REPRESSION, REBELLION, DEATH, AND DESIRE: THE POLITICAL AND
FREUDIAN DIALECTIC IN FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA'S THE HOUSE OF
BERNARDA ALBA

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ABSTRACT

Federico García Lorca’s The House of Bernarda Alba finds the point of contact between Freud’s theory and contemporary politics. The main dramatic conflict is between a tyrannical mother, Bernarda, who represses the instincts of her daughters and Adela who rebels against Bernarda in order to assert her passion. Bernarda’s tyranny corresponds to the Freudian concept of civilization which has gone wrong and to Franco’s regime in Spain. Part of Bernarda’s political agenda is to keep the inhabitants of the house in enmity by fomenting discord and hatred within the group. All the sisters love Pepe, see each other as rivals, and become each other’s oppressors. They are psychologically deformed by the system. Adela embodies Freudian Eros and rebels against Bernarda in the name of freedom, including sexual freedom, for which the Republic fought against Franco. In Freudian theory, apart from the struggle between civilization and an individual, there is another battle between the instinct of life, Eros, and the instinct of death, Thanatos. Thanatos is present in Adela; she commits suicide in the end.

I have analyzed this play as a psycho/political drama to make a statement about tragic inevitability vs. the possibility of change. The problem arises whether The House of Bernarda Alba is a play about a rebellion that fails because humankind is trapped in an unresolvable contradiction - or can there be a return to happiness once fascism is overthrown? I used Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, Lorca’s writing and secondary sources written on Lorca and The House of Bernarda Alba to investigate this problem.
My conclusion is that Bernarda’s tyranny, like Franco’s regime, is not invincible and could be defeated if the inhabitants of the house united in a common fight against it. A single individual cannot defeat the regime. However, even if fascism were overthrown, according to Freud, the return to happiness would still be impossible because every form of civilization produces unhappiness. Therefore, even if there is a way out of the political dilemma, there is no escape out of the Freudian dilemma because of the irreconcilable battle between civilization and an individual and even more so between Eros and Thanatos.
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INTRODUCTION

The House of Bernarda Alba was written in 1936, a few months before Federico Garcia Lorca's death at the hands of Franco's supporters. The play premiered in Buenos Aires in 1945. Franco's regime did not allow it to be performed in Spain until 1964 (Galerstein 183-184). Why would the play be considered dangerous to the regime? I see an answer to this question in the politics of the play, as well as in the strong Freudian elements in the personality of its characters. This thesis will examine The House of Bernarda Alba applying to it Freudian theory written in 1930 in Civilization and Its Discontents and discussing the contemporary politics present in the play; it will then find the point of contact between them.

Before he wrote The House of Bernarda Alba, Lorca had lived under the repressive rightist regime of general Miguel Primo de Rivera who ruled Spain between 1923 and 1930. Therefore, Lorca was familiar with tyranny. In 1931, however, the Second Spanish Republic won the elections, which resulted in a democratic government and social reforms (Newton 11). Beginning in 1933 fascism, in organized form, began to rise in Spain after the foundation of the Spanish Fascist party, the Falange, by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the dictator's son. However, the fascist sentiments were already present during the rule of Miguel Primo de Rivera. On July 17, 1936 the Nationalist troops under general Francisco Franco revolted against the Republican Government in Spanish Morocco, and the garrison in Granada followed on July 20 (Newton 12-13). Thus, a repressive right-wing/fascist takeover displaced a democratic system already in place.
Federico García Lorca was involved in the political life of Spain already during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. He began dealing with the theme of the struggle for freedom in his work, a theme which culminates in Adela in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, but which was already apparent in 1925 with *Mariana Pineda* who chooses death rather than the betrayal of her ideals or her lover (Klein 145). The military regime of Primo de Rivera created a backdrop against which Lorca was working on *Mariana Pineda*. The play was based on a tale of a woman in Granada who was executed by the absolutist monarchy in 1871 for embroidering a flag in support of the liberal opposition (Newton 6).

Lorca’s itinerant theatre company, the Teatro Universitario known as La Barraca, which was founded by him in 1931, received financial and ideological support from the highest level of the Republican Government after the appointment of Fernando de los Ríos as the Republican Government’s Minister of Education. Fernando de los Ríos was one of the leading figures of the socialist left in Granada and Lorca’s mentor and friend (Anderson 15-16). Therefore, Lorca was closely connected to the Republican Government. Between 1933-1936 Lorca publicly opposed the rise of international fascism and its sympathizers in Spain. In 1936 he spoke publicly in support of the Popular Front formed out of the republican and socialist parties (Carr 4), and joined the Association of Friends of South America and the Friends of Portugal dedicated to battle the repressive dictatorial regimes in those regions (Newton 13-14).

On July 14, 1936 Lorca went to Granada for the summer. He was arrested by the fascist police and executed on the morning of August 19, 1936 by order of the governor José Valdés Guzmán. Immediately after his death, in order to justify his execution, Lorca
was accused of being an agent of the Soviet Union. His connection to the Republican
Government and his friendship with Fernando de los Rios, as well as his public opposition
to fascism caused the Right to condemn his democratic views (Newton 14). Ian Gibson
claims in his book The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca that Lorca was executed by
the fascist machine of terror which was created to crush any resistance against the
Nationalist Movement (168). Lorca was known for his rejection of traditionalist Spain
(Gibson 168). Moreover, he felt contempt for the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and the
insensitivity of the Catholic Church towards the people (Newton 13-14), and he expressed
these views in the critique of Spanish society in his works. Ramón Ruiz Alonso, a
member of the rightist Catholic coalition CEDA said that Lorca “had done more damage
with his pen than others were capable of with guns” (Newton 14). At the outset of
Franco’s regime the discussion of Lorca’s death was prohibited; later it was explained as a
mistake made in the confusion during the first months of the Civil War. Some, however,
see the reason for Lorca’s death not in his politics but in the vendetta waged against
Granada’s homosexuals (Newton 14). Ultimately, however, the reasons for Lorca’s
assassination remain a mystery.

After having discussed Lorca’s political views and the opposition to Franco’s
repressive government in his work which provides us with the background information
for our examination of The House of Bernarda Alba, let us now return to the purpose of
this thesis and the connection between Freudian theory and Franco’s regime. In her article
“The political power of Bernarda Alba” Galerstein makes the point that the play was
written during the times of the Republic and it was meant as “a warning to the Republican
government, which was struggling with chaos and the rumblings of revolution, that it is never easy to overthrow an old order; and a people, to achieve its hopes for a new order, must be careful not to revert to the authoritarian practices of the old” (189).

The politics of Spain and Freudian theory are two seemingly separate issues. They find, however, a point of contact in Federico García Lorca’s play The House of Bernarda Alba. Francisco García Lorca said in the “Prologue” to Three Tragedies: “[T]he play’s dramatic tension is born precisely out of the clash of ... wills. Of the domineering will of the mother, upheld by the forces of tradition, of custom, of social values-and of the deaf and invincible wills of the daughters, dragged by their thirst for living and by impulses and instincts which clash with each other in their turn” (27). The same author recognized in In the Green Morning: Memories of Federico that the play dramatizes “the struggle between instinct and society, and between liberation and repression” (249). Francisco García Lorca presents an argument which coincides with the theories of Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents. Freud lists three components in the structure of personality: id, ego and superego. Id consist of two instincts: the life instinct, Eros, and the death instinct, Thanatos. Freud also writes about civilization which he defines in a following manner: “the word ‘civilization’ describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes-namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations” (36). Therefore, the instinct that Francisco García Lorca talks about parallels Freudian Eros and Thanatos and Lorca’s society parallels Freud’s civilization. Moreover, Freud recognizes that there is a struggle between civilization which attempts to repress an individual’s
instincts and the individual who wants to liberate them. As we can see Lorca’s critics use language akin to that of Freud when analyzing Lorca’s work, whether they are aware of Freud’s theories in detail or not. I chose Civilization and Its Discontents as a representative text because Freud synthesizes and rethinks his earlier theories in it arriving at the larger thesis that our civilization produces unhappiness, and because his theories about dialectical conflict in Civilization coincide most closely with the dynamics of the fascist regime of Franco and with the dynamics between the inhabitants of Bernarda’s house. Lorca foresaw the repressive nature of Franco’s regime, which came to power only after the play was completed and that is why it was so dangerous to the regime that it had to be banned. The tyranny of the domineering mother, Bernarda, “upheld by the forces of tradition, of custom, of social values” resembles the tyranny of Franco who was also upheld by these forces. Freud argues that these forces of tradition, custom and social values are components of civilization, and he sees a trade-off between an individual who gives away a portion of his or her possibilities of happiness and civilization which, in exchange, provides an individual with security (62). Franco’s regime took away those possibilities of happiness, deprived individuals of their freedom, and repressed Eros by threatening punishment for disobedience instead of offering security. Franco’s regime represents civilization which has gone wrong. Freudian theory, therefore, can be interpreted in a political way and applied to the understanding of the dynamics of the fascist regime and its repressive methods. Knowledge of the workings of civilization is power and could be used to undermine the regime, and that, ultimately, is why the play was banned. The play also analyzes the dynamics of oppression under the fascist regime
and the way in which the oppressed, the inhabitants of the house, become each other’s oppressors.

Freud also writes about sex (Eros), which was a taboo topic under Franco’s regime insisting upon strict Catholic morality of its citizens. The Republic opposed the Catholic morality of the regime and its requirement of decency, and fought, among other things, for liberty and sexual freedom. Such rebellion is represented by two characters in the play, filled with lust for life, Adela and María Josefa. Furthermore, Freud gives full attention to death (Thanatos) in his work. The Catholic Church, however, forbids suicide which the heroine of the play, Adela, commits.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine Bernarda’s methods of tyranny over her daughters, mother, servants and neighbours and will correlate them with the means that civilization employs to control individuals. It will also outline, in detail, the Freudian theory of civilization and superego. Moreover, it will find the parallels between Bernarda’s regime and Franco’s. Chapter II will discuss the ways in which Martirio, Angustias, Magdalena, Amelia, Poncia and the Servant accommodate to the regime. The chapter will draw parallels between the ways of accommodation and the workings of the fascist regime which keeps the citizens in enmity and it will discuss the serious psychological consequences of such accommodation as seen by Freud. Chapter III will present the two characters, Adela and María Josefa, who rebel against Bernarda and fight for freedom, an ideal of the Republic. The chapter will also discuss Freud’s Eros and Thanatos, the forces inside the characters motivating their rebellion, and the superego which like civilization is a form of censorship and can be seen as the internalized values of
civilization. Moreover, it will offer an examination of the images of Eros and Thanatos in the play.

By analyzing *The House of Bernarda Alba* as a psycho/political drama I intend to make a statement about tragic inevitability vs. the possibility of change. For me this is a play about a rebellion that fails because humankind is trapped in an unresolvable contradiction. Even after fascism is overthrown, there still cannot be a return to happiness. According to Freud there is “no possibility at all” of happiness (23). Moreover, Freud claims that:

>[A]ll the regulations of the universe run counter to it. One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be ‘happy’ is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’. What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the preferably sudden satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon. When any situation that is desired by the pleasure principle is prolonged, it only produces a feeling of mild contentment. We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things. Thus our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution. Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience. (23-24)

If we view the theme of tragic inevitability vs. the possibility of change in drama as a continuum, Greek tragedy in which human life is determined by fate and there is little possibility of change lies at one end of the spectrum. Brechtian ‘epic’ theatre which sees human life influenced by political conditions and postulates change lies at the other end. *The House of Bernarda Alba* is unique in that it connects both ends of the spectrum. We
want the daughters of Bernarda to rebel against the regime and we witness Adela's rebellion. In their rebellion we see the possibility of change which is a way out of the political dilemma. Franco's regime like Bernarda's regime is not invincible and can be defeated if the individuals unite and fight against it together. Adela's rebellion fails because of the sexual rivalry of all the sisters for the love of Pepe and their impossibility of coming together in fight against the tyranny. A single individual, Adela, cannot defeat the regime.

Freud argues that even if we change the political system "there still remains prerogative in the field of sexual relationships, which is bound to become the source of the strongest dislike and the most violent hostility among men" (60-61). Therefore, even if the daughters of Bernarda were liberated from the fascist regime and their mother's tyranny, their situation would only improve in that they would be free to pursue a different man. Their sexual rivalry for love of Pepe would not change. Moreover, some civilizations, like fascism, restrict freedom and repress instincts more than others and therefore we should rebel against them; but even if the dictatorial regime is defeated, any civilization, according to Freud's theories, restricts the freedom of the individual, represses instincts and therefore brings with it unhappiness. The return to the primitive conditions, if possible, would be worse because then an individual had even less freedom and happiness. During this early stage of civilization a stronger person subjugated a weaker one to slavery (Freud 62). Therefore, there is no way out of the Freudian dilemma in this life. There cannot be absolute freedom or happiness in life. The only freedom and thus end to the instinctual repression and unhappiness comes with death and that is the realization at which the
heroine of the play, Adela, arrives. Adela’s real tragedy lies in fact that she sacrificed everything for the man who does not love her. Even if she were free to pursue him would she be happy? According to Freud, humanity is constructed in such a way that individuals if given an opportunity will behave towards one another as most vicious beasts (59). The instinct of life (Eros) and of death (Thanatos) cannot be enslaved or reconciled in this life. That is why the only solution to the Freudian dilemma is Lorca’s Apocalyptic vision which is summed up in words of Patricia McDermott: “La casa de Bernarda Alba is Apocalypse Now, ending not in triumph but in despair, the reign of the Beast, hell on earth” (132).
CHAPTER ONE

Bernarda As the Embodiment of Freudian Civilization and Franco’s Regime.

Richard Seybolt said about The House of Bernarda Alba:

... La casa de Bernarda Alba may be viewed as the dramatization of a conflict between a repressive social code (Bernarda) and the blind, instinctual forces of nature (Adela)... With regard to characterization the two antagonists are what Scholes and Kellog refer to as illustrative, as opposed to representational, for they are presented to us almost exclusively in terms of one facet of life. Bernarda appears larger than life as a wicked and tyrannical mother, and Adela throughout the play portrays rebellious instinct. (82)

What Richard Seybolt says about the play in these lines echoes the Freudian theories of Civilization and Its Discontents. The “repressive social code” (Bernarda) coincides with Freudian civilization or superego which is in conflict with “the blind, instinctual forces of nature” (Adela), Freudian Eros. Freud distinguishes among three components in the structure of personality: id, ego and superego. The unconscious id demands immediate gratification of our inborn drives, sex and aggression, and obeys the pleasure principle. The superego is a moral component of personality incorporating social standards of right and wrong. Therefore, the superego can be seen as the internalized values of civilization. In Bernarda the superego, a form of censorship or social constraint, is carried to extremes. Freud sees the superego as a positive component in the structure of personality which counteracts the anarchic forces of the id. However, if the demands of the superego
are carried to extremes then the balance between id and superego is disturbed. The ego obeys the reality principle and keeps balance between forces of the superego and the id. Freud in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* sees an important trade-off between positive and negative sides of civilization:

Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security. We must not forget, however, that in the primal family only the head of it enjoyed this instinctual freedom; the rest lived in slavish suppression. In that primal period of civilization the contrast between a minority who enjoyed the advantages of civilization and a majority who were robbed of those advantages was, therefore, carried to extremes. (62)

Under a fascist regime, which existed in Spain under general Francisco Franco, the contrast between the dictator who enjoyed the advantages of civilization and the citizens of Spain who were robbed of those advantages was carried to extremes. The individuals had no freedom; they lived in slavish suppression. The individuals had no security, either because their lives were threatened, not by an external power or other individuals but by the very civilization, the regime, which was supposed to protect them. This civilization responded to any disobedience with severe punishment. The tyranny of Bernarda over the inhabitants of her house and her neighbours reflects Freudian civilization which has gone wrong or superego and is a premonition of Franco’s regime in Spain which is an example of such civilization. Therefore, the Freudian theory and contemporary politics coincide in the character of Bernarda Alba. Bernarda tyrannizes over the inhabitants of her house: her daughters, her mother and her servants, as well as the outsiders, her neighbours. She uses
a variety of methods to uphold her regime. She incarcerates her daughters and her mother within the confines of her house which becomes a symbol of a prison, convent or hell and reduces her daughters’ rights to following her orders. She uses her economic power to sustain her tyranny over Poncia and the Maid. Poncia is bound to her by economic necessity; Bernarda employs not only her but also her sons. Bernarda uses the power of gossip to tyrannize over her neighbours. However, the power of gossip also makes her a victim of tyranny because she has to police her own life, as well as the lives of the inhabitants of her house in order not to become an object of the gossip gathered by her neighbours.

The first reference to Bernarda’s tyranny is made, even before Bernarda appears on stage, at the opening of Act I in the conversation between Poncia and First Servant:

PONCIA. . . . Thank God we’re alone for a little. I came over to eat.

FIRST SERVANT. If Bernarda sees you...!

PONCIA. She’s not eating today so she’d just as soon we’d all die of hunger!

Domineering old tyrant! But she’ll be fooled! I opened the sausage crock. (157)

Freud said in his Civilization and Its Discontents:

We may reject the existence of an original, as it were natural, capacity to distinguish good from bad. What is bad is often not at all what is injurious or dangerous to the ego; on the contrary it may be something which is desirable and enjoyable to the ego. Here, therefore, there is an extraneous influence at work, and it is this that decides what is to be called good or bad. Since a person’s own feelings would not have led him along this path, he must have had a motive for
submitting to this extraneous influence. Such a motive is easily discovered in his helplessness and his dependence on other people. Above all, he is exposed to the danger that [the] stronger person will show his superiority in the form of punishment. People habitually allow themselves to do any bad thing which promises them enjoyment, so long as they are sure that the authority will not know anything about it or cannot blame them for it; they are afraid only of being found out. (71-72)

Poncia's behaviour provides a comment on the severity and effectiveness of Bernarda's regime. She is taking advantage of a moment in which the external authority, Bernarda, is not watching her and comes over to eat. Eating is not something "bad" but a necessity and the fact that Poncia has to hide it from Bernarda attests to the severity of the regime. Bernarda is fasting as a way of commemorating the death of her husband, Benavides. Poncia hides her eating for fear of an external authority, Bernarda, on whom she is economically dependent. Poncia is afraid of the punishment this authority can exercise over her, e.g. by firing her and thus taking away Poncia's only way of supporting herself. Lorca here shows us that Bernarda constantly has to watch the inhabitants of the house because as soon as the individual is not watched he or she, Poncia in this case, will act against the rule of Bernarda. That is why later in the play Bernarda will state that her watchfulness is an important measure to force obedience on the inhabitants of her house. Similarly, civilization has to constantly watch and police the life of the individuals. Franco's regime used the threat of severe punishment and constant police vigilance in
order to force the citizens to obey its rules, otherwise the citizens would act against the tyrannical law of the regime.

Later in this scene the First Servant asks Poncia whether she could give her some food for the Servant’s little daughter and Poncia responds: “Go ahead! And take a fistful of peas too. She won’t know the difference today” (157). Poncia’s humanity contrasts sharply with Bernarda’s tyranny who would allow others to go hungry when she herself is not eating. This juxtaposition of humanity and tyranny stresses Lorca’s point that Bernarda carries her regime to extremes. As the conversation progresses, Poncia uses the word “tyrant” in her description of Bernarda again: “Tyrant over everyone around her. She’s perfectly capable of sitting on your heart and watching you die for a whole year without turning off that cold little smile she wears on her wicked face” (159).

When Bernarda enters the stage, she comes with a cane, the symbol of her tyrannical power. Carolyn Galerstein claims that “her cane is the most obvious symbol of her authority. Like a staff of office, the cane is used to punctuate her statements. . . .The cane is a threat and a weapon, as is seen in act II when she beats Martirio” (161). The cane is also an emblem of her weakness - she appears as an old woman who depends on her stick. Tyrants, like Bernarda, are shown sometimes to be vulnerable - their power is not absolute. The first word Bernarda speaks is an order directed to the Servant: “Silence!” (161). This first word is an important comment on Bernarda’s regime. Bernarda silences unwanted voices, as does civilization or the fascist regime.

Let us now turn to the examination of the methods of Bernarda’s tyranny over her daughters. As the first word Bernarda speaks in the play is an order, so is the first line
Bernarda addresses to one of her daughters, Magdalena: “Magdalena, don’t cry. If you want to cry, get under your bed. Do you hear me?” (161). Magdalena is crying because of her father’s death. Bernarda orders her to repress her feelings of sorrow. Freud claims that “... civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts” (44). Here, Bernarda, civilization, represses powerful feelings. Bernarda denies Magdalena the right to mourn her father even though Bernarda herself is fasting. It is because Bernarda is distinguishing between self indulgence and self denial. The fascist regime is an example of civilization in which repression is carried to extremes.

One of Bernarda’s most powerful means to impose tyranny over her daughters is the incarceration within the confines of the house. According to María Jiménez the house is a threefold symbol of prison, convent, and grave (143-144). Dennis Klein claims that:

The house is its own little society, a virtual dictatorship in which Bernarda rules.

The physical house is the dividing line; it separates inside from outside. The walls keep Bernarda’s secrets inside and the watchful eyes of the neighbours outside.

Inside the house, the veneer of decency reigns; outside is the corruption. To Bernarda’s way of thinking, virginity is decency and sex is corruption. (127)

The house is a dictatorship with Bernarda as its dictator. Similarly, Spain became a dictatorship with Franco as its dictator a few months after Lorca had completed his play. Bernarda uses incarceration as a means to control her daughters, and Franco imprisoned those who opposed his regime. Moreover, the house symbolizes a tomb because the play starts with the funeral of Bernarda’s husband, Benavides, and ends with the death of
Bernarda’s youngest daughter, Adela, who hangs herself in this house. The metaphor of the house as a grave strengthens the existence of Freudian Thanatos, the death instinct, in the play.

Bernarda attempts to lock her daughters within the house in the name of the custom of mourning adhered to in her house for generations: “For the eight years of mourning, not a breath of air will get in this house from the street. We’ll act as if we’d sealed up doors and windows with bricks. That’s what happened in my father’s house—and in my grandfather’s house. Meantime, you can all start embroidering your hopechest linens” (164). Bernarda restrains the freedom of the individuals, her daughters, by means of the physical imprisonment in the house. Similarly, the fascist regime, took away the freedom of the citizens and threatened disobedience with incarceration or death. Moreover, Bernarda uses the Spanish tradition of mourning as a justification of the imprisonment. Franco and the fascist party, the Falange, used the excuse of defending Spanish traditions from the danger of the leftist, Republican or Marxist opposition to justify the incarceration of those who had opposed the ideology of fascism. Trythal claims that Franco considered those who held leftist political views dangerous to the society and under his regime such views were not allowed (138).

If Bernarda imprisons her daughters for eight years within the confines of the house and does not allow them any contact with the outside world, it will also mean that her daughters will never get married. Read in this light the lines in which Bernarda orders her daughters to embroider their hopechest linens sound ironic and the cruelty of her regime and the misery and pathos of the daughters are stressed through the irony. Therefore, here
Bernarda represses the life instinct, Eros, in her daughters by the means of imprisonment. Similarly, Franco’s regime, in its insistence on upholding the traditional values of Spanish society, repressed Eros in the citizens of Spain through a strong alliance with the Church.

Having imprisoned her daughters in the house, Bernarda pronounces the rules of the prison: “In this house you’ll do what I order. You can’t run with the story to your father any more. Needle and thread for women. Whiplash and mules for men. That’s the way it has to be for people who have certain obligations” (165). Bernarda reduces the freedom of her daughters to merely following orders. Similarly, Freudian civilization reduced the freedom of the citizens to obeying orders. The next line of Bernarda’s speech gives us an insight into the rules of the patriarchal society of Spain. In a family unit a father was its head, and consequently he would be able to overturn Bernarda’s orders. Because their father is dead, the daughters are at mercy of Bernarda’s regime. In the next lines Bernarda echoes the rules of civilization or Spanish traditionalist society which imposes those rules on her and she, in turn, becomes civilization’s representative in her house and enforces the same rules on her daughters. The Alba family unit reflects the larger society of entire Spain. In a traditional society the appropriate occupation for a woman of Bernarda’s social class is sowing or embroidering and the appropriate occupation for men is working in the fields.

Subsequently, Bernarda makes it clear that the rules of the prison will be upheld until Bernarda’s death: “beating on the floor. Don’t fool yourselves into thinking you’ll sway me. Until I go out of this house feet first I’ll give the orders for myself and for you!” (175). Similarly, Franco’s regime existed until his death. The line also implies that
Bernarda will fight to uphold her regime to the death and nothing less than death will stop her tyranny. While speaking these words, Bernarda beats the cane, the symbol of her tyranny but also of her weakness, on the floor to punctuate them.

Lorca continues the development of his metaphor of the house as a prison in Act II, where Bernarda tightens the iron grip of her tyranny, by using the images of restrain, leashes and chains. After Angustias has reported that somebody has stolen the picture of Pepe from her room, Bernarda gives Poncia an order: “Search their rooms! Look in their beds. This comes of not tying you up with shorter leashes. But I’ll teach you now!” (188). Bernarda does not trust her own daughters and orders the search of their rooms. The fascist regime does not trust the citizens and uses police search tactics and constant invigilation in order to control them. Bernarda threatens her daughters with further reduction of their freedom. The punishment for taking the picture is severe. Bernarda resorts to the use of physical violence; she beats Martirio, the culprit, with her cane. Subsequently, Bernarda maximizes the security of the prison: “I have five chains for you, and this house my father built, so not even the weeds will know of my desolation” (190).

In Act II Bernarda takes away all the rights of the individual as she says to Angustias: “You don’t have any right except to obey” (194). In this line Bernarda embodies the civilization in which the delicate balance between the advantages and disadvantages is disturbed. In civilization an individual gains civil rights and in exchange for having these rights he or she also has obligations. Franco’s fascism took away all the rights of the citizens but it insisted on keeping the citizens’ obligations. In Franco’s view the obligation was to slavishly obey his laws. Bernarda herself becomes a prison guard through keeping
a constant watch over her daughters: “I was born to have my eyes always open. Now I’ll watch without closing them ‘til I die” (194).

Furthermore, Bernarda pronounces the punishment for disobedience in the conversation with Poncia in Act II:

BERNARDA. Fortunately, my daughters respect me and have never gone against my will!

PONCIA. That’s right! But, as soon as they break loose they’ll fly to the rooftops!

BERNARDA. And I’ll bring them down with stones! (193)

Bernarda is so fierce in denying her daughters any freedom that she would not hesitate to inflict death upon them as a punishment for an attempt to break free. Similarly, Franco’s regime would not hesitate to inflict death upon any citizen as a punishment for an attempt to break free from the regime. The line also offers a foreboding because when Adela tries to break loose from Bernarda’s tyranny, she will die. Therefore, this line also makes the audience feel the presence of Thanatos in the play. Bernarda will prove to be serious about punishing the individual’s transgressions by death, at the end of Act II when she insists that the unmarried woman who killed her child be killed in turn, and in Act III when she shoots at Pepe and indirectly causes the death of Adela.

In Act III Bernarda brands a disobedient daughter an enemy in her conversation with Prudencia: “A daughter who’s disobedient stops being a daughter and becomes an enemy” (197). In civilization which has tipped over into the totalitarian regime, a citizen who is disobedient stops being a citizen and becomes an enemy of the state.
Bernarda has imprisoned her daughters in the house, has reduced their freedom to following orders, has taken away all their rights and in order to sustain this tyranny she used the methods similar to those employed by Franco: constant invigilation, searches, threats and physical violence. Moreover, she has pronounced the punishment for disobedience, death. What is Bernarda trying to prevent and what does she want to achieve by such drastic measures? According to Cedric Busette: “Bernarda represents the conservative forces of the society. She has had to model her life on a strict, almost puritanical code, and having survived it, even in a spiritually and psychologically damaged state, she nevertheless, enforces it brutally” (178). Bernarda upholds the ideal of the Spanish traditional society, decency. In accordance with this ideal Bernarda’s sexuality, Eros, was repressed by the Spanish civilization, and now she, in turn, represses it in her daughters. Therefore, Bernarda, the oppressed by civilization becomes the oppressor acting in the name of this civilization. Such is also a dynamic of the fascist regime, in which in order to survive the oppressed become the oppressors of those who are dependent on their power.

Why should sexuality pose such a threat to the civilization and the fascist regime?

According to Freud in restricting sexuality, civilization:

- is obeying the laws of economic necessity, since a large amount of the psychical energy which it uses for its own purposes has to be withdrawn from sexuality. In this respect civilization behaves towards sexuality as a people or a stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation. Fear of a revolt by the suppressed elements drives it to stricter precautionary measures. (51)
The fascist regime wants all the individual's energy employed in its own service, and therefore it represses sexuality. Moreover, the last statement of the above quotation accurately describes Franco's regime. In addition, Freud claims that civilization permits only heterosexual love and further restricts it in insisting on monogamy and legitimacy. It does not allow sexuality as a source of pleasure but tolerates it only because it is the only way to propagate the human race (52). If civilization allowed complete freedom of sexual life, the family, which Freud sees as a "germ-cell of civilization" (61), would be abolished (61). Franco's regime insisted on monogamy and legitimacy of heterosexual love, which was the only kind of love that the regime permitted. Lorca's homosexual preference is protesting this legitimizing of straight sex in Adela's fight for sexual freedom.

Bernarda pronounces the terms of sexual repression already in Act I: "Women in church shouldn't look at any man but the priest-and him only because he wears skirts. To turn your head is to be looking for the warmth of corduroy" (162). Bernarda speaks about the requirement of decency for women. She speaks in general terms, therefore it suggests that she echoes the ideal of civilization by which she had to live and which she internalized in her own superego. Now she represses the sexual freedom and the instinct of life, Eros, of her daughters. There is also another reason for Bernarda's insistence on the impeccable reputation of her daughters. As she controls her neighbours by gossip regarding the blemishes on their reputation, so she becomes the victim of her own methods. She must uphold the ideal of decency in her own house not to become the object of her neighbours' gossip. The gossip gives Bernarda power over her neighbours, and if she fell victim to it, she would lose that power. We have mentioned that in the case
of Bernarda the oppressed became the oppressor. Here also the opposite is true; the oppressor is a victim to her own oppression and becomes the oppressed. Poncia sees that Bernarda represses her own sexual desire, Eros, and after Bernarda's pronouncement of the laws of decency Poncia adds: "between her teeth. Itching for a man's warmth" (162).

Having repressed her own Eros, Bernarda denies its existence in her daughters, during her conversation with Poncia: "None of them has ever had a beau and they've never needed one! They get along very well" (168). Bernarda's blind denial of the existence of Eros in her daughters is ironic because the audience will learn about Adela's relationship with Pepe and of the desire of the other sisters for him. Moreover, part of the political agenda in the house is to keep the inhabitants in perpetual enmity. The regime maintains its power by keeping its citizens antagonistic.

Bernarda uses the word decency after finding out that Angustias was looking through the cracks of the back door to see men in the patio during her father's funeral: "Is it decent for a woman of your class to be running after a man the day of her father's funeral?" (166). Bernarda strikes Angustias for this breach of decency. This reproach which is accompanied by corporal punishment happens in Act I. In Act II Bernarda is rallying the crowd to kill, in the name of decency, an unmarried woman who had a child and killed it:

PONCIA. Librada's daughter, the unmarried one, had a child and no one knows whose it is! . . . And to hide her shame she killed it and hid it under the rocks, but the dogs, with more heart than most Christians, dug it out and, as though directed by the hand of God, left it at her door. Now they want to kill her.
They’re dragging her through the streets—and down the paths and across the
olive groves the men are coming, shouting so the fields shake.

BERNARDA. Yes, let them all come with olive whips and hoe handles—let them all
come and kill her! . . . And let whoever loses her decency pay for it!

Outside a woman’s shriek and a great clamor is heard. . . .

BERNARDA, at the archway. Finish her before the guards come! Hot coals in
the place where she sinned! . . . Kill her! Kill her! (195)

Carolyn Galerstein comments on these lines: “There is nothing to indicate that Bernarda
has any personal animosity toward this girl. Like an impersonal power she feels that the
deed of which she disapproves must be punished by lynching, regardless of what the
personal circumstances might be” (185). Civilization is such an impersonal power, which
in order to maintain its authority punishes disobedience with no concern for personal
circumstances of the individual. Bernarda’s regime and her insistence on killing the
woman reflect the regime in Spain; all the inhabitants of the village want to kill the
woman. Freud claims that society has a group superego which he calls “cultural
superego” (89), and that this superego “[i]n the severity of its commands and prohibitions
. . . troubles itself too little about the happiness of the ego” (90). In this scene we can see
what the extreme group superego can lead to.

Bernarda changes her methods of repressing Eros and upholding decency from
rebuking and hitting her daughter in Act I, through rallying the crowd to kill the woman in
Act II, to attempting murder in Act III. When Bernarda finds out about the relationship
between Adela and Pepe, she shoots at Pepe but misses. Adela, however, pays for it with
her death. Even after Adela’s death Bernarda still insists on perpetuating a lie in denying to the world the existence of Eros in her daughters: “My daughter died a virgin. Take her to another room and dress her as though she were a virgin. No one will say anything about this! She died a virgin” (211). According to Galerstein: “Bernarda Alba’s statement affirms a standard which most societies have set for women and which has formed the bases for not only social, but also political attitudes toward women. In particular the emphasis of Spanish society on the virginity of never-married woman . . .” (183).

Bernarda incarcerates not only her daughters in the house/prison but also her mother, María Josefa. The audience finds out about Bernarda’s treatment of María Josefa already in the opening conversation between Poncia and the First Servant:

PONCIA. There’s the grandmother! Isn’t she locked up tight?

FIRST SERVANT. Two turns of the key.

PONCIA. You’d better put the cross-bar up too. She’s got the fingers of a lock-picker! (157-158)

As Bernarda imprisons her daughters in the house, she keeps even tighter control over her own mother. She locks María Josefa in one of the rooms of the house. Bernarda maintains firm control over everybody and does not favour anybody. Bernarda only upholds the rules of civilization in front of the external authority, the neighbours, in this case. Whenever it suits her own purpose and the external authority cannot see it, Bernarda does not obey the rules which she herself enforces in her own house. She makes it clear that a daughter’s obedience to her mother is a rule in her regime; she herself,
however, not only is disobedient to her own mother but submits María Josefa to her tyranny. This is another case which supports Freud’s assertion that the individual will do anything, which serves his or her own interests, as long as the external authority will not know anything about it. Bernarda’s following statement supports this contention:

BERNARDA, to Servant. Let her [María Josefa] get some fresh air in the patio.

. . .Go with her and be careful she doesn’t get near the well.

SERVANT. You don’t need to be afraid she’ll jump in.

BERNARDA. It’s not that—but the neighbours can see her there from their windows. (165-166)

Bernarda sends a prison guard, the Servant, to accompany the prisoner, which is a common method used by the fascist regime. Bernarda’s only concern is not for her mother’s safety but it is the fear of external authority, the neighbours, who could see the way María Josefa is treated by Bernarda. As a result they would use the power of gossip to ruin Bernarda’s reputation and expose her hypocrisy. Julianne Burton in her article “The Greatest Punishment: Female and Male in Lorca’s Tragedies” discusses the power of gossip:

Women can turn their attention outward by casting themselves in the role of custodians of their neighbor’s honor; and this is an alternative chosen by many.

Gossip is a rewarding occupation, for it is one of the few paths to power open to women. Their guardianship of local morality through public commentary occasions an intense and hypocritical preoccupation with el qué dirán [what they will say] on the part of their fellow townspeople. This occupation also confers on
the womenfolk the important role of oral ‘historians,’ shaping popular opinion and perpetuating local tradition. The injustice and irony is that women, the most active repositories of such information, are also the main victims of the collective effort to maintain a rigid moral standard by means of verbal inference and censure. In this way, women become custodians of the evidence to be used in the domination and prosecution of their own sex. (265-266)

The information which could do damage to the reputation of one’s neighbours can be used to control them. This is the way Bernarda uses gossip. Similarly, in the fascist regime, a spy can use information that can harm an individual. The part of the dynamics of Franco’s regime was to keep the citizens spying on one another. The regime maintained its power this way. It gathered information about any attempt to overthrow it or to question its authority and kept the citizens in constant fear of being found out and of being accused of subversion.

Let us now examine the way in which Bernarda maintains her tyranny over her neighbours. According to Dennis Klein “Bernarda’s influence extends beyond her own home: she controls and frustrates the lives of all her neighbours. She knows their secrets, and so they live in fear of the emotional blackmail that she uses to keep them in their place” (87). The first example of Bernarda’s control over her neighbours by means of “emotional blackmail” is already evident in Act I during the funeral. A Girl says that she saw Pepe el Romano at the service. Bernarda does not like the turn which this conversation is taking and attempts to silence the Girl. As Bernarda’s first word on the stage was “silence,” a direct order to her servant, so now she uses a different method to
silence a neighbour. She responds to the Girl’s comment: “His mother was there. She saw his mother. . . . The one who was there was Darajali, the widower. Very close to your Aunt. We all of us saw him” (162). Bernarda successfully silences the Girl by reminding her of the relationship within the Girl’s family which is indecent, and consequently would be condemned by the traditionalist society. The neighbours are therefore kept in line by the fear that their secrets will be revealed which will cause the censure of the other neighbours.

Bernarda’s control over her neighbours is so tight that they avoid her for fear of her gossip. We find out about this avoidance tactic from the conversation between Amelia and Martirio in Act I:

AMELIA . . . Adelaida wasn’t at the funeral. . . . The whole trouble is all these wagging tongues that won’t let us live. Adelaida has probably had a bad time.

MARTIRIO. She’s afraid of our mother. Mother is the only one who knows the story of Adelaida’s father and where he got his lands. Every time she comes here, Mother twists the knife in the wound. (169)

The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed in the fascist regime is reciprocal. If Bernarda tyrannizes over her neighbours by the use of gossip they oppress her in turn. In Act II when Angustias finds out that somebody has stolen the picture of Pepe from her room, Bernarda articulates the fear of scandal and gossip: “What scandal is this in my house in the heat’s heavy silence? The neighbours must have their ears glued to the walls” (188). Subsequently, she outlines the method by which she will fight the power of her neighbours’ gossip: “I know how to take care of myself! If the townspeople want
to come bearing false witness against me, they’ll run into a stone wall! Don’t any of you talk about this! Sometimes other people try to stir up a wave of filth to drown us” (193-194). Bernarda protects herself and her daughters from gossip by the means of imprisonment in the house behind a stone wall. That is another reason why she imprisons her daughters and her mother. However, ironically, Bernarda becomes a prisoner behind the stone wall, too. By evoking the image of drowning in a wave of filth she expresses her fear of losing her status as a result of gossip of a sexual nature. Water, in Lorca’s plays, is a symbol of fertility. Bernarda connects sex with filth, and this ties back to her insistence on decency. She sums up her attitude towards the neighbours’ control over her by the means of gossip in Act III when speaking to Angustias: “Each one knows what she thinks inside. I don’t pry into anyone’s heart, but I want to put up a good front” (199).

At the end of the play Bernarda’s fear of losing her power over her neighbours becomes reality. Dennis Klein claims that:

The clue that Bernarda has lost her power over the neighbours is in the Maid’s last line of the play, “¡Se han levantado los vecinos!” (1531; The neighbors have awakened!). They have awakened not just physically but also emotionally: Bernarda will no longer control them by talking of what goes on in their homes. There is now a scandal in Bernarda’s house that evens out the score. Lie as she may, she will not be able to stop the talk about Adela hanging herself—or about her reasons for doing so. (92)

We have examined the way in which Bernarda tyrannizes over her daughters, her mother and her neighbours; let us now turn to Bernarda’s treatment of her servants. As
soon as Bernarda enters the stage her first words are directed to the Servant. After ordering silence, Bernarda continues: “Less shrieking and more work. You should have had all this cleaner for the wake. Get out. This isn’t your place” (161). This statement indicates the existence of the master-servant relationship in Bernarda’s house. The master-servant relationship exists in absolutist regimes where the dictator is the master and the citizens are his servants.

Later in the play Bernarda articulates the master-servant relationship very clearly to Poncia in Act I: “You’re a servant and I pay you. Nothing more.” (168), and in Act II: “Work and keep your mouth shut. The duty of all who work for a living” (192). As Bernarda silences her daughters, mother and the neighbours, so she does the same with Poncia when the servant questions the methods of Bernarda’s regime.

In this chapter I have examined the methods of Bernarda’s tyranny over her daughters, mother, neighbours and servants. Furthermore, I have found the parallels between the means Bernarda employs to sustain her regime and the similar methods used by the Freudian superego or civilization which has gone wrong of which a specific example was Franco’s regime in Spain. In the next chapter I will discuss the effect Bernarda’s methods have on the psychological and emotional lives of her daughters and servants. In addition, I will draw parallels between the behaviour of the inhabitants of Bernarda Alba’s house who either accommodate in various ways to the tyranny or rebel against it, and the dynamics of the fascist regime.
CHAPTER TWO

The Oppressed and the Oppressors: The Accommodation of the Inhabitants of the House to Bernarda's Regime.

[C]ivilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct. . . . It is not easy to understand how it can become possible to deprive an instinct of satisfaction. Nor is doing so without danger. If the loss is not compensated for economically, one can be certain that serious disorders will ensue. . . . [T]he id cannot be controlled beyond certain limits. If more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him or a neurosis, or he will be made unhappy. (Freud 44, 90)

Bernarda, as well as Franco, carry their respective regimes and the repression of an individual's instincts to the extremes. Neither in the case of Bernarda's despotism nor in the case of Franco's tyranny is the loss of the instinctual satisfaction in the individuals compensated for economically. Bernarda represses the instincts of her daughters, but she uses her economic power over her servants in order to oppress them. Lorca shows us the ways in which the inhabitants of Bernarda's house either accommodate to the regime and become psychologically deformed by it or rebel against it. In both cases they are all unhappy. In this chapter I will examine the ways in which Martirio, Angustias, Magdalena, Amelia, Poncia and the Servant accommodate to the regime, and in the next chapter I will discuss the ways in which Maria Josefa and Adela rebel against it. The daughters of Bernarda and her servants represent different stages of deformation by the regime and accommodate to it in various ways. They help to uphold the regime and
become each other's oppressors, and ironically perpetuate the power of the regime which
oppresses them. Similarly, under the fascist government the oppressed aid the despotism
out of fear of punishment and in hope of survival, oppress the others, and consequently
help to sustain the power of the regime which oppresses them. Such are the dynamics of
the fascist tyranny. The play explores the operation of civilization which has gone wrong
within the fascist rule, and shows how the system perpetuates itself and maintains its
power by keeping citizens antagonistic. Inside the house the political agenda is to keep all
the inhabitants in perpetual enmity by fomenting discord and hatred within the group.
Sexual discord keeps Eros at the level of conflict and destruction. If the sisters see
themselves as rivals for the attention of Pepe el Romano, whom they all love, then they
will not be able to unite and thus each of them, separately, will be too weak to defeat
Bernarda. Gwynne Edwards comments very convincingly on the dynamics of the
oppressed becoming the oppressor:

Bernarda's tyranny becomes inevitably her daughters' tyranny of each other and
passion's tyranny of each of them. Moreover, if the sisters are oppressed... they also progressively oppress each other, Adela's accusations leveled at Martirio,
Martirio's insinuations directed at Adela, and their mutual resentment turned
towards Angustias. ... [T]his is a world in which individuals seem continually
besieged and in which human beings prey upon each other, where mothers are the
victims of their children, children the victims of their mothers, servants the prey of
their mistresses, and all of them the prey of others in the widening circle of man's
inhumanity to man. (251-252, 254-255, 256)
Let us first examine the way in which Martirio accommodates to Bernarda’s regime and is psychologically deformed by it. Let us also discuss the relationship between Martirio and Adela which is one of the central relationships in the play and through which Lorca explores the dynamics of the fascist regime. According to Seybolt: “Adela’s true antagonist is Martirio, for were it not for her, Adela might have been united with Pepe, albeit outside the bounds of society’s sanction” (85). Lorca has given Martirio a symbolic name which is explained in the words of Maria Josefa: “Martirio, face of a martyr” (206), and suggests that Martirio embodies martyrdom and suffers due to Bernarda’s tyranny more than other inhabitants of the house. As Dennis Klein points out: “Martirio, at the age of 24 (second youngest), is the least likely candidate for marriage. She does not have Angustias’s money, Adela’s looks, Magdalena’s humanity or Amelia’s ingenuity. She is a physically pathetic sight: weak, ugly and hunchbacked” (78).

From the beginning of the play the audience finds out that Martirio has no hope of escaping Bernarda’s regime through marriage. Throughout the play we will see a variety of ways in which Martirio accommodates to the regime. One way is to resign oneself to the situation, and Martirio expresses this means of accommodation in her exchange with Amelia in Act I:

AMELIA. Did you take the medicine?

MARTIRIO. For all the good it’ll do me.

AMELIA. But you took it?

MARTIRIO. I do things without any faith, but like clock-work.

AMELIA. Since the new doctor came you look livelier.
Martirio states that she does things with no faith, like clock-work, which suggests her resignation to her mother's regime. Moreover, she objects to Amelia's observation that she looks livelier since the arrival of a new doctor with the assertion that she feels the same. Such an assertion also stresses her resignation. Freud claims that if civilization represses instincts, serious disorders will occur. Here we have the case in which civilization, Bernarda, does repress the instincts of the individual, Martirio, and the first response is resignation. Similarly, during Franco's regime one way to accommodate to it and survive was to resign oneself to the fascist rule.

As the conversation between Amelia and Martirio progresses, we see, in Martirio, another response to the regime which Seybolt identifies as rationalization (84):

MARTIRIO. It's better never to look at a man. I've been afraid of them since I was a little girl. I'd see them in the yard, yoking the oxen and lifting grain sacks, shouting and stamping, and I was always afraid to grow up for fear one of them would suddenly take me in his arms. God has made me weak and ugly and has definitely put such things away from me.

AMELIA. Don't say that! Enrique Humanas was after you and liked you.

MARTIRIO. That was just people's ideas! One time I stood in my nightgown at the window until daybreak because he let me know through his shepherd's little girl that he was going to come, and he didn't. It was all just talk. Then he married someone else who had more money than I. (170)
The first speech of Martirio sounds like rationalization. In the second speech we find out that Martirio was waiting for Enrique Humanas in her nightgown until daybreak which undermines her first assertion that “it’s better never to look at a man” and that she was always afraid of men. After hearing the second speech the audience can reexamine the first one in a new light. It is not only rationalization but in both speeches Martirio also expresses sexual repression. In addition to seeing sexual repression in Martirio’s character, the audience becomes aware of her hypocrisy, which is yet another way of dealing with repressive civilization or the fascist regime. The act of standing in her nightgown until daybreak reveals that Martirio does feel sexual desire, Eros, which she herself represses. Repressing one’s own Eros is yet another way of the accommodation to life in Bernarda’s house. Seybolt also sees in the first speech the clue regarding Martirio’s feelings towards Bernarda:

... Enrique Humanas had indeed wished to court her [Martirio]. This courtship was cut short by Bernarda because Enrique was socially unacceptable. We suddenly become aware that Martirio’s statement is not entirely true, and that although she may wish to fabricate explanations of her fate, she certainly must be harboring feelings of deep resentment and hatred for her mother. Slowly we begin to see that it is Martirio who probably is suffering more than anyone else under the tyranny of Bernarda. (84)

Martirio’s hypocrisy comes to the audience’s attention even more prominently when Magdalena says to Martirio: “I’ve never been able to bear your hypocrisy” (172). From
this point on, the spectators are aware that they must treat everything Martirio says in the light of Magdalena’s statement.

The first time the audience becomes aware that all the sisters, including Martirio, desire Pepe is at the end of Act I when the Servant announces that Pepe is coming down the street, and Amelia, Martirio and Magdalena “run hurriedly” to see him through the window. The spectators have already heard that Angustias is marrying Pepe and deduced from Adela’s response to this news that she too loves him. Now the spectators find out that the remaining three sisters are interested in Pepe as well, which reveals repressed Eros in all of them.

Lorca symbolically suggests that Martirio and the other sisters suffer from sexual frustration. He equates sexual drive with heat. If this passion remains unfulfilled, however, it turns into sexual frustration. In Act II Martirio admits: “Last night I couldn’t sleep because of the heat” (178), and later she states: “The heat makes me feel ill. . . . I was wishing it were November, the rainy days, the frost—anything except this unending summertime” (186). According to Seybolt, when Martirio wishes for November, she “refers not only to cooler days but to older age when her passion will diminish” (83).

The enmity between Martirio and Adela becomes apparent already during their first conversation. Adela enters wearing a green dress and a conversation about the dress develops between the two sisters:

ADELA. I had a lot of illusions about this dress. I’d planned to put it on the day we were going to eat watermelons at the well. There wouldn’t have been another like it.
MARTIRIO. It’s a lovely dress.

ADELA. And one that looks very good on me. . . .

MARTIRIO. What you can do is dye it black. (172-173)

Green is the color of nature and has sexual connotations in European literature (Klein 129). Therefore, the green dress symbolizes Adela’s Eros. Moreover, it is a time of mourning for Adela’s dead father and she should be wearing black in accordance with the customs of civilization and Bernarda’s regime. Therefore, wearing a green dress by Adela suggests her rebellion against Bernarda. Martirio’s advice that Adela dyes her beautiful green dress black expresses Martirio’s conformity to Bernarda’s regime. Martirio echoes what her mother would say. Moreover, Martirio wants to replace green color representing Eros with black symbolizing death, Thanatos, and therefore she wants to repress Adela’s Eros in the same way as Martirio’s Eros is being repressed. Therefore, Martirio becomes Adela’s oppressor by upholding Bernarda’s regime. One way of perpetuating the “system” is to create antagonism among the suppressed so that they discipline one another and become the source of the other’s punishment. Furthermore, Martirio’s suggestion about dyeing the dress reveals her cruelty. Cruelty is one of the disorders Freud predicts will develop as a result of sexual repression. The scene also reveals Martirio’s envy of Adela’s beauty. The dress is lovely and looks good on Adela and Martirio being herself unprepossessing does not want anybody else to look beautiful. Martirio will also respond with envy to Adela’s having Pepe.

The tension in the relationship between Martirio and Adela rises in Act II when Adela enters announcing that her body aches and Martirio, in reply, asks her “with a hidden
meaning. Didn’t you sleep well last night?” (181). By this question Martirio insinuates that she knows that Adela did not sleep at all because she was with Pepe. Moreover, this insinuation suggests that the enmity of Martirio towards Adela is motivated by jealousy, sexual frustration and rivalry. Thus Eros here works as a divisive power.

Adela feels the enmity towards Martirio, as well, which is evident in her answer “Leave me alone. Awake or asleep, it’s no affair of yours” (181), and her taunts regarding Martirio’s appearance: “Don’t look at me like that! If you want, I’ll give you my eyes, for they’re younger, and my back to improve that hump you have, but look the other way when I go by” (181). Therefore, the cruelty and hostility between the sisters is reciprocal. Adela’s animosity towards Martirio is motivated by Martirio’s spying on Adela, as Adela points out: “She follows me everywhere. Sometimes she looks in my room to see if I’m sleeping. She won’t let me breathe, and always, ‘Too bad about that face!’ ‘Too bad about that body! It’s going to waste!’” (181). Martirio acts as a spy, aiding in perpetuating Bernarda’s tyranny. Consequently, the dictator gains power by keeping the hatred between the individuals at high levels. If Adela has to fight not only Bernarda but also Martirio, then she becomes weakened in her rebellion.

The hatred and resentment between Martirio and Adela grow in strength towards the end of Act II when Martirio says about Pepe to Adela: “I’ll tear you out of his arms! . . . None of us will have him! . . . I saw how he embraced you! . . . I’ll see you dead first!” (194-195). If Martirio cannot have Pepe and assert her Eros with him, then none of the sisters will have him even if it means Adela’s death. Martirio’s last sentence is a
foreboding of future tragedy. Martirio’s lie that Pepe is dead will cause Adela’s suicide.

According to Seybolt

... because she suffers deep frustration, Martirio will have to find some kind of release for these feelings if she is to survive. ... Her only recourse will consist in her denying anyone’s happiness. This sinister attitude is as human as it is cruel, and it will usually take the form of bitter and sarcastic comments intended to hurt Adela in particular. Quevedo once remarked that envy gnaws, and on one level at least La casa de Bernarda Alba is the portrayal of Martirio’s consuming envy, an envy that will cause the destruction of Adela. (84-85)

Seybolt’s comment brings us back to the Freudian statement that the repression of instincts will cause serious disorders. Martirio’s envy and her denying of anyone’s happiness are the most destructive ways in which she accommodates to Bernarda’s regime in order to survive.

Dennis Klein points out that at the end of Act II Martirio is a mirror and a younger version of Bernarda’s tyranny when she joins Bernarda in demanding death for the woman who killed her illegitimate child (78): “Let her pay what she owes!” (195). While demanding this harsh punishment, Martirio is looking at Adela which suggests that Martirio suspects that Adela too may be pregnant. Martirio wants to set an example for punishment, just as Bernarda wants to set an example of the punishment for losing decency for her daughters.

At the end of Act III Martirio is spying on Adela who is coming back from her encounter with Pepe. Martirio tries to prevent her sister from seeing Pepe again by
echoing Bernarda’s ideal of decency: “That’s no place for a decent woman” (207). The audience can now witness the chain of oppression. Bernarda, oppressed by civilization which demands complete decency as the ideal of a Spanish woman, enforces it in her house. Martirio, oppressed by Bernarda, oppresses Adela by trying to force her to uphold the same ideal. As the conversation proceeds, Martirio for the first time openly admits her love for Pepe: “My breast’s bitter, bursting like a pomegranate. I love him!” (208). Her Eros is tinted with bitterness, resentment and jealousy of Adela, because Martirio knows she will never have Pepe and that Adela has him. Martirio expresses those feelings in the following words: “My blood’s no longer yours, and even though I try to think of you as a sister, I see you as just another woman” (208). Adela is no longer Martirio’s sister but her rival and enemy. Martirio is determined to prevent Adela from having Pepe at any cost, and in this she aids Bernarda whose aim is the same. Martirio comments on Adela’s plans to be reunited with Pepe outside civilization’s sanction: “That’ll never happen! Not while I have a drop of blood left in my body” (209). Martirio’s willingness to fight Adela to death resonates with Bernarda’s earlier statement that she will watch the inhabitants of the house until the day she dies.

Martirio tries to stop Adela from going out of the house to see Pepe, and the verbal struggle of the two sisters turns into a physical one. Martirio calls for Bernarda. The tyrant and the oppressed, who has now become a tyrant, again work together as Martirio denounces Adela to the authority, Bernarda: “MARTIRIO, pointing to Adela. She was with him. Look at those skirts covered with straw!” (209). Bernarda gets a gun, and shoots at Pepe but misses. Martirio, however, reinforces Bernarda’s lie that Pepe is dead,
and that is the cause of Adela’s suicide. Martirio helps to support Bernarda’s regime by causing the death of a rebellious individual, Adela. Ironically, without Adela, who is the only person who fully rebelled against Bernarda’s tyranny, Martirio will be oppressed by the regime until Bernarda’s death. When asked why she has lied, Martirio, dispensing with her previous hypocrisy says about Adela: “I’d like to pour a river of blood over her head!” (210). In these words we see the result of the repression of instincts.

Even though Martirio accommodates to Bernarda’s regime and helps it, there is one moment in the play in Act II in which she stands up to her mother when Bernarda is beating her with the cane for taking the picture of Pepe from Angustias:

BERNARDA, advancing on her, beating her with her cane. You’ll come to a bad end yet, you hypocrite! Trouble maker!

MARTIRIO, fiercely. Don’t hit me, Mother!

BERNARDA. All I want to!

MARTIRIO. If I let you! You hear me? Get back!...

BERNARDA. Not even tears in your eyes.

MARTIRIO. I’m not going to cry just to please you. (189)

Martirio’s words “if I let you” imply that Bernarda’s regime is not absolute and can be undermined. Read on a psychological level this line may point to Martirio’s masochism. Freud defines masochism as “a union between destructiveness directed inwards and sexuality” (66). Martirio’s outward aggressiveness has been kept in check by Bernarda’s rules and consequently it would redirect itself inwards combining with her repressed sexuality. Freud claims that the two instincts, the instinct of life, Eros, and the instinct of
death, Thanatos, "seldom -perhaps never-appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions and so become unrecognizable to our judgment" (66). Masochism could be seen as a form of accommodation to the regime and a serious disorder which is a consequence of sexual repression. Martirio refuses to conform to the authority. She, however, lacks Adela’s spirit and strength to rebel against Bernarda, even though this scene proves that she would like to. Here Lorca shows us the reason why Bernarda needs to create the enmity among her daughters. All the daughters would like to rebel against Bernarda’s tyranny. Each singlehandedly, however, is not strong enough to do so. The only way to defeat Bernarda’s regime would be for the sisters to unite and fight together. The sisters are incapable of uniting because they see each other as rivals for Pepe’s attention. Consequently, Eros is kept on the level of discord causing destruction among the sisters. Poncia articulates this in Act III: “They’re women without men, that’s all. And in such matters even blood is forgotten” (204). Similarly, the part of Franco’s politics in Spain was to keep the citizens in perpetual enmity, so that they would not be able to unite and have enough power to challenge the dictator’s authority. Poncia sees Bernarda’s house, which is filled with rivalry between the sisters, as a “battleground” (204).

Let us now turn to the discussion of the ways in which Angustias accommodates to Bernarda’s regime. Angustias, at the age of 39, is the oldest daughter of Bernarda, and a half-sister to the remaining four daughters. She is the only one with a large inheritance passed onto her by her father, the first husband of Bernarda. Now, after the death of her stepfather, she can use this inheritance to attract Pepe. She deals with the unlivable
situation in Bernarda’s house by hoping for an escape by marrying Pepe: “Fortunately, I’ll soon be out of this hell” (177), and by taunting the other sisters and constantly reminding them that she is the only one who has money: “a good dowry is better than dark eyes in one’s face” (177). As a result, she incurs the resentment and envy of the remaining four sisters. According to Klein, Angustias’ name means anguish (104), which gives the audience a clue that she too is unhappy even in spite of having Pepe for her fiancé.

The resentment and envy of the sisters towards Angustias because of her money and the fact that Pepe is now her fiancé becomes apparent already in Act I. The sisters talk about the upcoming marriage of the two:

MAGDALENA . . . Pepe el Romano is coming to marry Angustias. Last night he was walking around the house and I think he’s going to send a declaration soon.

MARTIRIO. I’m glad. He’s a good man.

AMELIA. Me too. Angustias is well off.

MAGDALENA. Neither one of you is glad . . . If he were coming because of Angustias’ looks, for Angustias as a woman, I’d be glad too, but he’s coming for her money. Even though Angustias is our sister, we’re her family here and we know she’s old and sickly, and always has been the least attractive one of us!

Because if she looked like a dressed-up stick at twenty, what can she look like
now, now that she's forty? . . .

AMELIA. But Magdalena's right after all! Angustias has all her father's money;

she's the only rich one in the house and that's why, now that Father's dead and

the money will be divided, they're coming for her.

MAGDALENA. Pepe el Romano is twenty five years old and the best looking

man around here. The natural thing would be for him to be after you, Amelia,

or our Adela, who's twenty-not looking for the least likely one in this house, a

woman who, like her father, talks through her nose. (171-172)

Martirio responds to the news of Pepe's upcoming marriage to Angustias with hypocrisy;
she says she is glad and calls Pepe "a good man," whereas in Act III she will call him a
"soulless man" and will declare her love for Pepe. In addition to expressing hypocrisy,
Amelia points out that Angustias is well off, which suggests the reason, in Amelia's mind,
why Pepe is marrying Angustias. Amelia's remark regarding Angustias' wealth also
stresses Amelia's envy of her half-sister's money and her upcoming marriage to Pepe.
Magdalena is the only one who does not resort to hypocrisy but talks openly about her
older sister's money and enumerates her physical faults, and thus expresses her resentment
towards Angustias. This conversation between the sisters is another example of the way in
which Eros causes enmity between the sisters. We have already discussed the way in
which Martirio is jealous of Adela; now we see the jealousy of the sisters directed at Angustias who will be married to Pepe.

The conversation quoted above takes place behind Angustias’ back. Later, Magdalena expresses her resentment towards Angustias and her envy of Angustias’ money in her half-sister’s presence while entering and seeing Bernarda removing powder from Angustias’ face: “to Angustias. If you’re fighting over the inheritance, you’re the richest one and can hang on to it all” (175). The enmity between Angustias and Magdalena is reciprocal just as the animosity between Adela and Martirio. Angustias responds by pointing out that she has the money and Magdalena does not: “Keep your tongue in your pocketbook!” (175).

In Act II the sisters discuss Pepe’s proposal of marriage to Angustias. While talking about the night when Pepe proposed, Angustias for the first time expresses her Eros which was repressed by Bernarda for years: “I couldn’t have said a word. My heart was almost coming out of my mouth. It was the first time I’d ever been alone at night with a man” (179). As the conversation progresses, Adela becomes its topic. Angustias knows that Adela is jealous of her because she is going to marry Pepe. She expresses her enmity towards Adela: “Envy gnaws on people. . . . I can tell it in her eyes. She’s getting the look of a crazy woman” (180). It is possible to conclude that Angustias might suspect the relationship between Adela and Pepe. During the conversation between the sisters, Angustias learns that Pepe left at four in the morning, the previous night, when she talked to him only until one thirty. Moreover, later in the conversation with Bernarda, Angustias will say about Pepe: “I think he’s hiding things from me” (200), which suggests her
suspicions. Moreover, she will state that “[She] should be happy, but [she’s] not” (200).

This assertion resonates with the meaning of her name, as well as, with Freud’s claim that an individual whose instincts are repressed will be unhappy. Whether Angustias suspects the entire truth or not, Adela is the youngest and the most beautiful of the sisters, and her youth and beauty are the object of Angustias’ envy.

As was the case with Martirio, Angustias also helps to uphold Bernarda’s regime. Just as Martirio will report Adela’s transgression to the authority, Bernarda, at the end of the play, so in Act II Angustias reports the stealing of Pepe’s picture: “They’ve stolen my sweetheart’s picture!” (188). One of the tactics of Bernarda’s regime is to create distrust between the sisters. Similarly, one of the tactics of Franco’s regime was to create distrust between the citizens of Spain. Angustias is suspicious of all her sisters. Adela accuses Martirio of having stolen the picture: “looking at Martirio. Somebody has it! But not me!” (188). Martirio hints at Adela’s relationship with Pepe when she responds “with meaning. Of course not you!” (188). Amelia responds with a sarcastic remark calculated to hurt Angustias: “You’d think he was a silver St. Bartholomew” (187), and Magdalena responds with indignation towards Angustias: “Do you have the effrontery to say that” (187).

At the beginning of Act III the enmity among the sisters almost reaches its peak (it will reach its true peak in the final scene of the play). Bernarda, her daughters and their guest, Prudencia, are sitting at the table, and their conversation is full of foreboding of the future tragedy. Angustias wears an engagement ring symbolizing her prompt escape from the hell of Bernarda’s house and her legal ownership of Pepe. As soon as Prudencia asks
when Angustias is going to get married and asserts that Angustias must be happy, Amelia and Magdalena respond by musing over spilt salt, a symbol of bad omen:

AMELIA, to Magdalena. You’ve spilled the salt!

MAGDALENA. You can’t possibly have worse luck than you’ve having.

AMELIA. It always brings bad luck. (198)

This exchange between Amelia and Magdalena can be analyzed from three different perspectives. On one level, the sisters are talking about their own bad luck, and Magdalena expresses her resignation and pessimism, stating that it is impossible to have worse luck than they are having. On another level, the sisters express envy of Angustias’ supposed happiness, and hope that something will happen to prevent her from marrying Pepe. In this case the spilt salt would symbolize Angustias’ bad luck. On yet another level, the spilt salt is a foreboding of Adela’s suicide.

Prudencia changes the topic of conversation from Angustias’ happiness to her engagement ring:

PRUDENCIA. It’s beautiful. Three pearls. In my day, pearls signified tears.

ANGUSTIAS. But things have changed now.

ADELA. I don’t think so. Things go on meaning the same. . . .

BERNARDA. With pearls or without them, things are as one proposes.
MARTIRIO. Or as God disposes. . . .

PRUDENCIA. The important thing is that everything be for the best.

ADELA. And that you never know. (198-199)

Adela wishes tears for Angustias, and Martirio responds to Bernarda’s assertion that “things are as one proposes”, with a claim that fate is in the hands of God. Both sisters express an expectation of Angustias’ unhappiness. In addition, the pearls and Martirio’s fatalistic claim foreshadow the future tragedy of Adela’s suicide as a result of which Angustias will not marry Pepe, and therefore her life will be unhappy.

We have analyzed the ways in which the sisters are divided by their jealousy, enmity, suspicion and hatred caused by their desire, Eros, for Pepe. In the case of Martirio, Lorca reminded us that it was in Bernarda’s best interest to perpetuate discord among her daughters in order to sustain her regime. Martirio wanted to rebel against Bernarda, but she was too weak to do so. In the case of Angustias we are also reminded of the constant danger of rebellion of the individual against the regime. In Act I Angustias attempts to rebel against Bernarda. She defies Bernarda’s authority by wearing make-up on the day of her stepfather’s funeral which causes Bernarda’s fury, and by arguing with her mother:

BERNARDA. Have you dared to powder your face? Have you dared to wash your face on the day of your father’s death?

ANGUSTIAS. He wasn’t my father. Mine died a long time ago. Have you
forgotten that already?

BERNARDA. You owe more to this man, father of your sisters, than to your

own. Thanks to him, your fortune is intact.

ANGUSTIAS. We'll have to see about that first!

BERNARDA. Even out of decency! Out of respect!

ANGUSTIAS. Let me go out, mother! (174)

Bernarda’s appeal for decency and respect mean nothing to Angustias. She expresses her
desire for freedom; she wants to get out of her prison. Her attempt at rebellion is
squashed, however, by Bernarda’s violent removal of the powder from Angustias’ face.
As we have seen in the case of Martirio, so we see in the case of Angustias that the single
individual is too weak to defeat Bernarda’s despotism.

Magdalena’s character is less fully developed than the characters of Adela, Martirio or
even Angustias. Apart from responding with resentment and jealousy towards Angustias,
Magdalena accommodates to the regime through resignation and sublimation to a greater
extent than the other sisters. Her skill in embroidering is mentioned a few times in the
play. In spite of her jealousy towards Angustias, Magdalena is still, according to Klein,
the most humane of the sisters (78). She would like to see Adela happy as she says in Act
I (171). Other sisters do not express similar sentiments towards one another. Moreover,
as Poncia says, Magdalena is “the only one who loved her father” (157). Her name
derives from Mary Magdalene which, according to Klein, is curious because she has no sexual past (104).

Magdalena’s skill in embroidery is mentioned for the first time in Act I by Bernarda who orders her daughters to start embroidering their hopechest linens and specifically says that “Magdalena can embroider them” (164). For Bernarda embroidering is her daughters’ duty. However, her singling out of Magdalena suggests that Magdalena may, in fact, deal with her imprisonment in the house by sublimation, embroidering in this case, more than her sisters. She is more skilled in it than the other sisters, and perhaps she treats it as more than just her duty. We can deduce her pre-eminence in embroidering from Adela’s claim regarding her green dress which is “the best thing Magdalena’s ever cut” (172). Freud defines sublimation as “the displacement of libido which our mental apparatus permits of” (26). Freud offers a further discussion of sublimation in his Civilization and Its Discontents:

[Instincts] are induced to displace the conditions for their satisfaction, to lead them into other paths. . . . Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life. . . . Sublimation is a vicissitude which has been forced upon the instincts entirely by civilization. (44)
Magdalena finds an outlet for her Eros. She displaces the conditions for the satisfaction of her Eros and leads them into another path, embroidery, which is an artistic activity permitted and even encouraged by Bernarda.

Magdalena responds to Bernarda’s order to embroider the linens with resignation: “It’s all the same to me. ... I know I’m not going to marry. I’d rather carry sacks to the mill. Anything except sit here day after day in this dark room” (164-165). Magdalena, like Martirio, has no hope of escaping Bernarda’s tyranny through marriage. However, she does express the profound desire to break free from the regime by stating that she would rather submit herself to hard physical labour, than remain in her prison. Magdalena’s desire to break free resonates with Angustias’ desire to escape, and with the rebellion and desire for freedom of Adela and María Josefa.

Bernarda answers Magdalena’s preference to carry sacks to the mill rather than sit in the dark room by echoing the demands civilization imposes on a Spanish woman: “That’s what a woman is for” (165). Martirio’s attempt to rebel was weak, Angustias’ even weaker, but Magdalena’s is reduced to the helpless response filled with resignation: “Cursed be all women” (165). Magdalena’s only way of escape is into nostalgia for the past: “I’ve been going through all the rooms. Just to walk a little, and look at Grandmother’s needle-point pictures—the little woolen dog, and the black man wrestling with the lion—which we liked so much when we were children. Those were happier times. A wedding lasted ten days and evil tongues weren’t in style” (170).
Magdalena is the only sister who would like to see Adela happy, and she sounds sincere when she says it: "Poor little thing! She's the youngest one of us and still has her illusions. I'd give something to see her happy" (171). In Act II Adela, while hearing bells announcing that men are going back to work in the fields, expresses her desire to go out in the fields too. Magdalena, in response, echoes Bernarda's rules: "Each class does what it has to!" (184), even though she expressed the same desire to get out of the house in Act I. Even in spite of her humanity, Magdalena, in echoing Bernarda's rules acts as Adela's prison guard in Bernarda's absence.

Amelia is Bernarda's daughter whose character is the least developed in the play. She has no strength to rebel against Bernarda and her entire life in the house is ruled by the fear of her mother. Fear was a very powerful weapon used by Franco during the Civil War and afterwards during his dictatorship. Trythall comments on Franco's use of fear as a weapon during the war:

And the terror was not concealed but broadcast, most notoriously by General Queipo de Llano, who boasted on Radio Seville of the rapes and murders the Regulares would commit on the 'marxist rabble'.

The effectiveness of this as a weapon was frequently demonstrated in the advance of Franco's forces towards Madrid. Frequently the fear of being cut off and so falling into the hands of the Legion and of the Moors led militiamen to abandon positions which were in fact still quite sound. (137)
Therefore, fear prevented those on the side of the Republic from fighting against Franco’s tyranny.

In Bernarda’s house fear is a powerful weapon. We have already seen Bernarda demanding death as a punishment for an unmarried mother, a demand which was calculated to serve as an example of a punishment for the loss of decency. We have also seen Bernarda beating Martirio with her cane and heard her constant threats of further imprisonment for her daughters. Amelia will not dare to rebel against her mother’s tyranny out of fear of punishment. According to Edwards, Amelia “is the prisoner of her fear of her mother” (248). Amelia’s fear of Bernarda becomes apparent as soon as Amelia sees Adela wearing her green dress on the day of her father’s funeral and says: “If Mother sees you, she’ll drag you by your hair!” (172). Another example of Amelia’s fear of Bernarda is Amelia’s reaction to Poncia’s story of her husband’s courtship of her which she tells to Bernarda’s daughters. The story is of sexual nature, and Bernarda would not approve of her daughters hearing it. Amelia is afraid that Bernarda is going to hear them, and consequently she “gets up, runs, and looks through the door” (179) saying: “Ay, I thought mother was coming! . . . Sh-h-h! She’ll hear us” (179).

In addition to the fear of Bernarda, Amelia, like the other sisters, acts as a prison guard towards the inhabitants of the house. In response to Adela’s outburst that she will not get used to being locked up, Amelia states: “What happens to one will happen to all of us” (173). This statement resonates with Martirio’s determination not to allow anybody to be happy. It also implies Amelia’s resolve to make sure that nobody escapes Bernarda’s tyranny.
Amelia, like Martirio, Angustias and Magdalena, is sexually repressed by Bernarda. When Angustias talks about the night Pepe proposed, Amelia states that “These things embarrass [her]!” (179). Amelia, too, in Act II suffers from heat. When Martirio says that she could not sleep because of the heat, Amelia adds that neither could she (178).

We have examined the ways in which the daughters accommodate to Bernarda’s tyranny and actually aid it. Now let us turn to the discussion of the way in which Poncia accommodates to and helps the regime. Poncia is economically dependent on Bernarda. Consequently, Bernarda uses her economic power over Poncia in order to make her servant conform to the regime. Poncia aids Bernarda’s regime through gathering gossip about the townspeople which Bernarda in turn uses to emotionally blackmail the neighbours and thus control them. Moreover, Poncia serves as a prison guard for Bernarda’s daughters and her mother, María Josefa. At the same time, Poncia resents her tyrant and employer, and her resentment is evident in her comments about Bernarda directed to the Servant, and in her skillful insinuations addressed to Bernarda implying that scandal may erupt in Bernarda’s house. According to Edwards, such insinuations are Poncia’s attempts at resistance towards Bernarda’s tyranny (255, 271).

Poncia summarizes her feelings towards Bernarda and describes her role in the house in the opening conversation with the Servant:

Thirty years washing her sheets. Thirty years eating her leftovers. Nights of watching when she had a cough. Whole days peeking through a crack in the shutters to spy on the neighbors and carry her the tale. Life without secrets one
Poncia serves Bernarda by spying on the townspeople. She does it even in spite of the fact that Bernarda uses the knowledge of Poncia’s mother’s past to control her and silence her whenever Bernarda needs to: “The whorehouse was for a certain woman, already dead. . . .” (192). Therefore, Poncia, as was the case with Bernarda’s daughters, helps the regime which oppresses her. Ironically, she gathers gossip of a sexual nature which is the same kind of gossip Bernarda uses against her.

In her speech in Act I, Poncia expresses her hatred towards Bernarda by wishing her pain. However, in spite of her hatred, Poncia stresses her servile behaviour. She compares herself to the watchdog, emphasizing her role of a spy watching the neighbours and of a prison guard keeping an eye on Bernarda’s daughters. Poncia gives us insight in the workings of the fascist regime when she states that she bites beggars when told. This is another example of the situation in which in order to survive, an oppressed individual oppresses those who are more powerless than he or she is. In the same speech Poncia gives us the reason why she oppresses the powerless; she does it out of economic necessity. Because Bernarda employs her and her two sons, Poncia oppresses others when threatened of being fired, which would turn her into a beggar. We see the same
behaviour in the Servant who has “blood on [her] hands from so much polishing of everything” (158). This suggests that she, too, is oppressed by Bernarda; and yet she throws out a beggar asking her for some scraps:

**BEGGAR.** I came for the scraps. . . .

**SERVANT.** You can go right out the way you came in. Today’s scraps are for me.

**BEGGAR.** But you have somebody to take care of you—and my little girl and I are all alone!

**SERVANT.** Dogs are alone too, and they live. . . . Get out of here! (160)

Again, in this scene we see the dynamics of the fascist regime at work. The oppressed servant becomes the oppressor of the beggar. This scene mirrors Poncia’s speech about her oppression of beggars. It also mirrors the behaviour of the sisters who, themselves oppressed by Bernarda, oppress each other in turn. Moreover, even Bernarda is oppressed by rigid norms of Spanish society, and she oppresses her daughters and servants.

Poncia ends her speech from Act I by pointing out that one day she will have enough and then she will spit in Bernarda’s face. As was the case with Bernarda’s daughters who wanted to rebel against Bernarda, Poncia now expresses her desire to rebel as well.
Apart from spying on the neighbours outside the house, Poncia keeps a constant watch on Bernarda's daughters inside the house: "I keep watch; so people won't spit when they pass our door... I don't have any affection for any of you. I want to live in a decent house" (182). Poncia knows about Adela's relationship with Pepe. She echoes Bernarda in stating that she keeps watch, and she furthermore echoes the ideal of decency expressed by Bernarda. The oppressed, Poncia, not only aids the oppressor but even internalizes the oppressor's rules and ideals into her superego and repeats them. Poncia weakens Adela's rebellion when she should stand on the side of Adela and rebel against Bernarda. If Adela has to fight not only against Bernarda's tyranny but also Poncia's, then the possibility of Adela's defeating Bernarda diminishes.

Poncia not only spies on Adela but threatens her with reporting Adela's defiance of Bernarda's rules to authority: "Don't defy me, Adela, don't defy me! Because I can shout, light lamps, and make bells ring" (183). This threat echoes Martirio's threat of reporting Adela's actions to Bernarda: "You can be thankful I didn't happen to open my mouth" (194). Martirio will carry out her threat. Poncia will only hint at it in her conversation with Bernarda by saying that Adela is Pepe's true sweetheart.

Poncia has said in Act I that one day she will openly rebel against Bernarda by spitting in her face. In Act II the audience sees Poncia's attempts to rebel against Bernarda in an indirect but crafty way by using the gossip she and her son have gathered regarding Pepe:

PONCIA. But aren't people strange! You should see Angustias' enthusiasm for

her lover, at her age! And he seems very smitten too. Yesterday my oldest son
told me that when he passed by with the oxen at four thirty in the morning they
were still talking. . . .

ANGUSTIAS, entering. That's a lie! . . . For more than a week Pepe has been
leaving at one. . . .

BERNARDA. What's going on here?

PONCIA. If you're not careful, you'll find out! At least Pepe was at one of your
windows-and at four in the morning too! (193)

Poncia uses her role as a spy and gossip gatherer in Bernarda’s house to her advantage.
She challenges Bernarda’s authority in the only way she can. Consequently, not only the
oppressed becomes the oppressor under the fascist regime but the opposite is true; the
oppressor, Bernarda, becomes a victim of her oppression, and becomes the oppressed.
Just as the sisters express their desire to escape the tyranny of Bernarda, so does Poncia:
“How I’d like to sail across the sea and leave this house, this battleground, behind!” (204).

Martirio, Angustias, Magdalena, Amelia, Poncia and the Servant all accommodate, in
various ways, to Bernarda’s despotism and aid in sustaining it, even though they are all
oppressed by it. Lorca portrayed each of these characters as unhappy, psychologically
deformed by the system, and gave them the desire to rebel against and escape Bernarda’s
regime. Each one of them was too weak to realize this desire and instead chose to survive
under the regime by oppressing others. In the next chapter I will analyze the two
characters, Adela and Maria Josefa, who chose rebellion as an alternative to submission and paid for it with either death or further incarceration and madness. In the portrayal of his characters Lorca shows foresight into the workings of Franco’s regime which also left the citizens with two options: conformity and oppression of others or rebellion. Lorca’s characters also behave in accordance with the Freudian prediction that an individual whose instincts are being repressed by civilization will rebel or develop serious psychological disorders or become unhappy.
CHAPTER THREE

Eros and Thanatos: Inspiring and Destructive Forces Motivating the Rebellion of
Adela and María Josefa in Bernarda’s House.

“[W]hat good to us is a long life if it is difficult and barren of joys, and if it is so full of
misery that we can only welcome death as a deliverer?” (Freud 35).

According to Freud there is a constant struggle between Eros or life instinct and
Thanatos or death instinct which are the two components of the id. Freud sometimes sees
Eros and Thanatos as twins and sometimes as opponents (5-6). A portion of Thanatos is
directed outwards and operates as aggressiveness. In this way Thanatos may serve Eros
in that it could destroy some other person or object instead of the self. However, if
outward aggressiveness is restrained it will redirect itself inwards into a self-destructive
impulse (66).

People strive for happiness (defined as absence of pain) and the “experiencing of strong
feelings of pleasure” (23). Desire for freedom and individual liberty is part of the life
instinct, Eros. Civilization or the superego impose restrictions on Eros in circumstances
where the erotic drive is anti-social, or where it becomes unlicensed and therefore
dangerous, or where pleasure is allowed to dominate moral consideration, and the “urge
for freedom” is directed against the civilization. Therefore, in Freudian theory there is a
struggle between an individual and civilization or between the id and the superego which
are two variants of a battle between instinct and social constraint. The first one is external and the second one happens within one individual.

The play under discussion lacks one tragic hero who is torn within by the id and the superego. Bernarda represents only civilization or the superego and Adela portrays only the id. We know nothing about Bernarda’s Eros, apart from Poncia’s remarks discussed in Chapter I, and even less about Adela’s superego. The two protagonists function more as abstract forces than three dimensional characters. The struggle in the play is between Adela and Bernarda; it is thus an external battle between the individual ruled by the id and civilization rather than an internal one between the id and the superego, and for this reason my main focus in this thesis has been on the battle between the id and civilization. However, the id vs. the superego dynamic is important in Freudian theory, and therefore is also acknowledged in this thesis, although is given less weight. Because I associate civilization as well as the superego with Bernarda, the presence of this superego in the play was already partially discussed in Chapter I. The superego, like civilization, represses Eros and Thanatos.

Eros and Thanatos are preeminent in the play both, in its characters and in its imagery. Eros is embodied in the character of Adela through her passion for Pepe, desire for freedom and rebellion against Bernarda, and in the character of María Josefa through her lust for life, her freedom and her attempts to escape the prison, namely Bernarda’s house. Eros is also expressed in the play through the images of water, fertility and the pervasive but unseen presence of men. Freedom, including sexual freedom, and democracy were the ideals for which the Republic fought against Franco. Therefore, in the characters of Adela
and María Josefa Freudian theory and contemporary politics find the point of contact. Thanatos is evident in Adela’s suicide, in the foreboding of Adela’s death expressed mostly by Poncia, in Bernarda’s pronouncement of death as punishment for indecency, as well as in the images of mourning.

Lorca gave Adela a symbolic name which resonates with the Spanish verb “adelantarse” (to go ahead, to move forward) (Dewey 42). This name reflects Adela’s defiant spirit. She will go forward in her rebellion against her mother’s tyranny. The revolt of Adela against Bernarda becomes apparent from the first confrontation between the two:

BERNARDA . . . Adela, give me a fan.

ADELA. Take this one.

She gives her a round fan with green and red flowers.

BERNARDA, throwing the fan on the floor. Is that the fan to give to a widow?

Give me a black one and learn to respect your father’s memory. (164)

Adela, by giving her mother a fan with green and red flowers instead of a black one, rebels against the Spanish tradition of mourning which Bernarda uses as a form of imprisonment of her daughters. Thus, Adela fights for freedom. According to Gilmour, Lorca was critical of Catholic tradition and morality and showed that it exerts “a stronghold over the lives of his mainly female protagonists and bar[s] their way to individual freedom and
fulfillment" (152). Lorca's sentiment was “in line with the Republican thinking of his time. 

...[T]he main objective of the legislation introduced by the left-wing Republican
government of the early 1930s was to ensure that ‘the personality of the individual could
develop in total liberty’” (152). Therefore, Adela's rebellion against Bernarda reflects the
revolt of the Republicans against the traditional Spanish society of 1930s, and it also
foresees the fight of the Republicans for liberty, and against Franco’s tyranny. Moreover,
green is the colour of nature and has sexual connotations in literature. Therefore, Adela,
by giving her mother the fan with green flowers and later by wearing a green dress,
expresses her Eros. We can also analyze this rebellion on two other levels using Freudian
theories. If we use the individual vs. civilization dynamic then Adela rebels against
civilization. If we apply the structure of personality theory to its analysis, then Adela
(representing forces of the id) opposes Bernarda embodying the superego.

Later in the play, when Adela rebels against the tyranny of Bernarda and the custom of
mourning, she does so not through symbolic action but verbally:

ADELA. I’m thinking that this mourning has caught me at the worst moment of

my life for me to bear it.

MAGDALENA. You’ll get used to it.

ADELA, bursting out, crying with rage. I will not get used to it! I can’t be

locked up. I don’t want my skin’s whiteness lost in these rooms. Tomorrow
I’m going to put on my green dress and go walking in the streets. I want to go out!

The First Servant enters.

MAGDALENA, in a tone of authority. Adela! (173)

Adela speaks the above lines “crying with rage”. Rage is an expression of aggressiveness which is an outwardly directed instinct of death, Thanatos. Magdalena acts, in this scene, as an representative of civilization attempting to restrict Adela’s expression of aggressiveness by insisting on Adela’s self-control in front of the Servant. This action of Magdalena will strengthen Adela’s inwardly directed Thanatos, and in the end of the play she will kill herself. Magdalena’s behaviour also restrains Adela’s freedom which is already curtailed by Bernarda, and will strengthen Adela’s “urge for freedom” which is directed against civilization.

Adela conveys her hunger for freedom a few more times during the course of the play. In Act II, as the sisters converse, “a distant song is heard, coming nearer” (185). This is the song of the reapers:

CHORUS.

The reapers have set out

Looking for ripe wheat;

They’ll carry off the hearts
Off any girls they meet.

Tambourines and carrañacas are heard. Pause. They all listen in the silence cut by the sun...

ADELA. How I'd like to be a reaper so I could come and go as I pleased...

CHORUS, very distantly.

Throw wide your doors and windows,

You girls who live in the town

The reaper asks you for roses

With which to deck his crown. (185-186)

Busette comments on the song of the reapers and on Adela's response to it: "The theme of freedom, already evident in the play, is underscored by the haunting chants of the migrant farm workers, in their song of abandon, sexual imagery, and movement from place to place, and the reaction of Bernarda's daughters, of sadness, to their own limited, encircled, and completely controlled lives" (179). Next, Busette sees Adela's line as an example of this sadness and states that Adela "joins in their song, momentarily, thus vicariously participating in their freedom" (179). Patricia McDermott goes even further in her analysis of the song and sees it as an example of the imagery of both Eros and Thanatos:
The dance/song of life/death is placed at the very centre of the play, the structural nub of the wheel of the dramatic action. The fertility song is accompanied by the tambourines associated with Bacchantes and by the wooden rattles used at Christmas and during Holy Week and death is at its heart, its reference to the reaper in the singular calling to mind the Divine reaper at the end of time in the Apocalyptic vision. (137)

Adela expresses her desire for freedom which is part of her Eros. Moreover, she sings the song with passion. Her response to the song underscores both Eros and Thanatos in her personality.

Adela yearns not only for freedom in general but for sexual freedom in particular, which she asserts in Act II: “I’ll do whatever I want to with my body” (181). She forcefully rebels against the sexual repression imposed by civilization or superego. Sexual freedom was one of the ideals for which the Republic fought. Consequently, Adela expresses the sentiments of the Republic. Sexual freedom was also the ideal of Lorca who had a vested interest in this issue. Being himself a homosexual he experienced the sexual repression of the rightist regime. Lorca admired qualities such as defiance and determination to fight for sexual freedom and he endowed the heroine of his play with these characteristics.

Adela reasserts the same sentiment in the conversation with Poncia: “My body will be for whomever I choose” (181). When she rebels against Poncia, Bernarda’s spy, she also rebels against Bernarda. Similarly, those who revolted against Franco’s civil guard,
rebelled against Franco himself. Adela says: “Save your advice. It’s already too late. For I’d leap not over you, just a servant, but over my mother to put out this fire I feel in my legs and my mouth. What can you possibly say about me? That I lock myself in my room and will not open the door? That I don’t sleep? I’m smarter than you! See if you can catch the hare with your hands” (182-183). Adela will fight not only against Poncia, Bernarda’s lackey, but against Bernarda herself to defeat sexual repression. She will fight for freedom to assert her passion, Eros, which she expresses using the image of fire. Adela strengthens the expression of her Eros by associating herself with a hare, which according to McDermott is a symbol of fertility (135-136), while daring Poncia to catch her and report her “crime” to the authority, Bernarda.

As the repression of the daughters’ instincts by the regime grows in strength, so does Adela’s desire to fight against the regime. In her conversation with Poncia she says: “No one can stop what has to happen. . . . I’ve been afraid of you. But now I’m stronger than you!” (183). Pepe el Romano is the source of Adela’s strength to rebel: “Looking in his eyes I seem to drink his blood in slowly” (183). This statement is a very strong expression of Adela’s passion for Pepe, and it is charged with imagery. Water in Lorca’s plays is an image of fertility, and consequently, so is the reference to drinking, drinking Pepe’s blood, in this case, to quench the thirst of sexual desire.

At the end of Act II Martirio assures Adela that she will not allow her to have Pepe and hurls a threat at Adela: “I’ll see you dead first!” (195). This foreboding is strengthened by the scene that follows. An unmarried woman, Librada’s daughter, had a child and killed it. The entire village is coming to stone her to death. Bernarda demands
death as a punishment for the woman; Martirio joins in Bernarda’s demand, and Adela is the only one who objects: “No, not to kill her! . . . Let her escape! Don’t you go out! . . . holding her belly. No! No!” (195). Adela fights against the strict morality of the regime or the cultural superego, and in this way she echoes the convictions of the Republic, which was rebelling against the overly zealous morality of Franco’s regime. Adela, being herself unmarried and possibly pregnant, sees what will happen to her in the near future. She wants the woman to escape the cruelty of civilization just as Adela herself previously expressed the wish to escape the regime. However, neither one of them will escape but both will meet certain death. Isabel Camara comments on the importance of this scene, stating that Adela has been symbolically condemned in the person of Librada’s daughter for asserting her Eros with Pepe (194). Worth noting is also the symbolism of the name Librada which echoes the Spanish verb librar (to free), and resonates with the theme of the fight for freedom.

As the play rushes to its climax, Lorca intensifies the presence of Eros and Thanatos in Adela. In Act III there are two telling stage directions: “Adela enters. She looks about cautiously and disappears out the door leading to the corral” (205), and later, “Adela enters. Her hair is disarranged” (207). The last stage direction is followed by the two confrontations which end the play: the confrontation between Adela and Martirio, and between Adela and Bernarda. Martirio spies on Adela who is coming back from her encounter with Pepe and tries to prevent her from going back to him. Adela responds with a reassertion of her strength: “This is just the beginning. I’ve had strength enough to push myself forward-the spirit and looks you lack. I’ve seen death under this roof, and
gone out to look for what was mine, what belonged to me” (207). Adela assures Martirio that this is just the beginning of the war for freedom, including sexual freedom. She saw death inside Bernarda’s house. On the realistic level, Adela refers to the death of her father, Benavides. Symbolically, however, she feels that death, as a spirit, resides under Bernarda’s roof. According to Diana Taylor, “... separated from nature, the house becomes a tomb for the living” (20). Adela went beyond the tomb to look for Eros. She juxtaposes Eros and Thanatos, implying that death resides inside the house, while Eros resides outside. She is factually correct in that she, just like her father, will die inside the house, while she meets with Pepe outside. Moreover, all other sexual acts, like the Paca la Roseta story, also happen beyond the walls of the house. By having Adela mention death lurking inside the house, Lorca also externalizes Adela’s own instinct of death, Thanatos.

In her verbal battle with Martirio over Pepe, Adela connects Eros with Thanatos: “There’s no way out here. Whoever has to drown—let her drown. Pepe is mine. He’ll carry me to the rushes along the river band...”(208). Adela expresses a foreboding that one of them is going to die. She visualizes death by drowning. Water symbolizes fertility, Eros, and therefore Adela feels that Eros, her relationship with Pepe, will cause death. The juxtaposition of the images of Eros and Thanatos brings us back to Freud’s theory in which Eros and Thanatos are in constant struggle and are seen as opponents or twins. Moreover, by stating that one of them has to drown, Adela expresses her determination to fight for the freedom to assert her Eros with Pepe.

Subsequently, Adela expresses her rebellion not only against Bernarda and her lackey, Martirio, but against the entire village: “I can’t stand this horrible house after the taste of
his mouth. I'll be what he wants me to be. Everybody in the village against me, burning me with their fiery fingers; pursued by those who claim they're decent, and I'll wear, before them all the crown of thorns that belongs to the mistress of a married man" (208). Adela is willing to accept punishment for her rebellion. At the end of Act II she saw what civilization does to an unmarried woman with child. Now she envisions the image of being pursued by the entire village. Pepe gives her courage to accept death as a price for Eros. Taylor comments convincingly on Adela's speech:

The insidious violence of locking individuals into social roles both in the house and in the wider social circle explodes into the overt attack on those who stray from the acceptable paths, showing the extent to which society will defend its totalizing system. . . .[T]he violence serves another, less apparent, social need. Society requires personal sacrifice in order to survive, in order to channel what René Girard describes as "the very real (though often hidden) hostilities that all the members of the community feel for one another" (p. 99). In the patriarchal system, unattached women function as perfect sacrificial "ovejitas" [sheep] (p. 139). By killing them "todo el pueblo" [entire village] participates in a communal act, gathering together and momentarily surpassing the hostilities that keep its members apart. Death, inflicted and observed ritualistically, offers a safe meeting-ground. (20)

Girard's view that all the members of the society feel hostile towards one another, and that of Taylor, that these hostilities threaten the survival of the society coincide with Freud's theory of aggression:
. . . their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper . . . but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation . . . to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. Homo homini lupus. . . . As a rule this cruel aggressiveness waits for some provocation or puts itself at the service of some other purpose, whose goal might also have been reached by milder measures. In circumstances that are favorable to it, when the mental counterforces which ordinarily inhibit it are out of action, it also manifests itself spontaneously and reveals man as a savage beast to whom consideration towards his own kind is something alien. . . . The existence of this inclination to aggression, which we can detect in ourselves and justly assume to be present in others, is the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbour and which forces civilization into such a high expenditure [of energy]. In consequence of this primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration. (58-59)

Adela proceeds with an action to reassert her Eros. She tries to meet Pepe. However, Martirio does not let her leave and calls for Bernarda, indicating to her mother that Adela had met with Pepe. Bernarda enters. Adela faces her mother and pronounces her liberation from Bernarda’s tyranny: “There’ll be an end to prison voices here!” (209). In a symbolic gesture Adela snatches Bernarda’s cane, a symbol of her tyranny but also of her weakness, and breaks it, saying: “This is what I do with the tyrant’s cane. Not another step. No one but Pepe commands me!” (209). Adela names Pepe as the only one who commands her, and thus announces that only her Eros is going to have control over her.
Moreover, Adela states that Pepe, who symbolizes Eros for all the sisters, will have control over all the inhabitants of the house: “He’ll be master in this house” (210). Adela’s statement resonates with an earlier assertion made by the Servant: “Bernarda thinks nothing can stand against her, yet she doesn’t know the strength a man has among women alone” (203). Lorca portrays Eros as the strongest force ruling over the inhabitants of the house.

In this final scene all the sisters stand against Adela and support Bernarda. This is another token that Eros is stronger than the tyranny of civilization. Their rivalry against Adela for Pepe causes them to support Bernarda’s regime which enslaves and oppresses them. This is evident in their actions. Martirio betrays Adela by calling for Bernarda. When Magdalena enters the scene and sees Adela breaking Bernarda’s cane, she tries to restrict Adela’s rebellion by saying: “Adela!” (210) in an authoritative tone of voice. When Angustias enters, Adela declares, “I’m his” (210), knowing that Angustias is engaged to Pepe.

The fascist regime will do anything to subdue a citizen to slavery. Bernarda, who in Act II demanded death as a punishment for an unmarried mother, now herself decides to punish indecency with death. She calls: “The gun! Where’s the gun?” (210). She attempts to kill the source of Adela’s strength, Pepe, in order to totally crush Adela’s freedom and suppress her Eros. We now get a variety of responses by the inhabitants of the house: “[Bernarda] rushes out. La Poncia runs ahead of her. Amelia enters and looks frightened, leaning her head against the wall. Behind her comes Martirio” (210). Amelia’s fear is consistent with her characterization throughout the play. In the meantime
Adela expresses, for the last time, her strength: “No one can hold me back! She tries to go out” (210). The strength of Eros as a divisive and destructive force reaches its pinnacle, evident in further responses of the sisters:

ANGUSTIAS, holding her. You’re not getting out of here with your body’s triumph! Thief! Disgrace of this house!

MAGDALENA. Let her go where we’ll never see her again!” (210)

Angustias wants to bind Adela the same way Bernarda does and echoes the pretentious morality of cultural superego. During the exchange between Angustias and Magdalena “[a] shot is heard” (210). Lorca prepares his audience for the upcoming death through the use of the sound of death, a gun shot. Bernarda misses Pepe who escapes on his mare, but Martirio brings false news of Pepe’s death to Adela. Adela’s last words on stage are: “Pepe! My God! Pepe!” (210). Following these words Adela runs out, and Martirio expresses her wish of Adela’s death. Immediately after a thud is heard. Lorca makes death palpable to various senses; he brings it to the audience through visual imagery, and also he makes the audience hear it. Adela, being unable to accept her slavery and live without Pepe, hangs herself “with the cord with which the mother symbolically would have bound all of them” (Francisco García Lorca Prologue 27). As Dennis Klein claims, Adela “lives for love and dies out of frustration. She suffers oppression; only with Pepe or in death could she be free. When she believes that she can no longer have Pepe, she has to resign herself to the only other chance of escape that she sees-death” (74)
Poncia has to break the door of Adela’s room open in order to witness Adela’s death. Francisco García Lorca sees the door in symbolic terms. The door is closed after the death of Benavides and “will not open again, except outside the play, when the story is over, when it is time to mourn the dead daughter” (In the Green Morning 241). Moreover, Francisco García Lorca makes a point that Pepe “flees, out the last door of the house towards life. He does so in perfect counterpoint to Adela, as she enters her room, in a flight towards death” (In the Green Morning 242).

Lorca connects the two forces, Eros and Thanatos, in the final moments of the play. Even in the face of Adela’s death, Bernarda attempts to perpetuate a lie, denying the existence of Eros in Adela’s life: “Pepe, you’re running now, alive, in the darkness, under the trees, but another day you’ll fall. Cut her down! My daughter died a virgin. . . Tell them, so at dawn, the bells will ring twice” (211). According to Gilmour, the tolling of the church bells creates an atmosphere of death. The audience hears the tolling of the bells at the beginning of the first act during the celebration of the funeral mass for Benavides, and is reminded that the bells will ring again the next day to celebrate Adela’s death (145).

Martirio stresses the power of Eros which in her view is the most formidable force. She envies Adela’s Eros even though Adela paid for it with death: “A thousand times happy she, who had him” (211). Bernarda in her final words becomes the embodiment not only of Freudian civilization or the superego but also of Thanatos:

And I want no weeping. Death must be looked at face to face. Silence!
To one daughter.

Be still, I said!

To another daughter.

Tears when you’re alone! We’ll drown ourselves in a sea of mourning. She, the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba, died a virgin. Did you hear me? Silence, silence, I said. Silence! (211)

Gilmour calls this retreat into “sterile mourning as . . . [the] religious custom dictates” (133) a “living death” (133). According to Isabel Camara, Bernarda’s final word, silence, names death (184); it is, in brutal irony, the same word as Bernarda’s very first one in the play.

Adela is not the only character in the play endowed with passion, Eros, lust for life, desire for freedom and a rebellious spirit. She is a true granddaughter of María Josefa who is filled with the very same qualities. As soon as Adela leaves the stage after her initial rebellion against Bernarda through offering her mother a fan with green and red flowers, the audience hears words of María Josefa which come from off stage: “Bernarda! Let me out!” (165). María Josefa, like Adela, wants to escape her prison; she articulates her desire for freedom. Bernarda incarcerates María Josefa in even the tighter confines than her daughters. Francisco García Lorca comments on this incarceration: “Within the closed space of the House there is an even narrower prison, that of the old woman, María Josefa, who escapes out of her room towards the house itself. This movement intensifies
the symbolic value of the character. She resembles the seed in the fruit” (In the Green
Morning 242). The seed in the fruit is an image of fertility. Therefore, Francisco García
Lorca sees María Josefa as a character symbolizing Eros.

At the end of Act I María Josefa manages to escape her prison, the room in which she
is locked up, thus enacting her rebellion against Bernarda:

Voices are heard and María Josefa, enters. She is very old and has decked out her
head and breast with flowers.

MARÍA JOSEFA. Bernarda, where is my mantilla? Nothing, nothing of what I
own will be for any of you. Not my rings nor my black moiré dress. Because
not a one of you is going to marry-not a one. Bernarda, give me my necklace of
pearls.

BERNARDA, to The Servant. Why did you let her get in here?

SERVANT, trembling. She got away from me!

MARÍA JOSEFA. I ran away because I wan to marry-I want to get married to a
beautiful manly man from the shore of the sea. Because here the men run from
women.

BERNARDA. Hush, hush, Mother!
MARIA JOSEFA. No, no—I won’t hush. I don’t want to see these single women,
longing for marriage, turning their hearts to dust; and I want to go to my home
town. Bernarda, I want a man to get married to and be happy with! (175-176)

María Josefa’s flowers symbolize nature, Eros, as does Adela’s green dress. She
expresses a desire to get married. Furthermore, she knows, as do the daughters, that none
of them will marry. According to Ramsden, “María Josefa is a means of exteriorizing the
daughters’ suppressed longings and essentializing the conflict (with a name that, in view of
the lamb and nativity references, may reasonably recall Mary and Joseph and therefore
offer a further contrast to Bernarda, the cruel parent who denies life” (xliii). Ramsden also
states that: “María Josefa . . . is from a village on the coast and she carries in her blood the
sexual vitality that Lorca associated with the sea” (xli).

Bernarda is ineffective in her attempts to imprison and control her mother; this is
another token of Lorca’s suggestion that Bernarda’s regime is not invincible. Even
though Bernarda tries to lock María Josefa in the room, María Josefa manages to escape.
Moreover, she is the only one in the house who is not going to be silenced by Bernarda.
She says that she will not hush. This is another way of rebelling against the regime.
Silencing the inhabitants of the house is a powerful way of controlling them. If a tyrant is unable to silence the individuals, then the individuals will question the tyrant’s authority and undermine it. Similarly, Franco was silencing those citizens who challenged the authority of the fascist regime, and Lorca was one of them. He was silenced by death.
McDermott offers additional insight into the character of María Josefa:

At the opposite end of the age range the lust for life is incarnated in the grandmother, physically restrained but mentally released from repression and inhibition in madness. Bernarda's command to let her loose in Act One ... is also paralleled in Act Three by her command to let out the stud stallion ... and establishes a link between the white-haired old woman and the white horse, the first of the horses of the Apocalypse. (136)

For McDermott the horse is a symbol of death. The stallion trying to break free is also seen, by Klein, as representing Pepe or the daughters trying to break free from sexual oppression (136-137). It seems that in the image of the horse Lorca connects Eros and Thanatos.

At the end of Act III María Josefa enters an empty stage with a lamb in her arms and sings a lullaby:

Little lamb, child of mine,
let's go to the shore of the sea.
The tiny ant will be at his doorway,
I'll nurse you and give you your bread.
Bernarda, old leopard-face,
And Magdalena, hyena-face,
Little lamb . . .

Rock, rock-a-by,

Let's go to the palms at Bethlehem's gate . . .

Neither you nor I would want to sleep

The door will open by itself

And on the beach we'll go and hide

In a little coral cabin. (205)

This lullaby resonates with the predicament of Adela and Librada's daughter. The little lamb symbolizes a baby, as María Josefa will later state to Martirio: "You're Martirio . . . And when are you going to have a baby? I've had this one . . . I know it's a lamb. But can't a lamb be a baby?" (206). María Josefa wants to escape Bernarda's house, go to the shore of the sea and hide in a little coral cabin. Similarly, Adela, who is pregnant symbolically and witnessed what the villagers did to Librada's daughter, will also reveal to Martirio her plan to escape Bernarda's house and hide: "... but I'll go off alone to a little house where he'll come to see me whenever he wants, whenever he feels like it" (209). McDermott comments on the symbolic pregnancy of Adela. She compares the play to the Apocalyptic vision of the Book of Revelation and points out that in the Apocalyptic vision there is "the enmity between the pregnant woman (interpreted in Catholic tradition as both a figure of the Church and of Mary as the Virgin of the
Immaculate Conception, patroness of Spain and the Catholic mother) and the dragon” (133). In the Apocalyptic vision there is also “the divinely aided escape of mother and child” (133). McDermott adds that Adela’s line quoted above “recalls her grandmother’s lullaby and links her to the image of the endangered mother with child” (140). Maria Josefa is in a way a mirror of Adela and represents an alternative future for her. If she is not exiled from the community and stoned to death like Librada’s daughter or does not commit suicide, she will become mad, in her yearning for Eros, just like Maria Josefa.

In her conversation with Martirio in Act III, Maria Josefa breaks into poetry, articulating symbolic images of fertility, offering the foreboding of Adela’s death and the fate of the rest of her sisters:

Everything’s very dark. Just because I have white hair you think I can’t have babies, but I can-babies and babies and babies. This baby will have white hair, and I’d have this baby, and another, and this one other; and with all of us with snow white hair we’ll be like the waves-one, then another, and another. Then we’ll all sit down and all of us will have white heads, and we’ll be seafoam. Why isn’t there any seafoam here? Nothing but mourning shrouds here. . . . Pepe el Romano is a giant. All of you love him. But he’s going to devour you because you’re grains of wheat. No, not grains of wheat. Frogs with no tongues! (206)

María Josefa enumerates the images of fertility: babies, waves, seafoam, images which are not present in Bernarda’s house. Instead the only image that is present is that of death, mourning shrouds. A mourning shroud is connected with the funeral of Benavides, and
one will also be necessary for the funeral of Adela. The use of shrouds in plural, by María Josefa, foreshadows another funeral, that of Adela. At the same time we remember Bernarda’s order to embroider hopechest linens in Act I and the sisters embroidering them in Act II. In the light of María Josefa’s statement these hopechest linens can be envisaged as mourning shrouds. Therefore, once more Lorca brilliantly connects the images of Eros and Thanatos. Moreover, María Josefa knows that all the sisters love Pepe el Romano, and she presents him as a giant which echoes the statements of Poncia and the Servant about the power a man has among women. María Josefa offers an image of Eros as a destructive power. She claims that Pepe is going to devour them because they are not grains of wheat, which is an image of fertility, but frogs with no tongues. According to Klein: “[F]rogs . . . depend on their tongue for food, for life. Without their tongue, frogs die” (131). Therefore, this image symbolizes the death of María Josefa’s family line (Klein 131).

We have analyzed the presence of Eros and Thanatos in the characters of Adela and María Josefa, and we have touched upon the discussion of the images of Eros and Thanatos in the play while analyzing the characters. Let us now augment the discussion of the imagery of these two forces. Eros is present in the play through the pervasive but unseen presence of men. We have already discussed Pepe el Romano who according to Klein is a symbol of manhood (130), and with whom all the sisters are in love. The play is filled with references to men. Already during the opening conversation Poncia describes their priest’s voice which “went up, and up-like a pitcher filling with water” (159). Poncia
tries to imitate the priest’s voice and in response to the Servant’s warning that she will strain her windpipe, makes a sexual joke: “I’d rather strain something else!” (160).

The Servant lets the audience know that she was Bernarda’s husband’s mistress: “. . . take what’s coming to you, Antonio Maria Benavides . . . You’ll never again lift my skirts behind the corral door!” (160). Subsequently, Poncia tells Bernarda the story of Paca la Roseta which Poncia heard from the men on the patio: “They were talking about Paca la Roseta. Last night they tied her husband up in a stall, stuck her on a horse behind the saddle, and carried her away to the depths of the olive grove” (167). These are just three examples of the symbolically felt male presence.

Moreover, there are images of animals in the play that stand for men. We have already discussed the symbolism of the stallion. Let us now turn to the discussion of the mule. In Act II Martirio tells Amelia that she heard someone in the yard the previous night; she is alluding to Pepe’s encounter with Adela in the corral. Amelia suggests that it might have been “a young, unbroken mule” (187) to which Martirio responds “to herself, with double meaning. That’s it! That’s it. An unbroken little mule” (187), and she means Pepe.

Lorca felt the omnipresence of death; he made it palpable in this play. John Gilmour elaborates on this issue in his article “The Cross of Pain and Death: Religion in the Rural Tragedies”: “In an interview with José R. Luna in 1934 Lorca declared, ‘La muerte... Ah!... En cada cosa hay una insinuación de muerte... La muerte está en todas partes. Es la dominadora’” (151). (Death... Oh!... There is insinuation of death in everything... Death is everywhere. Death dominates.) Apart from the images of death already described in this
chapter, there are some others, like an image of mourning. The play begins with the celebration of the funeral of Bernarda’s husband, Benavides, and ends with the announcement of the future funeral of Adela. Death is also felt (and seen) in the costumes of the characters who for the most part wear black in accordance with the custom of mourning. The black costumes contrast sharply with the whiteness of the walls. White is a colour of sterility, the opposite of Eros. Moreover, black and white are the colours worn by nuns which emphasizes the metaphor of the house as a convent. The sterility of the daughters in the house will bring about the end of Alba’s bloodline. Consequently, it becomes the image of Thanatos.

Death is also felt in Poncia’s foreboding of a future tragedy, Adela’s death. In Act II Poncia remarks: “Something very grave is happening here” (191). In Act III, similarly, Poncia is trying to warn Bernarda, using images of the overmastering power of the sea and the rush of blood, which are the images of Eros functioning as a destructive force. She also uses an image of lightning, to foreshadow the future tragedy: “Who knows, lightning might strike suddenly. Who knows but what all of a sudden, in a rush of blood, your heart might stop. . . . When you’re powerless against the sea, it’s easier to turn your back on it and not look at it” (203). Subsequently, Poncia comments on the situation to the Servant by using the image of thunderstorm: “I can do nothing. I tried to head things off, but now they frighten me too much. You feel this silence?—in each room there’s a thunderstorm—and the day it breaks, it’ll sweep all of us along with it” (203). According to Klein the thunderstorm can also be seen as an image of turmoil (139). McDermott interprets the half-hour of silence that Bernarda enjoys in Act III, the silence before the thunderstorm
that Poncia refers to, as an Apocalyptic image of the “half-hour of silence that follows the breaking of the seventh seal” (138).

In this chapter I have analyzed two characters, Adela and María Josefa, who rebel against Bernarda. Lorca endowed them with courage, lust for life, passion for men, and desire for freedom. Once again, as was the case in the previous chapters, Lorca finds a point of contact between Freudian theory and contemporary politics. Adela and María Josefa are ruled by the powerful instincts of Eros and Thanatos which are beyond their control. Lorca enriched his play with various images of Eros: e.g. water, men, mule, hare, nature, and Thanatos: mourning, tolling of bells, lightning and door, just to mention a few. These images create the feeling of the omnipresence of Eros and Thanatos and strengthen and externalize the existence of the two instincts inside the characters. At the same time Adela and Maria Josefa voice sentiments of the Second Spanish Republic which valued freedom, including sexual freedom, as one of their ideals. Lorca demonstrates that the fascist regime exacts the price of death for rebellion, as is the case with Adela. Those who do not die, seek their liberation in madness, like María Josefa who represents an alternative future for Adela.
CONCLUSION

"To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves... When things get that deep inside you there isn’t anybody can change them" (Lorca Blood Wedding 60).

I have started my conclusion with the words from another of Lorca’s plays, Blood Wedding. These words express the essence of Lorca’s vision which has the power to evoke strong emotions in the audience, and they also sum up the impossibility of resolving the Freudian dilemma of the struggle between civilization and the individual and even more so between the two most powerful forces in human life: Eros and Thanatos.

In this concluding chapter let us devote our attention to the discussion of Adela’s suicide and its consequences for Bernarda. The play does not have a tragic hero but a group protagonist. Lorca shows the tragedy of all women living in Bernarda’s house, in the village and in entire Spain. In order to emphasize the group protagonist, Lorca gave his play a subtitle: “A Drama About Women in the Villages of Spain”. Although Adela is the character who comes the closest to being a tragic hero, there is no division within her. She represents one facet of life, Eros. The play as a whole, however, portrays the division: the struggle between the forces of passion and repression. Adela’s suicide is not the result of self-division between passion and the demands of honor as for example Hedda Gabler’s suicide is, but on one level it can be seen as a misunderstanding. Adela is misinformation about Pepe’s death when she kills herself. In a way, Adela’s suicide achieves
a partial political purpose: it weakens, but only slightly, Bernarda’s regime. The matriarch loses control over her neighbours as a result of Adela’s suicide; now there is a scandal in Bernarda’s house, and she will not be able to control her clan any more. The Servant’s statement regarding the neighbours’ awakening gives us a clue that Bernarda’s regime is not invincible and could be defeated if only the oppressed united in a common fight against it.

Adela’s suicide also stresses the irreconcilable dynamic of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Adela arrives at the conclusion that there is no absolute freedom in life. The only freedom, which is part of Eros, can be found in death, Thanatos. Moreover, Adela’s suicide proves Freud’s claim that an individual’s instincts cannot be repressed beyond a certain level. Adela cannot live without asserting her Eros, and therefore she embraces its twin, Thanatos.

The House of Bernarda Alba offers the possibility of change; Bernarda’s regime could be defeated. Furthermore, Adela and Pepe could be united outside society’s sanction even if the regime were not defeated. However, the play does not end in change but in death and an accommodation to the situation of those who remain alive. Ultimately, nothing much changes in the end. The regime remains in power, although somewhat weakened, after destroying a rebellious individual, and oppresses the inhabitants of the house as strongly as ever. Eros and Thanatos are the most formidable forces in the play which starts with one death and ends in another. The presence of death is reinforced by Lorca’s Apocalyptic imagery, and the Apocalyptic vision offers the only closure to the Freudian dilemma. In conclusion, even if there is a way out of the Franco dilemma, there is no
escape from the Freudian dilemma. This brings us back to the quote which opens the concluding chapter, and asserts that we are powerless in the face of Eros and Thanatos, forces that are deep within us and that nobody can change.
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