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## How the Notion of Honor in *Bodas de sangre* Can Help Reinterpret

### Cases like *La manada*

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#### Abstract

This essay will delve into the idea that *Bodas de sangre*, a play written by Federico Garcia Lorca in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, still serves as a relevant discussion when determining how gender and societal pressures can correspond to the development of issues in modern-day Spain. It will chronicle a fairly new rape case, referred to as *La manada*, that initiated a call for reformation of the lingering misogynistic mindsets in some parts of the Spanish judicial system. By analyzing the reaction of the public after the initial verdict, namely large protests across Spain, I hope to unveil a possible, collective motive found at the base of the reaction and detail why I believe this motive is related to themes found in *Bodas de sangre*. Furthermore, I will provide my reasoning for why I think the notion of honor in *Bodas de Sangre* is at the root of the social dangers that Lorca conveyed through his work, and how this notion of honor could be present in the reaction of *La manada*. I believe that the insight *Bodas de sangre* can give to *La manada* could be of use in giving a different, more literary, explanation for the reoccurring societal patterns and reactions when analyzing modern-day cases that deal with such provocative subject matter.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay serves as an extension of a chapter called "How Honor and Marriage Are Found at the Core of Societal Disruption in *Bodas de sangre*" from my undergraduate thesis, "Chronicle of a Tragedy: A Comparison of Early Modern Iberian Literature to *La manada*." Some wording may be similar in this piece and the chapter of my thesis, although all research and writing for both were conducted by me. See citation for more details.

*Keywords:* *Bodas de sangre*, *La manada*, Gender Inequality, Spanish Notion of Honor, Federico Garcia Lorca

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Literature can often reveal how certain patterns of gender inequality have been reoccurring throughout periods of time and how they may derive from traditional expectations and values within a society. After familiarizing oneself with Federico Garcia Lorca's work, it becomes obvious that he targeted these patterns by writing about common societal impositions on gender and how they are deeply rooted in traditional values, such as honor. Within his work, he unveils the dangers that may follow the pressure to maintain family honor on the sanity of both men and women, and often his work can be viewed as a criticism on the deeply affected wounds deriving from the warped perception of honor in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Honor, a value that once created order in times like that of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup> and likely before, became a tool in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that which some members of society used against the progression of gender equality. After researching the injustices present in the conviction of *La manada*, it became possible to connect Lorca's response to the dangers of societal implications on gender, as found through his play *Bodas de sangre*,<sup>3</sup> to the response of many people worldwide after the case of *La manada*.

*La manada* is a case of rape that occurred in the summer of 2016 after the San Fermin celebrations in Pamplona, Spain. One day after the festivities, an 18-year-old woman was gang

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<sup>2</sup> After doing extensive research on Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* and Calderon de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, it became apparent that honor served as a kind of backbone for order within early Spanish societies. While *Fuenteovejuna* relates the notion of honor to the functionality of the society as a whole and *La vida es sueño* comments on the opposing aspects of love and law in marriage and honor, *Bodas de sangre* ultimately brings all of these aspects together in its portrayal the role of marriage in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish societies.

<sup>3</sup> *Bodas de sangre*, also known as *Blood Weddings* in its English translation, will only have the first word in the title capitalized in accordance with traditional Spanish capitalization rules. The same rule will apply to all titles referred to as their original Spanish name throughout this article.

raped and videoed by a group of five men while she was trying to walk to her car. Following the incident, the case was brought to the attention of the Provincial Court of Navarre. As the definition of “rape” was called into question by the Spanish law, the five men were found guilty of sexual abuse, a lesser charge than that of sexual aggression, which has greater legal consequences. The decision was made because the court concluded that they could not prove that the men employed violence on the victim, despite having videos of the incident (Barry).

Because the case had occurred at the well-known San Fermin festival, a festival that is most widely regarded for its showcasing of the Running of the Bulls, the amount of attention it received multiplied shortly after the Provincial Court of Navarre made their decision.<sup>4</sup> While the number of people following the case grew, the Provincial Court of Navarre made the decision that the group of men referred to as *La manada* (translated as “wolf-pack” in English) was found guilty of sexual abuse, as stated before (Barry). The verdict ignited a passionate disruption within the society because many felt that the charge was not severe enough to create a sense of justice for the victim. Protests took place in order to combat the initial verdict of the Provincial Court of Navarre and it later became obvious that the fight for an overturn of the initial verdict was representative of a larger fight to better other present issues among Spanish societies regarding gender inequality, which is perhaps the kind of reaction that Lorca had wanted to instigate with his plays.

Although Federico Garcia Lorca wrote several tragedies illustrating the plight of women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are three that are commonly recognized as his most popular:

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<sup>4</sup> According to The Guardian, it is estimated that over 1,000,000 people attend the festival in Pamplona annually (information taken from the article titled “Annual Pamplona Bull-Run Festival Begins Amid Fireworks and Protests”).

*Yerma*,<sup>5</sup> *La casa de Bernarda Alba*,<sup>6</sup> and *Bodas de sangre*. While *Yerma* and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* more closely discuss the internal, emotional effects of women within their family, *Bodas de sangre* focuses on the plight of women that stems directly from their supposed role in society. The decision to focus solely on Lorca's *Bodas de sangre* in this article was to expand upon how Lorca's perception of gender inequality from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish societies, as illustrated in *Bodas de sangre*, can aid in deciphering the biases found in the initial court decision of *La manada*. It is important to note that the research in this article will not draw direct connections between the characters of the play and the people involved in the rape case, but rather unveil the biases on gender that are present in both the case and the play. In order to remain oriented around the relationship between *Bodas de sangre* and *La manada*, this article will not go into full detail of the play, but it will summarize some of the main plot points and examine the character development to help respond to the question that this article seeks to answer: how are the traditional Spanish values, such as honor, still present in modern day affairs?

Lorca writes about themes in *Bodas de sangre* that are commonly seen throughout literature: forbidden love, a runaway bride, and untimely death. Although these themes have found themselves within many famous pieces throughout literary history, his use of character development is what makes his piece outwardly original. He ultimately utilizes his character development to tell a different story within the play; one that describes how passion and order did not coexist within some Spanish societies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This research focuses on the development of the main characters within the play: La Madre (the mother of the groom), El

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<sup>5</sup> *Yerma* (1934) is a tragedy that details the life of a woman who is unable to conceive children and how this desire for motherhood ultimately drives her to commit crime.

<sup>6</sup> *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936) was Lorca's last tragedy ever written. It details a woman along with her five daughters and how the mother's oppression within the house ultimately leads to the family's demise.

Novio (the groom), La Novia (the bride), Leonardo (the lover), La Luna (the moon), and La Muerte (death).

Act one introduces La Madre, El Novio, La Novia, and Leonardo, and there is a dwelling atmospheric sadness accompanied by a lingering sense of morbidity throughout the first act. La Madre speaks with her son, El Novio, a seemingly sensitive man, about the death of his father and how she is perpetually fearful of losing the other members of her family. She is painted as a pessimistic woman, fearful of the future and overly protective of the family. After this conversation, she is informed by her neighbor that La Novia, who is engaged to El Novio, had previously been with another man named Leonardo. The bit of gossip made La Madre worried and skeptical over her son's relationship because the idea of having another lover before marriage was problematic to La Madre. It gave La Novia a sense of impurity, and for La Madre, impurity of a daughter-in-law could cause detriment to the family name and lineage.

This assumption was the more traditional mentality, driven by older notions of values and societal expectations, and through the character of La Madre, it can be assumed that the pattern of negative judgments passed on women in this regard were still present in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also insinuated that La Madre had never been involved physically with anyone else other than her late husband, so her concerns about La Novia are exaggerated within her own mind. It is probable that these concerns about impurity in marriage were imposed on the mother's mentality by the society in which she was raised. The traditional view of marriage that La Madre maintained had conceptualized marriage as almost like a tool to carry on a family lineage and reputation, and it is possible to see that, in this mindset, marriage was not necessarily about being in love with a partner, but more about forming a bond that strengthens a family name (Brines and

Joyner 333). The immediate judgement of La Novia's past by La Madre suggests that La Novia was already beginning to be ostracized by society before the real incident that occurred.

Act two takes place on the morning of the wedding and Leonardo tells La Novia that he is still in love with her, despite the fact that he is married to her cousin. Although La Novia first refuses to express her feelings towards Leonardo, she soon confesses her deep-rooted love for him. As the party moves to the church for the wedding ceremony, La Novia asks El Novio to keep her safe, and it becomes clear that she requests this because she is scared that her shared passion with Leonardo would disrupt the wedding and possibly lead to something worse. At the end of act two, it is revealed that La Novia and Leonardo ran off together during the wedding reception. Enraged, a search party forms, led by El Novio, to find the two fugitives, and during this time, La Madre carries an air of self-righteousness being that she had, in her perception, been right about the nature of La Novia.

It is possible to assume that La Novia ran away with Leonardo because of the pressure imposed on her to remain in a marriage of convenience, rather than be in a relationship of pure passion, and here it becomes apparent how this is a society where freedom to act does not exist. In a literary sense, the characters were faced with a choice between two deaths: a death of their passion or a death of their reputation/honor. Because the bride escapes with Leonardo during her wedding, the groom is forced to take revenge because his honor had been jeopardized, or perhaps El Novio is pressured by society to respond to the situation with anger, rather than sadness. It can also be understood that La Novia had been given the bulk of the blame from the society because she was a woman with a past of impurity. Furthermore, Lorca is drawing a connection between the reality of the body, driven by passion, and the reality of the mind, driven by rationality. La

Novia had proven society's concerns about her being untrustworthy and dangerous to the family by acting on her passions, rather than on rationality.

Act three begins in the forest, where Leonardo and La Novia have escaped. El Novio had just made his way to the forest, in search of Leonardo and La Novia. Then a kind of supernatural event takes place, a scene that is present in many Greek tragedies. La Luna, in the form of a woodcutter, appears on the stage and foreshadows death to the audience by stating that blood will be spilt. Then La Muerte, who is disguised as an old beggar woman, enters and discusses the fate of the night, also suggesting that it will end in death. This kind of direct interaction with the audience and heavy foreshadowing of death within the play alludes to the Greek tragedy method of using a sort of chorus to give the audience better insight into the action occurring onstage. With this strategy, Lorca uses La Luna and La Muerte to make the audience feel more involved and to stress the importance of the next scene.

Soon a battle between El Novio and Leonardo occurs and they both end up dead. Within the village, La Muerte, who is still in the form of an old beggar, appears to La Madre. The presence of La Luna and La Muerte suggest that death had been following the three lovers and that an early death was their fate as soon as Leonardo and La Novia broke free from their reality and let themselves be overcome with passion. La Madre disregards the presence of La Muerte until she is met with La Novia, whose white wedding gown is covered in the blood of her own lovers. At this point, there are many interpretations of what happens to La Novia, being that Lorca ended the written play with this scene. In some productions, she has an immediate death whereas in others, her death is postponed but her life has left with her lovers'. La Novia's punishment was never clarified, and here the reader is able to see how Lorca left room for the reader to determine their own ending. By leaving the ending open for interpretation, Lorca



allows the audience to possibly fill the plot to mirror instances that relate directly to them. In this way, his play can reach a larger audience, and therefore have a greater impact in dissolving the harmful societal expectations.

The image of the blood on La Novia's white gown in the last scene represents her ruined purity and can be seen almost like a scarlet 'A' that indicates the weight of shame and sorrow that she will have to carry. Furthermore, the ending of the play suggests that when the ideals of marriage were compromised, the entire functionality of the society was compromised too. Acting out on personal passions rather than what is expected by the society could create massive chaos and develop into a precarious situation for those involved. It is this that led to the demise of the society; in the end, there was death, collapsed sanity, and an overall broken society.

Lorca chose a tragic plot that relied on, at the time, the taboo concept of unbearable desire to possibly attract a larger audience and eventually create a wider forum to discuss the actual issue that is represented in *Bodas de sangre*. If so, he used the entertainment value of the work as a way to reveal his message: society takes an oppressive form, rather than a supportive form, by enforcing specific gender roles. The pressure to act only within one's implied gender and corresponding societal role is possibly what creates a feeling of eagerness to express freedom, and more specifically, the freedom to love. The storyline elaborates on the tragedy of forbidden love while it is also enriched with the more realistic tragedy of stifled emotion caused by environmental pressures. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Lorca did not give proper names to La Novia, El Novio, and La Madre. This could possibly be because he wanted to generalize the relationships presented so that the audience had an easier time relating the social issues illustrated in the play to their own environment, again, as an appeal for a wider audience. It is revealed through the play that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, men could only act out emotionally

in revenge or anger and women were chastised for being passionate. By generalizing his characters, he suggests that societal pressures are not just dangerous to the characters in his play, but to everyone his characters represent.

The play also depicts the differing opinions of women on the topic of marriage and enforces the idea that younger women believed that marriage was tied to the idea of love and freedom, whereas older women typically believed that marriage was a tool used to uphold reputations and build better connections between families, like in the case of La Madre. While some of the members of the society were quick to pass negative judgement in *Bodas de sangre*, it is interesting to note that at the start of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, younger generations are portrayed to be progressive about premarital actions. *Bodas de sangre* gives us an insight as to when the development of less misogynistic mentalities may have occurred in Spanish societies, however, it is still important to note that marriage and familial honor were still commonplace in maintaining societal order at the time. This offers a reason as to why, when a member of society seemingly undermined the values of marriage, they were ostracized. As seen in the play, these contrasting mentalities led to the eventual demise of everyone involved.

La Madre represents the destructive familial pressure to upkeep an honorable reputation for the family. She has an older mentality and enforces these pressures on her son and her son's fiancé. By perpetuating her fear of both physical and honorable death and driving her son to seek revenge for the family, it is possible that La Madre led her son to his own demise. Perhaps he would not have felt the need to take revenge on Leonardo if he did not think that his honor and family name were at stake, or that it was acceptable for a man in his society to express heartache and defeat. It can be suggested that La Madre believes that when people act outside of social

norms, by way of passion, they can become harmful to the nature and functionality of their society.

La Novia represents a young woman who breaks social standards by giving into her passions and earning a scandalous reputation because of her actions. In the beginning of the play, El Novio's mother explains that he must be careful with La Novia because her reputation suggested that she did not abide by societal standards being that she publicly had a lover before. Families in this time had wanted women that would only promote their reputation as a family, and if a woman had public history with other men, then they were either deemed unsuitable or were constantly scrutinized by the public (Dyer 447). After Leonardo and El Novio died, La Novia had to return back to her community and reveal the tragedy that had taken place. Rather than having recognition of being a victim to the society and of the destructive sense of revenge both men were nearly forced to act on, she was seen as the murderer, which further outlines the patriarchal society in which they lived.

El Novio also represents inequality towards gender, but for both men and women. He is forced to act out of anger, rather than anguish, because accepting defeat could potentially bring dishonor to his family. At the beginning of the play, he was shamed for being with a woman with an impure history and at the end of the play, he was shamed for trusting in a woman like La Novia. He was pushed by the society to defend his masculinity and the honor of his family, which ultimately led to his own mental collapse and subsequent death. The character of El Novio drastically changes from beginning to end. He went from embodying sensitivity and sweetness to being overrun by embarrassment and fury, possibly due to the societal expectation of how he, as a man, should react.

Between the characters of El Novio and La Novia, Lorca illustrates the precarious implications that derive from imposed gender roles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The play depicts an emotionally abusive relationship between society as a collective and the individuals that belong in it, and this relationship exposes the fact that there was no forum in which individuals could express their emotions and receive a just response. The characters in *Bodas de sangre* represent the ongoing battle for men and women in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain, as their right to live a life of freedom was constantly jeopardized by their society (Brines and Joyner 334).

As stated before, honor was key to maintaining societal status and a reputable family name. *Bodas de sangre* can give insight as to what the expectations of women were in their respective societies and how these expectations potentially helped reinforce a patriarchal society. When hearing cases like that of *La manada*, it is possible to understand why this play is still very relevant in discussions regarding gender roles. The idea of honor and its influence on Spanish society has an evolving history in Spanish literature, and a big part of the evolution can be imagined, having in mind plays such as *Bodas de sangre*.

Lorca wrote his play almost like an exposé on the dangers of imposing pressures on people based on their gender. In *Bodas de sangre*, Lorca invites his readers to think on the purpose of the values that are present in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tragedy underlines a call to redefine the merit and worth of the traditional values found in society. Although he acknowledges its ancient beauty, he exposes how it creates vicious cycles throughout society that end in tragedy. The play illustrates how the values found in marriage, or more specifically, honor, have been a major social influence on differentiating love and freedom throughout Spanish history. Freedom was not a factor in determining the righteousness of a woman's

actions, and the amount of honor a woman cultivated or destroyed was ultimately decided by the judgements of those around her.

It is possible to connect the case with these plays in this regard because the victim was neglected in her pursuit of justice and her freedom was compromised when the court decided her perception of the event was invalid. During the initial verdict, the case was seen as something black and white, that is, denoting the presence of complexity. Because the victim did not technically say “no” during her videotaped rape, her entire position was undermined (Barry). The court was quick to place judgement on the situation without attempting to gain a full understanding of what actually happened in an emotional context. Similarly to how La Madre in *Bodas de sangre* reacted to La Novia returning after the death of Leonardo and El Novio, the lower court initially deemed the victim’s emotions invalid in the presence of judgement.

*La manada* sparked a reaction to a baseline patriarchal society, and both men and women used the publicity of the case as a platform to express a need for reformation. They were expressing their need for reformation just as Lorca did when he wrote *Bodas de sangre*, but the protests that followed this case were based on different desires by different groups of people. Some people wanted punishment for the men in *La manada*, whereas others just wanted a change in their society. Even a few simply saw this opportunity as a more publicized forum for them to express feelings and concerns about other social and political issues. However, despite the varying desired outcomes of the protesters, there was still a solidarity among all the people.

This solidarity could have stemmed from the idea that because honor had been jeopardized for the victim, in a society that has historically recognized honor as one of the most important values, everyone felt obligated to reprimand the judicial system for not upholding this value in its decision making. The fact that the initial verdict resulted in the accused receiving a lesser charge

meant that misogyny still exists either in the lower judicial system, or more specifically, in the written law itself. Here, "honor," in whatever sentiment it may carry in a modern context, is forsaken by the court ruling, and could be seen as one of the biggest driving forces found in the inner depths of the protestors. As the notion of honor was misused by the society in *Bodas de sangre* as a tool for emotional restraints, it is possible to conclude that the reaction from *La manada* was one that criticized the lost original sentiment of honor, one that dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and likely before, which recognizes honor as an individual right.

Alongside the intricate concept of honor, the traditional ideals of marriage have possibly institutionalized many belief systems into the minds of people in some parts of Spain, which could have helped to enforce societal gender roles onto men and women in the modern day. It would not be so illogical to think that if the concept of marriage has helped enforce societal gender roles, then it is also possible that the concept of 'marriage' in Spain helped promote the patriarchal society that still exists in some parts of the country (Uceda). At least that's what could be concluded or inferred after reading *Bodas de sangre*. With this position, *Bodas de sangre* should be used as a reference point when discussing the issues pertaining to inequality in Spain today, because by understanding the issues found in the work of one of the most famous authors of Spain, Federico García Lorca, many more people can begin to realize how inequality is harmful to society and its individual members. A global recognition of this issue may restore something that many people have forgotten: the traditional Spanish notion of honor, which is closely related to the modern conception of 'respect,' is a universal value.

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