

## THE STAFF PHILOSOPHER

Does *Blood Wedding* move you, and move you to think?

*“Great drama generally rolls in on an idea, that idea being the informing thought of a new movement in history, a new image of man. At such points in time, ideas don’t just happen to be selected by playwrights in search of interesting material: drama is a sort of river bed into which mighty ideas flow.”*

-Eric Bentley

Frederico Garcia Lorca and his famous friends—including Salvador Dali, Manuel de Falla, and Luis Buñuel—helped define many of the movements that washed over Spain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including *modernisme* in culture, surrealism in art, and republicanism in politics. Existentialism was one fount of their fundamental ideas. Ortega y Gasset, also in Garcia Lorca’s circle, was an early adopter whose existentialist philosophy foreshadowed the ideas of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus.

Garcia Lorca lays down *Blood Wedding* as a river bed into which existentialism flows. It is set in God-drenched rural Spain, and is riddled with regularly religious questions about justice, meaning, and fate. Yet God is nowhere to be found. No light shines from above to show the way. God is never blamed, begged, or bargained with. The buck stops where a murderer’s knife must finally stop, where the play itself finally stops, within (to literally translate the final words) “the dark root of a cry.” In a word, with existentialist *angst*.

And the philosophical currents of *Blood Wedding* still flow almost a century later.

There is *passion*, the boiling blood which moves most swiftly through the play’s veins. Of some twenty characters in *Blood Wedding*, only one is given a name. There is the Wife, the Mother, the Neighbor, the Bride—characters who are defined by their social role and who strive to carry out their defined function. And then there is Leonardo Felix, the Happy Lion, the named, real individual. He violates the social norms, rides his horse with abandon, absconds with the bride of another, and dies under the moon, his blood married in the ground with that of the avenging Bridegroom. “Better be dead with blood flowing, than live with it rotting within,” says the First Woodcutter.

And this brings us to ever-present *death*—a knife on the first page, a knife on the last page, and the specter of blood spilled past, present, and future haunting every page between. But what does death mean in Garcia Lorca—and, accordingly, what does life mean? Now there’s a novel philosophical question. Are the dead more fortunate than their murderers who live on peacefully in prison? Is death a fair price to pay for one night of pent-up amorous passion? Or for balancing the scales of honor with blood revenge? Or does the inevitability of death render such trade-offs, in the end, irrelevant? Existentialists like Ortega y Gasset have taught us to practice “being unto death,” living with an acute and constant awareness of life’s fragility. But does that lead us to live

more freely and intensely, or just more morbidly? Leonardo had his answer and died (we surmise) with no regrets.

And, finally, there is the current of *honor*. Extreme insults to honor, according to tribal codes, call for blood revenge. Such payback plays well in the Old Testament, on Mount Olympus, and in the fraternity house. It compels the Bridegroom to pursue Leonardo to their mutually assured doom. And, says the Mother at the play's end, it is for her son's honor that she would sink her teeth into the throat of the unrepentant Bride. And so she knocks the Bride down, but then hesitates. She has a choice. How much should she honor honor? The traitorous Bride is now also her daughter-in-law. Her choice is not for or against passion—forgiveness can be as passionate as payback. Her choice is for or against compassion. She too can violate a social norm, this code of honor. She too can merit a name. How will the Mother decide? Within the dark root of a cry.

*David Carl Wilson* is a local philosopher based at Webster University.  
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