

Subject Pathway – Session 27 – 27th March 2003
Federico Garcia Lorca

In which ways is *Blood Wedding* a suitable text for KS4 GCSE study?

Devising a detailed scheme of work:

- introducing the text
- studying the text
- responding to the text
- comparing *Blood Wedding* with other texts

The introduction of a work in translation is only permissible for GCSE studies in twentieth century drama as the poems from other culture and traditions included in the Anthology for GCSE study were originally written in English. Work should be chosen for content with the opportunity to bring in other factors making students aware of cultural citizenship.

The introduction of Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* offers the students the chance to study an important lyric poet and playwright of twentieth century Spain. Lorca spent most of his life in Granada and Madrid but also spent nine months in New York in 1929 prompting his poem *Poet in New York* which, in its criticism of modern city life, has been compared to T S Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

Born 5th June 1898, Lorca's father had become a millionaire growing sugar beet following the American capture of Spanish Cuba and Philippines. Originally studying law he changed track, living in Madrid's Residence for Students with, among others, Salvador Dali, and following his passion for music and literature.

Lorca became popular in 1929/30 with the publication of his poems the *Gypsy Ballads* and began writing about Spain in the 1930s. He promoted interest in theatre through an innovative travelling theatre company, La Barraca, which was government-sponsored. Lorca is also famous for reviving an interest in flamenco. Lorca was acknowledged to be ahead of his time both in his technical innovations and in his portrayal of social concerns, however he did not put on his own plays. Lorca's characters are unrealistic wearing metal wigs yet 'telling truth'.

Lorca's impact was considered too powerful by leaders of Franco's military insurrection; his opposition to fascism, his writing on controversial social themes from homosexuality to pacifism, and his advocacy of popular theatre, led to his murder in Granada by Nationalists at the start of the Spanish civil war in August 1936. On his death students of Lorca performed *Fuente Orejuela* by Lope de Vega, a contemporary of Shakespeare (he wrote approximately 5-800 plays of which two or three are performed now), in Morocco. *Fuente Orejuela* tells the story of the village of Cordoba's rejection of the rule of the knights of Cantabria in the fifteenth century, preferring to be ruled by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, sponsors of Christopher Columbus. The knights had abused their power culminating in the play with a rape of a woman who subsequently

harangues her attacker, resulting in his murder by the women of the village. Although subjected to torture, the villagers do not give the women away. Historically the Crown took over the rule of Cordoba with the knights banished.

Antonio Machado, Spain's most famous twentieth century poet, also wrote a poem which was banned by the fascist regime.

Blood Wedding is the first of three folk tragedies (1935), with *Yerma* ('barren') following in 1937 and *The House of Bernarda Alba* in 1940. *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma* are poetic whilst *The House of Bernarda Alba* is more prosaic and more overtly critical of social mores.

Blood Wedding was first performed on 7th March 1933 and presents a realistic lullaby in Act 1, poetic spectacle in Act 2 and completely unreal symbolism as characters converse in verse in Act 3.

The **first act** comprises three scenes and introduces three households. The first is that of the bridegroom and his mother. The mother is very protective of her remaining son, her eldest son and husband having been killed in a feud with the Felix family. A neighbour informs the audience, in the style of a Greek chorus, of the son's efforts to buy an olive grove and about his fiancée, who had previously been engaged to Leonardo Felix, and reveals that his fiancée's mother had not loved her father and had left when her daughter was still young.

The second household is Leonardo's where we are introduced to Leonardo's wife and mother-in-law and learn more details of the bride and bridegroom's wedding through the maid. Leonardo, although poor, rides an impressive horse and spends more money than the family can afford shoeing the animal, whilst his wife worries about the wheat price and whether she will be able to have a new dress and the baby a new bonnet.

Leonardo is the only character with a name (Leon - big cat + 'ardo' – 'I burn') and as part of the Felix (cat) family is fated.

The third household, father and bride, live on the drylands in the caves, – a sign on wealth as the caves provide a cool sanctuary against the sun. Tension builds as the audience realizes the bride does not really love the groom and that the groom's presents are part of a negotiation process to join two wealthy families. The father's speech praising his daughter details that she makes bread at 3am, can embroider and cut through rope with her teeth.

Act 1 is one of **realism/naturalism** as audience is made aware of environment and heredity through talk of olive groves of the rich and the wheat of the poor. (Connections can be drawn here to Zola, Ibsen and Theresa Lacune)

Aim to go beyond the naturalism and realism to the 'le moment' of Hippolyte Taine (mid 19th century and friend of Zola) – with three families pulling on rope it is the wedding which will make it snap.

In lesson – can ask for two characters for the groom – one to read and the other to say what he is thinking to discover the subtext.

Act 2 brings **spectacle** with Leonardo's early arrival after the bride has just had her hair done and is dressed only in her petticoats. We learn that they did not get married because he did not have enough money. Guests arrive but there are further exchanges of intimate conversation before the wedding. Key moments highlight the subtext with the Freudian sub-conscious drive laid bare at moment of conflict.

In Act 2 scene two the marriage has taken place but at the moment of the circle dance the bride is discovered to have ridden off with Leonardo – hot blooded Andalusian image.

At the end of Act 2 the mother is the pivot of a classic key moment as she hovers between saving her son and choosing revenge, a moment of collision where she chooses hatred – described as 'duende' where the rough edges and technical shortcomings enhance the performance emphasizing the darkness of the moment.

The audience from earlier conversations would expect **Act 3** to bring a knife fight but instead are presented with the heavy symbolism of three woodcutters enacting their roles akin to Greek chorus.

The runaways have crossed the watershed, leaving the southern sandy, dry slopes of Sierra la Morena of Andalusia for the northern slopes covered in pine forests and streams. The fourth woodcutter plays an androgynous moon, representative of the fates; if it shines they can be seen, however if the clouds obscure it they will get away. There is no knife fight but blue light and violins, with death dressed as a beggar woman who is going to kill them.

In Act 3 scene two the space is white once more with only the women left behind to mourn. Although the mother hits the bride as she joins them, she forgives her in the unity of mourning and a bizarre enactment of a Mass follows where she holds the knife up (rather than the body) as if in communion. There is another key moment as the audience realises Leonardo's wife knew what he was but loved him, with the three speeches at the end bringing a harmony.

Fate has come full circle in a cycle of violence and mourning; Leonardo's wife is in exactly the same position as the mother was, widowed with one child and expecting another.

Drama Objectives:

- actioning the text
- essays
- monologues

Suggestions made for grammar starter – transitive verbs, needing an object to make sense, for example ‘hit’; intransitive verbs such as ‘smile’ and those which can be either such as ‘kiss’.

Lesson suggestion – to write to Lorca – using Max Stafford-Clark’s example of ‘Letters to George’ in which he writes to the eighteenth century playwright George Farquhar

Based on Stanislavky’s system that actors develop their own conception of their roles, the group was asked to attach an action to every speech at the beginning of the play, making it a transitive verb, followed by interpretation of say first five minutes, for example mother’s entrance. In lesson may need to give a pool of verbs to choose from - leads to more subtle understanding – groom may be testing ground to see if he can talk to mother about the wedding. Her ‘yes’ could be a warning, a denial or an invitation to talk or maybe informing the audience.

Clark proposed that following the discussion, to ensure consistency, the text be written on the left with directions as to how to deliver the line on the right, illustrating how pace, movement, gestures, can be affected by a single word. This text based exercise results in a performance to meet drama objectives and is recommended as a good way to approach SATS teaching – how would class direct scene? – go through actioning scenes in groups to show understanding of method.

Having considered a letter to Lorca and building on knowledge of play, the consistency gained in pursuing the initial idea serves to make the subtext explicit. When it comes to Leonardo talking to the bride, the actions are quite different – he cajoles, seduces etc whilst talking about the wedding.

Essay suggestions:

Which character do you sympathise with most?
(ties in with key moments, leading to staging etc)

There is a lot of symbolism in *Blood Wedding*. In what way is Leonardo’s character symbolic?

How is symbolism used in *Blood Wedding*. How far is each character a symbol?

How would you stage Act 3 of *Blood Wedding*? What problems would there be?

Reread last three pages of *Blood Wedding*. How far do you think Mother and Bride are reconciled at the end? How does staging contribute to meaning?

Is this a play about women?

How was the mother portrayed? etc

By using small pieces of the play, focus is afforded lower ability students whilst stretching the more able – In what way are the woodcutters a chorus?

Monologue

Can be prepared as part of drama assessment which will lead into essay. By gluing parts of speeches together an emotional trajectory is traced forming a self-standing piece of theatre, a script for performance and an evaluating text, giving insight into the play for the rest of the class. Each line should be delivered as it would be said in the play – see example of Mother's Monologue.

Also poems written by Lorca which relate to themes in the play can be used as another way to review each Act, for example riding away on horses, the moon etc.

My experience of drama teaching to date has been with indigenous texts. However I have been able to introduce excerpts from texts from other cultures in a descriptive writing unit and in teaching the first cluster of poems in the 2004 Anthology have concentrated on cultural and traditional links to begin the module introducing the concept of hybridity brought about through slavery and colonialism. The class began by considering their own cultural heredity, family, local and national traditions, and sharing them with the rest of the group, who were particularly interested to hear from those speaking a second language at home and with a different pattern of celebrations. Some knowledge of historical and cultural background has afforded the class more confidence in putting forward their initial thoughts about the poems, something they are nervous about doing and those taking history have been able to contribute to drawing cross-curricular links which have proved beneficial to the whole group.

References:

<http://www.whitbyhs.cheshire.sch.uk/fetures/blood/lorca/htm>

<http://lingolex.com/lorcabookshop.htm>

<http://boppin.com/lorca>

Federico Garcia Lorca *The House of Bernarda Alba and other Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1992)

Federico Garcia Lorca *Lorca: Three Tragedies* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1961)