

## Structural Forces of Themes: a Comparative Analysis of Federico Garcia Lorca's Selected Plays

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### Abstract

This study explores the role of structural forces in shaping the themes of honor, virtue and tragic fate in Federico Garcia Lorca's selected plays: *Bodas de Sangre* "Blood Wedding" and *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* "The House of Bernarda Alba". Utilizing structuralism, the analysis investigates how the societal expectations, familial constraints, and rigid social roles are inherent in both plays, which drive the characters' actions and lead to their inevitable downfall. This study argues that these forces impose a set of values, honor and virtue which limit individual desires, particularly for the women, forcing them to sacrifice personal fulfillment in favor of preserving family reputation and adhering to social norms. Furthermore, the concept of tragic fate is examined as an inescapable consequence of these structural constraints, with the characters unable to escape their predetermined roles within the family and society. Through examining Lorca's use of structural elements, the study reveals how they underscore the themes of fatalism, highlighting the connection between societal oppression and personal destiny. Finally, this study compares how both of the selected plays present the themes of honor, virtue and tragic fate as inextricably linked to the structural forces that govern the characters' lives and contribute to their tragic endings. This study concludes that the social rules and family duties control on what the characters do, and causing their tragic endings. Also, these rules limit personal wishes, especially for female, and forcing them to give up their happiness to protect family honor and values.

**Keywords:** Federico Garcia Lorca, Spanish Drama, Structural Forces, Structuralism, Symbolism

### Introduction

Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* is a powerful tragic play which explores themes of honor, death, love, and fate in a rigidly patriarchal society (Saeed & Khan, 2025). It portrayed women as passive participants in a world wherein their choices were dictated by tradition culture lens through which to examine the experiences of the female characters, revealing the societal structures that oppress them. The Bride's inability to choose her own path, the mother's internalized patriarchy, and Leonardo's wife's silent suffering illustrate different aspects of women's subjugation (Rusconi, 2021).

Lorca critiques the traditional Spanish values that equate a woman's worth with her obedience, purity and role within the domestic sphere (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mizrahi, 2025). By analyzing the text through the principles of feminist theory, it is clear that the play exposes how patriarchal oppression operates through institutions like honor, marriage, using violence as a means of enforcing compliance. Similarly, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (The House of Bernarda Alba) further explores the consequences of societal repression, particularly within a household governed by strict traditions.

Bernarda, as a matriarch, became the enforcer of a system that ultimately entraps her own daughters, mirroring the broader mechanism of control that perpetuate cycles of suffering. Both plays illustrate how societal forces dictate human desires, leading to inevitable tragedy (Baker, 2014). By comparing these two works, this study shed light on the how Lorca employed structural forces, such as binary oppositions (freedom vs. repression, individual vs. society) and symbolism (blood, walls, colors and fate) to construct a narrative wherein personal agency was suffocated by tradition. The portrayal of female characters as victims of cultural expectations underscores the inescapable nature of tragedy in his plays, reinforcing the idea that oppression was deeply ingrained in the social fabric (Slate, 2017).

Lorca's plays were extensively analyzed; particularly regarding the thematic socio-political and symbolism (Naylor, 2018; Johnson, 2008). This study explores Lorca's works through lenses such as comparative literature and structuralism also the thematic criticism (Hart, 2014). The following section is a literature review to examine studies to understanding the structural forces themes in Lorca's plays. The first study is Death Rituals and structural composition in Lorca's plays which was conducted by Maria Fernandez. Explains that recurring motifs of mourning and death in Federica Garcia Lorca's theater especially in Blood Wedding and Yerma. The study aims that the ritualistic element as structural forces that underscore the idea of fate and the tragic societal oppression.

The second study is Poetic Structure and thematic development in Lorca's drama by López. The interplay between poetry and drama in Lorca's work as a style of writing emphasizing how his style shapes the structural and thematic aspects of the plays (Foster, 1975). He sheds light on the Public and Blood Wedding, focusing on how Lorca's poetic rhythm and imagery contribute to the emotional and depth resonance of the narrative. The third study is "Political themes and structural devices in Lorca's theater" by Annelise Gonzalez which was published in 2011. Gonzalez delves into political dimensions of Lorca's works to analyze the structure elements of The House of Bernarda Alba which serve as vehicles for critiquing censorship (Bergen, 1999).

The study concludes that the thematic construction challenges political and social norms through the narrative style. "Lorca and Greek Tragedy: A structural comparison". It examines the parallel between Lorca's drama and classical Greek tragedy, with focusing on Blood Wedding. According to Jones, Lorca's Blood Wedding is more than just a story rooted in Spanish countryside culture; it is an intentional effort to capture the spirit of classical Greek tragedy. By weaving in fundamental tragic components such as fate, inner moral conflict, and catharsis, Lorca creates a play that parallels the form and emotional weight of ancient Greek works. This approach allows Blood Wedding to rise above its local origins and achieve a universally resonant tragic quality.

The fifth study is entitled: "Gender Dynamics" by M. Martínez. The study explores the gender roles and the rigid societal structures of the female characters in the House of Bernarda Alba and Yerma. Another study is: "Symbolism in Lorca's theater" by Smith. Investigates Lorca's reliance on symbols and imagery such as moon and blood, so this study aims to recurring symbols of themes such as passion, and fate especially in Blood Wedding in which shed light on the narrative coherence. Finally, Feminist structures in Lorca's theater by Richard Rodriguez. Rodriguez sheds light on Lorca's plays from the feminist perspective, highlighting how structural elements reflect female oppression and resistance. He focuses on the House of Bernarda Alba, Yerma and Blood Wedding. The study argues that Lorca's setting and structures symbolize the restrictions on female, through the female characters.

## **Methods**

The study follows a structuralist approach to analyze the way Bodas de Sangre and La casa de Bernarda Alba construct the themes of virtue, honor, and tragic fate. It utilizes a comparative

textual analysis. The study examines these themes to reveal how societal forces shape the plays' tragic outcomes. It also sheds light on comparative analysis and this approach's principles are:

(1) Binary Oppositions: Freedom vs. repression and individual vs. society; (2) Symbolism: Blood, Walls, fate and colors. The study focuses on the structuralism elements while acknowledging historical and cultural influences on Lorca's portrayal of honor and repression. So, this methodology allows for a deeper understanding how structural forces dictate the characters' fates, reinforcing the inescapable nature of tragedy in Lorca's selected plays.

## Results and Discussion

Stainton expresses that Federico Garcia Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre* (Blood Wedding) and *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (The House of Bernarda Alba) are two of his most renowned plays for, among different reasons, exploring themes of fate, repression, societal constraints, and gender roles. While they differ in setting and dramatic style, both plays employ structural forces, such as narrative progression, character dynamics, and symbolic motifs to reinforce their thematic essence. Lorca's poetic dialogue and dramatic style enhance the tension in both works, making structure an essential force in reinforcing their thematic depth.

### Binary Oppositions in Lorca's Structural Approach

#### *Freedom VS. Repression*

Anibal, explains that these plays were exploring the tension between characters yearning for freedom and forces that repress them. Lorca constructed this opposition through setting, dialogue, and action.

#### *Bodas de Sangre: Passion as a Force of Liberation*

In *Bodas de Sangre*, the Bride struggles between societal duty and her own passionate desires. She is expected to marry the groom, a man who represents stability and honor, yet, she is drawn to Leonardo, who embodied raw passion and freedom. This opposition is evident when the bride, just before the wedding, expresses her internal conflict:

*"I will shut myself away with my husband, and I will love him above everything. But whenever I see you, I see the shadow of another man behind you."* (Act II, Scene 1)

Her attempting to conform is ultimately futile, reinforcing fate as an inevitable force that overpowers social order. The structure of the play mirrors this struggle: it begins with a controlled domestic setting but moves towards a chaotic, natural environment (the forest), where repression is no longer sustainable.

#### *La Casa de Bernarda Alba: Confinement and Control*

In contrast, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* maintains a rigid, enclosed setting that physically and symbolically represents repression. Bernarda, as the ultimate authority, dictates the lives of her daughters, suffocating her desires. The first act sets the tone for this repression:

*"This is what it means to be a woman. Silence!"* (Act I)

Bernarda's insistence on silence represented the structural suppression of female expression. Adela, like the bride, represents resistance. She refused to conform, culminating in her final, tragic declaration:

*"Nobody can stop me! I'll be what I want to be"* (Act III)

However, unlike the Bride, Adela's rebellion is crushed within the confines of the house. The structural rigidity of the setting ensures that repression ultimately prevails, reinforcing the binary opposition between freedom and control.

## ***Individual Vs. Society***

Lorca's characters do not simply struggle with personal conflicts, but are also at odds with societal expectations.

Bodas de Sangre: Social Honor vs. Personal Desire

The Groom's Mother serves as the voice of tradition, believing that a woman's duty is to marry and produce heirs. She warns about the destructive nature of passion, yet the inevitability of fate contradicts her belief in social order. She laments: (69)

*"Men's blood is strong. It seethes inside them, and women's blood, like water, can drown it or let it run wild." (Act I, Scene 1)*

Her words shed light on the structural division between duty society demands order, but human nature disrupts it. The play's climax, a duel between Leonardo and the Groom, underscores this conflict; bloodshed is the structural resolution that restores social balance, even at a tragic cost.

La Casa de Bernarda Alba: Patriarchal Authority

Although Bernarda is a woman, she upholds the patriarchal values that imprison women, making her an agent of societal control rather than an individual with autonomy. She enforces strict rules on her daughters:

*"A daughter's duty is to accept her father's will." (Act I)*

This reinforces the structural role of women as enforcers of their own oppression. The daughters are not only trapped within the house, but also within a social system that denies them agency. The play's structure, with its confined setting and escalating tension, mirrors the way society closes in on Adela, ultimately driving her to tragic fate.

## ***Symbolism as a Structural Force***

Lorca's selected plays rely heavily on symbolism, which serve as a structural framework for the thematic conflicts.

Blood: Passion and Fate

Blood in *Bodas de Sangre* is both a symbol of life and destruction. From the beginning, the Mother associates it with violence:

*"Knives, Knives! Damn all of them! And the monster who invented them!" (Act I, Scene 1)*

Yet, by the end of this play, blood becomes the ultimate expression of fate and passion. The duel between Leonardo and the Groom are not just a fight between individuals, but a structural necessity; that is, blood must be spilled to resolve the conflict between personal desire and social expectation.

Walls: Confinement and Repression

Poeta, (1999) states that *La Casa De Bernarda Alba*, walls were a central structural element. The house itself became a prison, a place where Bernarda's control manifests physically. The walls were not just barriers; they symbolize societal oppression, particularly for women (Fayter, 2016). This was evident when Martirio expresses her frustration:

*"It's not just this house. It's the way things are." (Act II)*

These words underscore that the walls are not merely physical, but ideological, representing norms. The structure of the play, confined to a single setting, reinforces the claustrophobia of repression.

Colors: Black and White

White in *La Casa De Bernarda Alba* initially represented purity and order, but as the play progresses, it became a symbol of sterility and death. Black associated with mourning, dominated the final act, marking Adela's tragic end. Bernarda's final line:

*"She died a virgin." (Act III)*

This was not just a statement, but a structural imposition society's need to preserve its illusion of purity even in death. In *Bodas de Sangre*, colors also play a thematic role:

Red symbolizes passion and bloodshed, most notably in the Bride's final confession, where she describes her uncontrollable longing. Blue and green have always often associated with hope and defiance, particularly in the surrealistic imagery of the Moon and nature.

Fate: The Inescapable Force

The selected plays suggest that fate was a structural inevitability. In *Bodas de Sangre*, the presence of supernatural elements, such as the moon and death, were signifies that destiny governs all actions. The moon declares:

*"When the blood begins to flow, it will be like a river of daggers" (Act III, Scene I)*

This foreshadows the unavoidable conclusion, reinforcing fate as an external in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, fate operated within the rigid walls of the house, though there was no supernatural intervention, the oppressive social system ensures the same tragic end.

## **Conclusion**

Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre* and *La Casa Bernarda Alba* Construct their themes through binary oppositions (Freedom Vs. Repression, individual Vs. Society) and symbolic structures (Blood, walls, colors and fate). However, *Bodas de Sangre* allows for a brief escape into nature before fate restored order while *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* remains rigidly confined, ensuring that repression prevails. Structurally, both plays depict women's struggles against an inescapable system, wherein attempts at freedom lead only to tragedy. Lorca masterfully uses structure to not only tell a story, but to reinforce the inevitable cycle of social oppression and personal destruction. These plays underscore the tension between human desire and societal constrains, illustrating how tradition and authority shape personal destinies. In *Bodas de Sangre*, nature symbolizes an uncontrollable force that momentarily defies social norms, but ultimately succumbs to the predetermined path of fate. In contrast, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* offers on escape its claustrophobic setting and rigid social rules highlight the suffocating power of patriarchal control. Lorca's use of poetic language, stark imagery, and dramatic tension reinforces the idea that true liberation remains unattainable within these oppressive structures. Lorca's works serve as a powerful critique of rigid societal norms, challenging audiences to reflect on the consequences of repression and the cyclical nature of human suffering. Ultimately, both by strict traditions and social expectations, the pursuit of freedom often comes at a tragic cost.

## **Suggestions**

Refining the Thematic Focus: Studying particular themes like oppression and fate, explicitly expressing them in the title, would enhance clarity. A suggested title can be: "The Structural influence of fate and oppression: A comparative study of Federico Garcia Lorca's selected works". Highlighting a Certain Play: Conducting a structural analysis which is confined to *Bodas de Sangre* and *La Casa De Bernarda Alba*, with a clearer scope. A suggested title can be: "Structural patterns in *Bodas de Sangre* and *La Casa De Bernarda Alba*: A comparative examination". Enhancing Readability and Appeal: to make the title more engaging while

maintaining its academic rigor, consider a more fluid wording. Such as: "Decoding structure: A thematic investigation of Federico Garcia Lorca's Key Dramatic Works". Also: "Form and fate: how structural choices reinforce tragic themes in Lorca's plays" and "A stage of destiny: exploring the structural elements behind Lorca's thematic vision".

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