the time of the play Bernarda is about sixty. She married at the age of twenty or so, and had all her five children by the time she was forty. Had her daughters done the same, she would be well on the way to having twenty-five grandchildren. In contrast, Angustias is nearly forty and unlikely to have many children. Bernarda could have restricted the number of children the other daughters had simply by insisting that they marry in order of age. She goes further, denying marriage to four of the five daughters. Had she got her way, Angustias would have married Pepe and had few children, who would therefore have been as wealthy as their parents when they inherited; the other daughters would never have married and had no heirs, which meant that any wealth they left on their death would probably have gone eventually to Angustia's children, making them even wealthier. Those grandchildren might then have had the means to join the wider social circles of the truly wealthy. But a rise in status bought by denying maternal fulfilment to four daughters, life itself to their children, is culturally wrong.

On the other hand, if Bernarda had acted properly in pre-modern terms all her daughters would have married, and married younger, therefore producing more

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grandchildren to divide the wealth coming from Bernarda and her husbands. Moreover, four of them would have married men of more modest means, thus reducing even further the average inheritance of Bernarda's grandchildren. Generally, wealth enhances the chances of marriage and reproduction, but reproductive success means having more heirs who will be less wealthy than the parents. As a levelling system, this was far from perfect, for it did not prevent a society with beggars and servants, but it did constrain the development of social inequality. There is no suggestion in the play that Bernarda's marriage strategy was couched in terms of the status of her grandchildren. However, there is in this society a very conscious focus on grandchildren. Children take their class from the economic standing of their parents and it does not change during their lifetime. If the parents better themselves, however, their children will be better off and their grandchildren will have a higher standing. The local wisdom is that it takes three generations for a family to change its class. Enrique Humanas farmed his own land but was unacceptable to Bernarda because he was the son of a 'gañán' (p. 615). Had he been the grandson of a farmhand but the son of a prosperous landowner, the situation might have been different. To put it another way, his own children might fare better than he did.

The only direct reference in the text to a redistributive device is to a pre-modern one: charity, or rather, the lack of it. Poncia talks about Bernarda's setting her on beggars, but the beggar woman who appears in Act 1 says that she is always given leftovers. She is refused by the maid, who wants the food for herself, which shows both that the maid was poor enough to want leftovers and that the problem of charity is not just Bernarda's. Where Bernarda really shows herself to be uncharitable, however, is in her refusal to give away any of her dead husband's clothing. Given that there are no men left in the family and that she does not expect her daughters to marry, the point of the denial seems much more refusal to help others than retain use for herself. These refusals, then, illustrate the problem of charity as a device for redistribution. It is voluntary, therefore it can be blocked by greed and contrariness.

The main thing wrong with the 'casa' of Bernarda Alba is that it is a 'casa' without (an institutional) 'calle'. It cannot do its work, cannot produce people for the 'calle' and for new 'casas', if it is not part of a community of socially equal 'casas'. It is more hampered in its work if it lacks a proper wife-mother than if it lacks a proper husband-father. The sexual message of the play, then, is pre-modern: 'Sex is a powerful animal force. Properly channelled by the "casa", it is creative. Totally suppressed, it is dangerous. Mastered, the sexual "beast within" creates humanity. Unmastered, it destroys humanity.' In short, the play is not about women who are prevented from having sex; it is about women who are prevented from marrying and having children. These are concerns that Lorca examined in other plays, such as *Doña Rosita la Soltera* and *Yerma*.

Sex and marriage are only foreground issues; the background issue is social class. For all the emphasis on money and property, on the difference between Bernarda as landowner and her employees, the target is not the really wealthy in their relation to the poor. Lorca is not attacking the 'señorito' class to which he himself belonged and whose wealth sustained him in his intellectual and artistic pursuits. He is attacking the 'señoritos de pueblo' who aspire to that status but do not have the means to sustain it. He attacks them not because they have pretensions but because

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their pretensions tragically distort their 'casas' and their lives. His target is the village equivalent of the city middle class he had previously criticized in *Doña Rosita la Soltera*. *La casa de Bernarda Alba* is not a sweeping condemnation of pre-modern society; what it does is far more subtle. The play probes pre-modern cultural inconsistency and ambiguity, and sounds an alarm to a danger in pre-modern society. It does this so acutely that it transcends the particularity of time and place and tells us something more general about the human condition, provided, always, that we understand the specific terms with which it starts. This acuteness was possible only, in my view, because Lorca loved the culture he was criticizing and enjoyed its pleasures to the full, because he knew and accepted the powers, and the dangers, of its passions.

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