

La casa de Bernarda Alba

by Federico García Lorca

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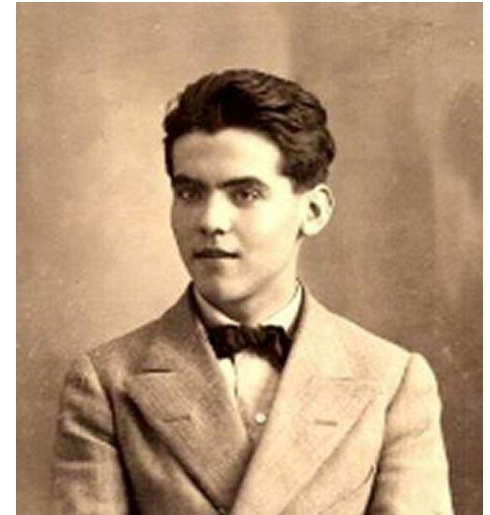
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Discussion on the main characters
- 3. Discussion on the core topics of the play

1. *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, by García Lorca

■ Federico García Lorca, 1898-1936.

■ Playwright, theatre director, poet. Some of his works:

- *Bodas de sangre (Blood Wedding)* [Th]
- *Yerma* [Th]
- *Romancero gitano (Gypsy Ballads)* [P]
- *Seis poemas gallegos (Six Galician Poems)* [P]



■ He was executed by the military authorities of the Franco regime (far right-wing).

■ The play was written in 1936 but it was not performed until 1945 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

■ It was censored in Spain by the Francoist authorities until 1964.

■ Lorca was inspired by his experience of the traditional rural society of Granada at that time. The play denounces the oppression and hypocrisy encountered in this type of community.

- What are the main differences between theatre and other literary genres?
 - Dialogue.
 - Stage directions by the playwright.
 - Theatrical performance: a 'new life' for the work every time it is performed.

1. *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, by García Lorca



1. *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, by García Lorca

- The countryside of Andalucía
- Bernarda Alba's house
- Plot:
- Traditional and religious society
- Patriarchy and oppressive atmosphere

Bernarda orders her family to be in mourning for eight years after the death of her second husband. During that time her five daughters are not allowed to leave the house or be seen. This situation creates an increasingly oppressive atmosphere causing conflict between the authoritarian mother and her daughters. In addition, tension and enmity builds up between the sisters themselves after the wedding of the eldest, Angustias, to Pepe "El Romano" is arranged. Several of the daughters are in love with him and his visits to the house produce conflicts and situations which could dishonour the family. When Bernarda finds out that Pepe is also meeting the youngest sister, Adela, she tries to scare him away from the house by shooting in the air. The scene ends in tragedy when Adela commits suicide believing Pepe to be dead.

Bernarda:



- What two adjectives would you chose to describe her?
- Some vocabulary: *autoritaria, mandona, estricta, dura, clasista, orgullosa.*
- Bernarda is a woman with a controlling personality and she exerts authority over her daughters and servants in a tyrannical way. She never shows affection, not even towards her daughters. Her relationships with other characters range from fear to hate. Her values are guided by the family honour code (based on morality and economic wealth) and her main concern is to keep up appearances.

“BERNARDA.— (Golpeando con el bastón en el suelo.) ¡No os hagáis ilusiones de que vais a poder conmigo. ¡Hasta que salga de esta casa con los pies adelante mandaré en lo mío y en lo vuestro!” (Act 2)

“BERNARDA.— Una hija que desobedece deja de ser hija para convertirse en una enemiga.” (Act 3)

Bernarda's daughters:

■ **Angustias** (39 years old): she is the eldest daughter, fruit of Bernarda's first marriage. She is the richest sister because she inherited all of her father's money. Angustias knows that Pepe wants to marry her for her money, but she does not mind and looks forward to getting married even if he does not love her. She is obedient and has learnt Bernarda's values; the importance of money, for example, and that women should stick to their traditional role and be submissive to their husband.

■ **Magdalena** (30)

■ **Amelia** (27)

→ The play offers little information about these two characters. Both are submissive to their mother but they are also aware of the oppression of women. "AMELIA.— Nacer mujer es el mayor castigo.

MAGDALENA.— Y ni nuestros ojos siquiera nos pertenecen." (Act 2)

Bernarda's daughters

- **Martirio** (24): she is referred to as a “saco de veneno” (“sack of venom”) by the servants. Martirio is in love with Pepe too and she steals Angustias's photo of him. When she realises that Adela is meeting Pepe in secret, she tries to dissuade her from maintaining the relationship. Martirio is jealous of Angustias and even more so of Adela, she would also like to be in Adela's place (but wouldn't dare to do it).
- **Adela** (20): she is the only sister who still has hope for a different life. Adela is curious and cheerful and she challenges her mother and Poncia because of her love for Pepe. The secret relationship which she has with him is a dishonour for her family and herself (according to the social rules of the time), but is also a sign of bravery and self-assertion. She doesn't care about keeping up social appearances or moral rules because her desire for freedom and her feelings for Pepe are stronger than the fear of social repression. Adela's green dress is a symbol of rebelliousness, hope and life.

Bernarda's daughters

“LA PONCIA.— Las cosas se han puesto ya demasiado maduras. Adela está decidida a lo que sea, y las demás vigilan sin descanso.

CRIADA.— ¿Y Martirio también?

LA PONCIA.— Ésa es la peor. Es un pozo de veneno. Ve que el Romano no es para ella y hundiría el mundo si estuviera en su mano.

CRIADA.— ¡Es que son malas!

LA PONCIA.— Son mujeres sin hombre, nada más. En estas cuestiones se olvida hasta la sangre.”
(Act 3)

“ADELA.— (Rompiendo a llorar con ira) ¡No, no me acostumbraré! Yo no quiero estar encerrada. No quiero que se me pongan las carnes como a vosotras. ¡No quiero perder mi blancura en estas habitaciones! ¡Mañana me pondré mi vestido verde y me echaré a pasear por la calle! ¡Yo quiero salir!” (Act 1)

“ADELA.— (Haciéndole frente.) ¡Aquí se acabaron las voces de presidio! (Adela arrebatada un bastón a su madre y lo parte en dos.) Esto hago yo con la vara de la dominadora. No dé usted un paso más. ¡En mí no manda nadie más que Pepe!” (Act 3)

- **Pepe “El Romano”**: he never appears on stage but is always present. Pepe awakens the sexual desire of the sisters, which Bernarda tries to repress.
- **La Poncia**: she has an ambivalent relationship with Bernarda. She depends on her economically and she serves and advises her. But Poncia also hates Bernarda because she feels despised and abused by her. Poncia is the only character who sees the impending disaster in advance.
- **Bernarda’s mother**: María Josefa is mad and her delirium is related to the traditional roles of women: marriage and maternity. She has similar desires to her grand-daughters but this character works as a distorting mirror of those desires.

■ Deprivation of freedom:

- Their own house as a prison
- The use of space in the play
- Silence



■ Love / sexual desire

■ Personal relationships: envy, hate, fear...

■ Traditional customs: mourning, the oldest daughter getting married first, courtship, the bride's trousseau, the reapers' songs.

■ Mourning (8 years!): black clothes, the daughters not leaving the house or even leaning out of the window.

Oppression of women

- Social control over women:
 - Sexist education
 - Traditional sexual morality only affecting women and not men.
 - Some women are condemned in the play because they do not follow the traditional role.
 - Gossips are always present as a threat.

- A woman's life and a man's life are two different worlds and are separate. Marriage as the only dignified choice for women of the upper classes.

- Marriage as a business:
 - Angustias's fiancé wants to marry her for her money whilst she gets an eligible husband from the same social class.
 - Bernarda rejected other candidates who wanted to marry some of her daughters because their lower class (she calls them "gañanes" ("farmhands"))).

Oppression over women

“LA PONCIA.— De muy lejos. Vinieron de los montes. ¡Alegres! ¡Como árboles quemados! ¡Dando voces y arrojando piedras! Anoche llegó al pueblo una mujer vestida de lentejuelas y que bailaba con un acordeón, y quince de ellos la contrataron para llevársela al olivar. Yo los vi de lejos. El que la contrataba era un muchacho de ojos verdes, apretado como una gavilla de trigo.

AMELIA.— ¿Es eso cierto?

ADELA.— ¡Pero es posible!

LA PONCIA.— Hace años vino otra de éstas y yo misma di dinero a mi hijo mayor para que fuera. Los hombres necesitan estas cosas.

ADELA.— Se les perdona todo.

AMELIA.— Nacer mujer es el mayor castigo.

MAGDALENA.— Y ni nuestros ojos siquiera nos pertenecen.” (Act 2)

“BERNARDA.— No le debes preguntar. Y cuando te cases, menos. Habla si él habla y míralo cuando te mire. Así no tendrás disgustos.” (Act 3)

Social differences

- Representation of different social classes and how they see each other:
 - Landlords/landladies** (Bernarda's family: the only destiny for women is marriage),
 - servants** (the only earth which belongs to them is the earth where they will be buried),
 - beggars** (even servants look down on them).
- The poor are seen as people without feelings by some characters, and people from the upper classes value wealth and social rules over happiness.
- The need of showing off wealth:
 - La Poncia questions Bernarda's wealth saying that she is the richest person in the village but that she would be poor in comparison to people from other places, and that it is for that reason that she did not look elsewhere for husbands for her daughters.
 - Bernarda suggests that the neighbours who came to her husband's funeral were only interested in seeing whether her family had an expensive house.

Social differences

“MENDIGA.— Vengo por las sobras.

(Cesan las campanas)

CRIADA.— Por la puerta se va a la calle. Las sobras de hoy son para mí.

MENDIGA.— Mujer, tú tienes quien te gane. ¡Mi niña y yo estamos solas!

CRIADA.— También están solos los perros y viven.

MENDIGA.— Siempre me las dan.

CRIADA.— Fuera de aquí. ¿Quién os dijo que entrarais?” (Act 1)

“CRIADA.— ¡Ya quisiera tener yo lo que ellas!

LA PONCIA.— Nosotras tenemos nuestras manos y un hoyo en la tierra de la verdad.

CRIADA.— Ésa es la única tierra que nos dejan a las que no tenemos nada.” (Act 1)

“BERNARDA.— No hay en cien leguas a la redonda quien se pueda acercar a ellas. Los hombres de aquí no son de su clase. ¿Es que quieres que las entregue a cualquier gañán?

LA PONCIA.— Debías haberte ido a otro pueblo.

BERNARDA.— Eso, ¡a venderlas!

LA PONCIA.— No, Bernarda, a cambiar... ¡Claro que en otros sitios ellas resultan las pobres!

BERNARDA.— ¡Calla esa lengua atormentadora!” (Act 1)

References

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Gracias
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