

## ABSTRACT

A Real Woman:  
A Director's Approach to Federico Gracia Lorca's *Yerma*

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Federico García Lorca's play *Yerma* tells the story of a young woman in a rural Spanish town, who has been married for over two years and has not become pregnant. Her husband, Juan, says he does not want children but Yerma searches for a solution to their infertility. In the end, Yerma realizes she will never have children with Juan, she decides to kill him and the possibility of ever having children. This thesis documents the analytical, design, and rehearsal processes as well as the overall directorial approach to *Yerma* as performed at Baylor University in the spring of 2020.

A Real Woman:  
A Director's Approach to Federico García Lorca's *Yerma*

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Theatre Arts

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Fine Arts

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to all the faculty, staff, and students of the Baylor University Theatre who have supported me throughout my time in graduate school. The welcoming community helped this Northerner create a life while away from home. I would like to thank the amazing *Yerma* design team of mentors, faculty, staff and students who waded through the waters completely immersed with me throughout the production process. To the student leaders and cast members who made my thesis project fun, challenging, and breathtaking, thank you for sharing your talents. A special thanks to my partner in sass, Guilherme Almeida, for speaking my language, encouraging boldness, and making me laugh.

My three years at Baylor has been fruitful thanks to the delightful graduate program faculty who helped me to clarify my voice as a director. I am eternally grateful to Dr. Toten Beard for sharing your grace and patience, enthusiastic instruction style, and directorial insight. Dr. Jortner drove me here day one and never stopped pushing me to challenge myself as a director and scholar. Dr. Castleberry provided encouragement and the opportunity to fully explore my director's voice. Dr. Denman created moments and lesson I will take with me long into the future.

I would not be here without my grad school family. Thank you to Aaron Brown and Josh Horowitz for modeling how to succeed as a graduate student and a director. Cooper Sivara for being a singular leader with humor and compassion who helped me when I needed it most. To Jessica Holt and Kahre Hiles for growing the female numbers

in the program, for your blazing humor and friendship, and for modeling how to give and receive help. Saving the best for last, Chad Kennedy, you will never know how much it has meant to have you on this journey especially when I was difficult or over the top. Your music, smile, and grace have been a tonic for what ails me.

Thank you to my Minnesota family who believed in me and supported the crazy idea of going back to school, especially Michael and Angela. Finally, words cannot express how much the love of my husband, Dave Williams, has meant to me. Thank you for never saying no, persevering through struggles when I was not nearby, and for caring for our furry roommates.

## DEDICATION

To Dave Williams

And those friends who believed in me when I did not.

## PREFACE

In preparation for directing *Yerma*, I conducted extensive research to better understand the play and Federico García Lorca. In summer 2019, I visited Spain thanks to support from Baylor's Graduate School and the Department of Theatre Arts. Everyone I met there—from the customs officers to taxi drivers to museum guides—was excited to hear I had come from the U.S. to research “their” poet, Federico García Lorca. Southern Spain is proud of Lorca and his presence is felt around every corner in Andalucía.

I started my visit in Fuente Vaqueros, Lorca's birthplace. I was fortunate to stay with a native Spanish woman, Mar, who invited me to dinner. As I enjoyed her Spanish omelet, Mar told me about her life. Our three-hour conversation provided an insider's view of the village and Spanish culture. Mar is not a typical Spanish woman as I will discuss. The fact that she shared her home, food, and opinions with this outsider, made her very unusual. Mar was born in the Basque area of northern Spain; she had only been in the south for eighteen years. She was raised in a matriarchal tradition that considered the mother's family line more important than the father's lineage. Women were taught and expected to be strong and independent. She said this went back to the Celts and Druids who conquered northern Spain for a number of years. Historically, the women practiced medicine. They were healers and gardeners who grew herbs for medicinal purposes. Women were the leaders of religious ceremonies. When the Catholics conquered Spain, the healers were called witches. The women were condemned as were their ceremonies of a religious nature.

Fuente Vaqueros is located at other end of the country and the cultural spectrum from where Mar was raised. Southern Spain is known as the beginning of Africa because of its Moorish ancestry. The south has traditionally had a male-dominated society. Mar said machismo is very much alive even now in Andalucía. When she first arrived in Fuente Vaqueros, it was unheard of for a woman to be alone. She was a single mother of three middle-school aged children. She would read to them from Chekhov, the Greeks, Dostoyevsky, plays, and poetry. Her children's teacher told her not to read those things to them; those were for university, not children their age.

Ignoring the societal norms of the south, Mar went places by herself both in Fuente Vaqueros and throughout Europe. She gained a reputation because of this. The locals call her "Hippie," the "Blonde Communist," and "Witch." Still her neighbors came to her when they have important papers arrive so that she can read and write for them.

She was a nurse for 40 years. For a population of 4,400, Fuente Vaqueros only has one doctor and two nurses. Mar cared for many victims of domestic violence throughout her years of service. She taught a course a few years ago about nursing geriatrics. She had women in their 30s who could barely read or write because no one expected them to, and they did not see the need. She introduced a reading from Edgar Allen Poe and met resistance from the class because he was an alcoholic. They would not read Truman Capote because he was gay. The class wanted to skip Arthur Miller because he wrote *The Crucible*, which was "about witches." She told them it was not, and they finally agreed to read Miller because of his relationship with Marilyn Monroe. They had no interest in reading anyone but Federico García Lorca. They did not need to know the work of authors from other countries.

I also observed how the separate social spheres of men and women can still be traced in Spanish village life even today. This is a topic Lorca explores in his rural trilogy of Spanish plays: *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*), *Yerma*, and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (*The House of Bernarda Alba*). Lorca's tragedies reveal the immense weight of preserving honor in a closed society and the pain of failing to live up to the community's expectations. As an old Spanish proverb states, "*Tu honra en ti no está, sino en los demas*," which means, "Your reputation is not up to you, but to others."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 37.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Theory and Criticism

#### *Introduction*

Understanding the location and culture of the play's setting was crucial for preparing to direct Baylor University's production of *Yerma*. Discovering how to stage this play with the design team and undergraduate actors was the work of this thesis, and the production had to be grounded in critical literature, Lorca's other writings and events that shaped his life.

*Yerma*, first produced in 1934, tells the story of a young woman in a rural Spanish town, who has been married for over two years and has not become pregnant. Her husband, Juan, says he does not want children, but Yerma searches for a solution to their infertility. In the end, Yerma realizes she will never have children with Juan; she decides to kill him and the possibility of ever having children.

Lorca explores a number of themes in the play which are very specific to the time and place in which he lived, but he asks questions that we still consider today. The culture in Spain is highly binary; men have their place and women have theirs. Each sex has their duty and purpose. A woman's is related to home and family. The play asks, what is the place of a childless woman? The play also explores reputation and honor, asking, if we are honorable, should we worry about a neighbor's opinion.

*Yerma* asks us to consider how we define womanhood; are you a woman only if you have children, or is caring for a home and husband enough to be considered a real

woman? In a moment of anger Yerma says, “How I wish I were a woman!” meaning that because she has not had a child, she is not a woman.<sup>1</sup> She says she will settle down if chairs get broken and sheets get used; without children, the house remains pristine leaving her with little to do. Yerma cautions Maria that, “a country girl who doesn’t bear children is as useless as a handful of thorns.”<sup>2</sup> In her view being a woman is defined as bearing children; she was not given a man’s body; she has breasts and a womb to conceive and give life to children. The longer she goes on without having children, the more masculine she feels.

Juan contends that taking care of a husband and a home is enough to make her a woman. He offers Yerma anything she wants to purchase, thinking that this will make up for not having a child. Having Yerma as a wife is enough to make Juan happy, and he expects her to feel the same way about him. Other women also question Yerma’s obsession with having a child. The Fifth Washerwoman suggests that planting seeds, sewing, and putting up preserves should be enough to keep a woman busy and happy. Lorca creates a complex feminist paradox with the views offered by the women in contrast to Juan. The majority of the women in the play associate motherhood with

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations going forward are from the same edition of *Yerma*. Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata, *Federico Garcia Lorca: Three Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993), 137.

The first step in work on this production was to consider translations. The Dewell and Zapata version was chosen for its commitment to the intent of the original Spanish. While maintaining the poetic nature, the English prose fit the word choices Lorca made when writing his script. The translators worked with the Lorca estate to produce this work originally in 1987 and it has been a favored text of Lorquians for production. Additionally, though the prose is more literal, the lyrics were translated to maintain a rhythm and poetic nature that maintains the nature of the musicality over literal translation. Other translations reviewed include Ian McPherson and Jacqueline Minett’s, W.S. Morton, and Gwynne Edwards’ excellent text. I reviewed the adaptation/translation by Melinda Lopez which premiered at Huntington Theatre in 2019 and was written “to relate to a U.S. audience.” In the end, the Dewell and Zapata translation maintained the spirit of the playwright and honored his artistry.

<sup>2</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 155.

womanhood, criticizing barren women for their lack of children. The Fourth Washerwoman states that women do not get pregnant if they are spoiled, weak, and lazy. Juan, as the primary representation of the patriarchy, accepts his wife without having children. This is a reversal from most men of the society who are concerned with having a son to carry on the family name and honor. The women who should be compassionate to their “sister” are the ones who tear down her reputation, while the man urges her to find joy in what she has and accept their life together.

The ideas of reputation and honor prominent in Spanish culture are of great importance to the lives of the play’s characters. Lorca prompts us to ask, what is the significance of public opinion in our lives? Is it enough that we as individuals know we are acting honorably, or should we be concerned with what people think about us? While Juan is not concerned with the gossip about his barren wife, he often refers to his honor and reputation. Juan orders Yerma to stay home and act normally because people will think she has nothing to do, which is shameful. Initially the accusations are subtle, but he later states it more directly. He often mentions that he has heard the gossip about Yerma, and that people stop talking when he enters a room, thereby insinuating that they were talking about him and/or Yerma. Juan goes as far as to accuse Yerma of having an affair.

As she grows bolder throughout the play, Yerma challenges Juan, accusing him of believing that only his family is concerned with honor. She tells him that her family is equally as honorable and has never had anything to hide. When Juan brings his Sisters to watch Yerma, she tells Maria that they are against her, saying, “They imagine things. Like people with a guilty conscience.”<sup>3</sup> Yerma counters that their suspicions about her

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<sup>3</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 157.

misbehavior are projections of their own guilt for not acting honorably themselves. The Fifth Washerwoman, perhaps to justify gossiping, states, “A woman who wants a good reputation has to earn it.”<sup>4</sup> In her mind, Yerma has earned a good reputation because she knows she has respected her husband and family. However, the women have a different view, she has to earn a good reputation from them as representatives of the community. Their suspicions and rushes to judgement are enough to give her a bad name.

What follows in Chapter one is a consideration of the many factors that shaped the text of *Yerma*. To begin, I will describe key moments in Lorca’s life; then, explore key Spanish cultural and sociological traditions, and finish with artistic influences.

### *Lorca’s Biography*

Federico García Lorca was born June 5, 1898, to a teacher, Vicenta Lorca Romero, and a landowner who grew beetroot and tobacco, Federico García Rodríguez.<sup>5</sup> The couple had two more children, Francisco, who was born in 1902, and Isabel, born in 1909. The family resided in the village of Fuente Vaqueros in southern Spain, a short distance from Granada, for the first nine years of Lorca’s life. The characters and events he created in his rural trilogy of plays resemble the people surrounding him as a child. Lorca learned his use of imagery from the villagers whose connection to the land and nature inspired poetry in their language.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 138.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 23.

Lorca drew from his early childhood memories and family history in Fuente Vaqueros as he wrote *Yerma*. In interviews, Lorca frequently commented on his love for the people of his childhood villages. Ian Gibson, a prominent Lorquian, theorized that the character of Yerma may have been based on the first wife of Lorca's father, Matilde. She was not able to have children and died in 1894. Gibson notes that this woman was a particular obsession in the poet's childhood.<sup>7</sup> Lorca imagined Yerma's family to be equally as fertile as his own – he had 40 cousins who all lived in Fuente Vaqueros – in the script, her family is described as having relatives for hundreds of miles.<sup>8</sup> Lorca also gave Yerma's father his own grandfather's name, Enrique.<sup>9</sup> Lorca described his brother's wet nurse as, "illiterate, earthy, good-natured, and an inexhaustible fund of country lore...exuberant personality and peasant speech." Though her name was assigned to the conjurer, her personality is reflected in the character of the Pagan Old Woman.<sup>10</sup> Lorca wrote many of the traits of his father's advisor, Salvador Cobos Rueda, into the character of Dolores the Conjurer. From Cobos, Lorca learned folk stories, natural remedies, the properties of plants, and other folk wisdom. As an adult, Lorca wrote about Cobos: "It was you who made me love nature." Lorca wrote an in-depth description of Cobos's funeral which he attended at the age of eight. Despite the years that had passed, Lorca

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 183.

<sup>9</sup> Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

recounted the laying out of the corpse, the ceremony, and the emotions he felt about the loss of his friend.<sup>11</sup>

When the family moved in 1907, Lorca disliked leaving the richness of the people and the environment in Fuente Vaqueros. His father moved them closer to his large sugar beet fields in the city of Asquerosa, now Valderrubio. Lorca continued to find inspiration in this new village, where he observed Frasquita Alba Sierra on whom he based the titular character in his third play of the rural trilogy, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*.<sup>12</sup>

Lorca embraced and professed the same liberal and progressive ideals of his parents. At the age of ten, they enrolled him in a local state college of secondary education, the College of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Almería. Despite its conservative Catholic name, the school “was considered by the local bourgeoisie to be a dangerous hotbed of liberalism and ‘progressive ideas’.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, his ideals would lead to his early death in 1936 at the hands of local nationalists who had rebelled against the legitimately elected Republican government.

In 1909, the family purchased a home in Granada, leaving behind the countryside that Lorca loved.<sup>14</sup> At the time of the move, Lorca continued his studies at the College in Almería, but he struggled academically. Lorca failed his first exams but eventually graduated from secondary education in 1915. He wanted to pursue an education in music, but his parents insisted he attend the University of Granada to acquire degrees in

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

Philosophy and Letters and the Law.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Lorca spent his time with artists and intellectuals he met at the university who became known as *El Rinconcillo*. The members of the group would have a strong influence as Lorca developed his artistic style and, later in life, challenged the politics of national and local officials.

While earning his law degree, Lorca continued studying music, but his artistic focus changed in 1916. After Lorca's valued friend, music teacher, and ally, Antonio Segura Mesa, died he turned away from music to focus on writing. If Segura had lived, Lorca who was a talented musician and composer, may never have turned to writing.<sup>16</sup> In May and October, Lorca joined other artists in a series of study tours throughout Spain, which resulted in his first publication. He wrote his observations of Spanish towns and cities in *Impresiones y Paisajes (Impressions and Landscapes)* which was financed by his father and released in 1918.<sup>17</sup>

In 1919, Lorca moved to Madrid and became a student at the educational institution, Residencia de Estudiantes. Lorca befriended many artists and intellectuals who became life-long friends and sometime rivals, including Luis Buñuel, Rafael Alberti, and Salvador Dalí. Madrid introduced Lorca to many avant-garde theatre directors of the ultraísta and creationist movements.<sup>18</sup> He met theatre producer, Gregorio Martínez Sierra,

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<sup>15</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), v.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 47.

<sup>17</sup> Edwards, *Yerma*, vi.; Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>18</sup> The Ultraístas were a group of avant-garde Spanish poets in the early 1920s, led by Guillermo de Torre, who desired a poetry free from formal, logical, or narrative structures. They also wished for poetry cleansed of human emotions. The Creationist movement was led by Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro who proposed that a poem was as real as a plant, a star, with its own reason for existing. For more, see "Ultraísmo," *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford University Press, 2015), [https://www-oxfordreferencecom.ezproxy.baylor.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1181?rskey=JzmmqN&result=1](https://www-oxfordreferencecom.ezproxy.baylor.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1181?rskey=JzmmqN&result=1;); and

who discovered Lorca's concept for a play about butterflies, cockroaches, and a scorpion. *El Maleficio de la Mariposa* (*The Butterfly's Evil Spell*) opened in 1920, but the story did not appeal to the audience, and the play closed after four performances.<sup>19</sup> However, Lorca did find success in 1921 when he published his first book of poetry, *Libro de Poemas*, which he dedicated to his father who again financed the printing.<sup>20</sup>

With the encouragement of friend and popular Spanish composer, Manuel de Falla, Lorca turned his thoughts back to the people of Granada. He began developing a lecture on the *cante jondo* (deep song or flamenco song) of the Gitano people to be presented at an event they were planning. Returning to Granada, Lorca and Falla presented the first Cante Jondo Festival, which took place in June 1922. Lorca hoped to publish a book of *Poema del Cante Jondo* at the time of the Festival, but the poems that communicated the "primitive sources from which wells up the anguish of *cante jondo*" would not be released until 1931.<sup>21</sup> After the successful festival, Lorca returned to his plans to revive traditional puppet plays, which had fascinated him as child. He wrote his first play in this genre, *La tragicomedia de Don Cristóbal y Señorita Rosita*.<sup>22</sup> Lorca asked Falla to write music for the play, and together they planned to premiere it in the

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"Creationism," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Green, Stephen Cushman, and Clare Cavanagh (Princeton University Press, 2012), <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/prpoetry/creationism/0?institutionId=720>. Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>

<sup>19</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), vi.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 88, 96-97.

<sup>20</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma*, 101.; Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., vi.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 109-110.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., vi.; Ibid., 117-119.



fall. However, their plans were put on hold and the play was not produced until 1924 in Buenos Aires.

Encouraged by his older brother and hoping to gain favor with his father, Lorca returned to Residencia in September to complete his Law degree. In January 1923, he graduated and never thought about studying law again. Shortly after that, Lorca began a relationship with Salvador Dalí. At first the men shared a strong friendship, and eventually they became romantically involved.<sup>23</sup>

In 1924 and 1925, Lorca wrote vociferously and delivered lectures, but he made no progress in the staging of his plays. He crafted his second full-length play, *Mariana Pineda*, and another puppet play, *La zapatera prodigiosa* (*La zapatera prodigiosa*). He finished several short plays of which only two survive, *El paseo de Buster Keaton* (*Buster Keaton's Stroll*), and *La doncella, el marinero, and el estudiante* (*The Maiden, the Sailor, and the Student*). Lorca was not successful in finding a producer to put his dramas onstage.<sup>24</sup> Undaunted, he continued to write completing *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* (*The Love of Don Perlimplín for Belisa in Their Garden*) in 1926. He also delivered his first popular lecture on the seventeenth-century Spanish poet, Don Luis de Góngora, and he published his *Oda a Salvador Dalí*.<sup>25</sup>

In 1927, Lorca finally achieved the success he had worked towards his whole life. *Mariana Pineda* was performed in Barcelona at the Teatro Goya, then in Madrid at the

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<sup>23</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), vii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 120-122.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vii.

Teatro Fontalba. Lorca's work excited audiences in both cities.<sup>26</sup> When *Mariana Pineda* played in Barcelona, Lorca also exhibited his art for the first time; 24 drawings were shown at Galerías Dalmau. Lorca also published his second volume of poetry, *Canciones* (*Songs*). Esteban Salazar Chapela, a Spanish literary critic, praised Lorca's poems and his, "ability to be fully alive in the modern world and alert to contemporary trends, while at the same time, working within the tradition of 'popular poetry' – the folksong of the Spanish countryside."<sup>27</sup>

Despite many successes the following year, Lorca described 1928 as a "horrible summer of feelings," likely due to the end of his relationship with Dalí.<sup>28</sup> The year started with the publication of *gallo* (*Cockerel*), a Granadino literary magazine edited by Lorca and his friends declaring the end of romanticism and a move to more avant-garde literature.<sup>29</sup> Lorca published, *Romancero Gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*), a book of poems about Andalucía.<sup>30</sup> Part of Lorca's "horrible summer" was due to criticism of *Romancero Gitano* from Dalí and Buñuel who called it, "too traditional and not sufficiently avant-

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<sup>26</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), vii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 175.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., vii.; Ibid., 188.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *Yerma*, vii.; Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 205. Originally called *El gallo del Defensor* (*The Cockerel of the Defensor*), Lorca changed the name to *gallo* purposefully without a capital letter.

<sup>30</sup> Lorca commented, "The book as a whole is the poem of Andalucía, I call it Gypsy because the Gypsy is the most distinguished, profound, and aristocratic element of my country,...A book in which the visible Andalucía is hardly mentioned but in which palpitates the invisible one." Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 206.

garde.” The summer improved when Lorca began a passionate, new relationship with sculptor, Emilio Aladrén Perojo, which would prove to be short lived.<sup>31</sup>

Lorca came to the attention of the government, perhaps for the first time, in 1929, due to two different plays. His play *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* was to premiere in Madrid in February, but it never opened. Due to the death of King Alfonso XIII’s mother, María Cristina, theatres were closed and all rehearsals cancelled. The police shuttered the whole production of Lorca’s play after they discovered the cast had continued rehearsal despite the prohibition. The real reason for the closure was likely the storyline which officials believed mocked the military; the actor playing Perlimplín was ex-military and in one scene appeared in cuckold horns.<sup>32</sup> In April, Lorca received much recognition and praise after *Mariana Pineda* finally premiered in Granada at Teatro Cervantes.<sup>33</sup> The play is based on a true heroine of Granada, Mariana Pineda, who revolted against the regime of Ferdinand VII. Pineda was executed for her actions against the King.<sup>34</sup> By honoring a woman who some would say was a traitor, Lorca may have drawn attention that would prove dangerous later in his life.

Despite the success of *Mariana Pineda*, Lorca was in a depression after the failures of many plays and relationships. In an effort to improve his mood, his family financed a trip to New York with his Residencia de Estudiantes mentor, Fernando de los

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<sup>31</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), vii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 209.; Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., viii.; Ibid., 230.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., viii.; Ibid., 235.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 130, 235.

Ríos. During his visit, Lorca studied English at Columbia University and traveled to Vermont. While he was in the United States, the 1929 Wall Street crash occurred. He wrote a volume of poetry, *Poeta en Nueva York* and *Viaje a la Luna (Trip to the Moon)*, a silent cinema piece, based on his travels.<sup>35</sup> Probably the most important discovery from the trip was his trip to Harlem. Lorca wrote home comparing the spirit and “moving melancholy of the Blacks” to the Andalusian *cante jondo*. He condemned the treatment of the “American Blacks” as he did Gypsies of Andalusia.<sup>36</sup>

In March of 1930, Lorca and de Rios traveled to Havana, Cuba. While there, he held readings of the new plays he was developing including *El público* and *Yerma*. Lorca described his trip as, ““one of the most useful experiences of my life.”” The time he spent in the U.S. and Cuba changed his view of himself and his art.”<sup>37</sup>

In July, he returned to Spain, spending December in Madrid for Teatro Español’s premiere of *La zapatera prodigiosa*.<sup>38</sup> The play is Lorca’s first exploration into the use of a chorus who comment on the action, a device which he develops further in both *Bodas de sangre* and *Yerma*. While *La zapatera prodigiosa* was a success, Lorca commented in the press that the play, “did not represent his current theatrical practice.” *El público* ,

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<sup>35</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), viii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 276.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *Yerma*, viii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 303, 305.

Lorca said, was his “real work” however he struggled to find a producer. *El público* is a six act play which includes an assassination and whose main characters are horses.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, Spanish politics were in upheaval. The month of December 1930 marked the beginning of rebellion against the monarchy in Spain. A Republican party insurrection failed in Madrid likely due to a group of rebels in Jaca who had acted a day early; the authorities were on alert and easily squashed the uprising. Some of the rebels were assassinated, most were merely arrested including Fernando de los Ríos who had returned to Spain with Lorca. The authorities announced a general election would take place soon, however those same government leaders resigned six days later. Three months after that a municipal election was held rather than a general vote by the citizens.<sup>40</sup> Almost all of the provinces voted Republican, leading King Alfonso to flee the country.<sup>41</sup> The Republican leadership introduced many reforms which the party felt would bring Spain into the modern era. Rather than bringing the country together, the move to a Republic increased discord and division among the people.<sup>42</sup>

With Spain’s Second Republic established the Provisional Government chose Lorca as the artistic director of the Teatro Universitario, and its group known as La Barraca which took Golden Age Spanish plays to rural villages and towns as a part of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 305-307.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 306-308.

<sup>41</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 23.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 24. At the same time, Lorca published works he had written in the early 1920s, *Poem of Cante Jondo*. Lorca also completed *Así que pasen cinco años* (*When Five Years Pass*) which he described as, “a mystery play with the characteristics of this genre, a mystery play about time, written in prose and verse.”

government's education program.<sup>43</sup> During the years with La Barraca, Lorca views on theatre were enriched. As a director, Lorca came to understand drama from a new perspective. He was also exposed to audiences who knew nothing of the "frivolous and materialized bourgeoisie" of Madrid.<sup>44</sup> Lorca spent most of 1931 and the beginning of 1932 planning and preparing the students of La Barraca to tour the countryside. With a truck for transportation, he loaded minimal props and coveralls for costumes to begin touring in July of 1932.<sup>45</sup>

In 1933, Lorca's old and new works continued to play for responsive audiences in Spain and Argentina. *Bodas de Sangre* at Teatro Beatriz is Lorca's first box office success, while *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* finally opened at Teatro Español.<sup>46</sup> With the promise of a following in South America, Lorca traveled to Argentina to give lectures and attend productions of *Bodas de sangre* and *La zapatera prodigiosa* in Buenos Aires.<sup>47</sup> One of those lectures was Lorca's first delivery of *The Play and Theory of Duende* in which he explains the aesthetics of *duende*. In the lecture Lorca notes, "In all other countries, death is the end. When it arrives, the curtains are pulled shut. But not in Spain [...] In Spain a dead man is more alive as a dead man than

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<sup>43</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), viii.; Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 320-321.; Christopher Maurer, *Una Vida en Breve*, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.Garcíalorca.org/Federico/Biografia.aspx?Sel=Introducci%C3%B3n>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *Yerma*, viii.; Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 330.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., viii.; Ibid., 349.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., viii-ix.; Ibid., 357-358.

anywhere else in the world: his profile cuts like the edge of a barber's razor”<sup>48</sup> The concept of *duende* is seen throughout Lorca's work and especially in the rural trilogy.

*Bodas de Sangre* is the first play in the rural series that would come to be seen as Lorca's signature dramas. Here he investigates love “that could or should have been, but that is thwarted.”<sup>49</sup> While Lorca uses influences of ancient Greek theatre, his characters reflect the true Andalusian culture and flavor of life in the country that is connected to the soil and seasons. Lorca explained, “I'm more interested in the people who inhabit the landscape than in the landscape itself” which is exemplified in his rural trilogy. Both in *Bodas* and in *Yerma*, Lorca explores “a worse loneliness than that of an unhappy marriage in a situation allowing of no escape, no second chance” a theme which he further develops in *Yerma*.<sup>50</sup>

In 1934, Lorca's *Mariana Pineda* was performed again in both Buenos Aires and Spain. *Mariana Pineda* was not well received in Argentina perhaps because the Argentinians did not have historical connection. In December, *Yerma* premiered at the Teatro Español in Madrid to both critical and audience acclaim.<sup>51</sup> His success continued in 1935 with two plays playing in Madrid. *Yerma* opened in Barcelona, followed by a run of *Bodas de sangre*, and the premiere of *Doña Rosita la Soltera*.

While Lorca found much acclaim in 1936, the politics of Spain were more troubled as the Popular Front won the General Election. During this year Lorca published

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<sup>48</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 20.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 340-341.

<sup>51</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), ix.

two books of poetry, continued to develop three new plays, rehearsed *Así que pasen cinco años*, and he shared the completed *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* with friends. As Lorca's socialist sympathies became more evident, he began to feel unsafe in Madrid and returned to Granada. In July, shortly after Franco began overtaking the Madrid government, the Granadian military seized power. Despite Lorca's efforts to evade capture, he was detained in Granada. The following morning Francoists imprisoned him in a building outside of the village Viznar. Within two days, he was assassinated with two other men in an olive grove outside of Alfacar.<sup>52</sup>

### *Spanish Culture and Sociology*

It is easy to understand why Lorca loved the majesty of Granada: the workmanship of the plaster in the Alhambra, the inlaid wood boxes, and the delicacy of handmade guitars. The Romans and the Arabs had harnessed the natural beauty of the place and used it to provide for the population as did the Roma. All people embraced the environment and adapted to it, rather than changing the environment for the ease of people. Granada is surrounded with the simple pleasures of the Vega, the low plains areas between the hills, which allows for growing plants and animals. But perhaps Lorca's love for the diverse cultures, history and romanticism also was a source of deep sadness because of the traditional machismo culture that pervaded. He surrounded himself with intellectuals and artists which put him at odds with agrarian culture.

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<sup>52</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), ix-x.



## *Sex Roles in Spain*

In 1975, Stanley Brandes moved to a small rural town in southern Spain to study sex roles; based on his descriptions, not much had changed since Lorca wrote *Yerma*.<sup>53</sup> The home was still the woman's place and men only stay to eat and sleep. Otherwise men should be working or socializing with other men. Bars were the space of men, and women might come to the door to deliver a message but otherwise they were not allowed inside. Men were allowed to share their most intimate feelings with other men but must keep these expressions private from any women. Similarly, women were expected to share their most intimate feelings with female friends only.

Brandes learned to navigate the rules of relations between the sexes in the small rural town. Men and unrelated women were not allowed to spend long periods of time in conversation even in public. To do so privately would surely indicate an affair was taking place. For example, Brandes made the mistake of having occasional, but regular, public talks with a female vendor in the market. Her husband became so jealous he told his wife he wanted to kill Brandes. Another time the wife of a very close friend of Brandes' was

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<sup>53</sup> Francisco Franco lead the government of Spain from 1937 to 1975. Under his authoritarian rule, the country stagnated economically and culturally. The lack of stability in politics led to lower wages causing skilled workers to migrate out of the country. Droughts caused rampant famine in the 1940s, coincided with World War II. Franco issued trade restrictions that removed Spain from participation in the international markets. Rural citizens left the poverty of the countryside seeking a better life in urban areas unsuccessfully. The government increased repression and censorships of its citizens. In the 1950s, inflation and a growing deficit led to strikes and student unrest. The Catholic Church subsidized the government in exchange for instituting more conservative public policy. The economy began improving for the middle class in the 1960s, but not for the workers. Sociological study under the authoritarian government was unfathomable. As the country began building a democracy, little had changed from when Franco took power. For these reasons, the following sociological studies were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. The researchers found the people and traditions had changed very little compared to the 1930s. "Franco's Spain, 1939-75," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Francos-Spain-1939-75>.

In the introduction to his study, Brandes states that his family "found (them)selves in the midst of one of the poorest, least literate, and most socially conservative parts of Iberia." Stanley Brandes, "Sex Roles and Anthropological Research in Rural Andalusia," *Women's Studies*, Vol 13 1987, 357-372.

asking relatives for a ride to a nearby town. The visit became much less urgent when Brandes offered to drive the woman. In private the next evening the couple explained that they trusted Brandes, but if he and the friend's wife were observed together in a car alone it would compromise both of their reputations.

### *Gossip*

In his 1978 study of social purpose in rural Spain, David Gilmore defines eleven types of gossip. Gilmore spent time in a rural southern Spanish town he calls Fuenmayor. There he found three contexts where gossip is common: 1) the street or block, usually women gossiping over the fence with the neighbors in their immediate vicinity; 2) the neighborhood, a sector of the city that has a group identity where both men and women are found exchanging information; and 3) the town, people of different sectors gossiping about people from other sectors usually at the central marketplace and on work gangs. Gossiping is as common as saying hello. "Idle chat" is not exclusively about the living, in rural Spain inanimate objects and the dead may be the object of stories often embellished to demonstrate one person's knowledge or to condemn another person.

Most of the gossip in *Yerma* is expressed by the small group of Washerwomen and from the Old Pagan Woman; men are not excluded from gossip entirely, but the play does not depict the type of male-only spaces where such conversation would be most expected. One term Gilmore uses to categorize gossip is *criticar* or "to pass negative judgement."<sup>54</sup> While there are many moments of *criticar*, the Fifth Washerwoman's description and judgement of Yerma's strange behavior is most clear. "She spent the

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<sup>54</sup> David Gilmore, "Varieties of Gossip in a Spanish Rural Community," *Ethnology*, Vol 17, No 1, (January 1978), 94-95.

night before last sitting on the doorstep, in spite of the cold!... It's hard for her to stay in the house."<sup>55</sup> As mentioned by Brandes, traditional rural Spanish culture frowns upon women being outdoors by themselves. It is especially unnatural that Yerma is outside in the cold. The Washerwoman takes delight in sharing this piece of gossip.

Another form of gossip identified by Gilmore, *chismorear*, means to share a non-malevolent piece of gossip among a small group.<sup>56</sup> For example, the Fourth Washerwoman reports, "We do know her husband has brought his two sisters to live with them... They used to have jobs keeping an eye on the church. Now they'll be keeping an eye on their sister-in-law!" The Washerwoman is excited to have information but provides no judgement until she adds, "I wouldn't be able to live with them"<sup>57</sup> Another form of gossip involving small groups is *paliquear*, which is similar to *chismorear*, but this type includes information of a sexual nature.<sup>58</sup> An example from the script begins with the First Washerwoman asking if any of the woman have witnessed Yerma in the presence of other men. The other women respond:

Fourth Washerwoman: We haven't but other people have!

First Washerwoman: Always other people!

Fifth Washerwoman: They say it happened on two occasions.

Second Washerwoman: And what were they doing?

Fourth Washerwoman: Talking.

First Washerwoman: Talking is not a sin

Fourth Washerwoman: There's something in the world called a "look"... A woman doesn't look at roses the same way she looks at a man's thighs. She "looks" at him!

First Washerwoman: But at who?

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<sup>55</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 139-140.

<sup>56</sup> David Gilmore, "Varieties of Gossip in a Spanish Rural Community," *Ethnology*, Vol 17, No 1, (January 1978), 96.

<sup>57</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Gilmore, "Varieties of Gossip in a Spanish Rural Community," 96.

Fourth Washerwoman: At someone, do you hear? *You* find out. Or do I have to say it louder?<sup>59</sup>

The Fifth and Fourth Washerwomen both enjoy sharing *paliquear* and then withholding the final bit of information to exert power over the First and Second Washerwomen.

The final form exemplified in *Yerma, murmurer*, is a collective type of gossip when the facts of a scandal are already known to most people. The goal of sharing this gossip is to express “moral indignation” not to spread new information. An example is the Pagan Old Woman’s line to Yerma in act three, scene two. With full awareness that Juan is nearby and may overhear, she states:

Something that cannot be kept quiet anymore. Something they are shouting from the rooftops! It’s your husband’s fault! ... Neither his father nor his grandfather nor his great-grandfather behaved like a breed of real men. Heaven and earth had to come together for them to have a son! They’re put together with spit!<sup>60</sup>

The Pagan Old Woman decides finally to repeat to Yerma what all the neighbors have been saying for years: that Juan is infertile like the rest of his family and is not man enough to impregnate Yerma.

### *Artistic Influences*

Lorca’s time at the Residencia de Estudiantes altered his life in many ways. The artists with whom he became friends would influence his art, his career, and his love life. I will now focus on two of the artists who had perhaps the greatest impact: Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. While their personal relationships to Lorca were very different, Buñuel and Dalí followed similar paths in artistic circles.

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<sup>59</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 140-141.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 183.

Born in 1900, Luis Buñuel, arrived at Residencia de Estudiantes in 1917 having just finished secondary school. Buñuel was born in Calanda, Spain, and made his way to Madrid to earn a degree. After being cut off financially by his parents, Buñuel searched for employment. After many failed attempts at jobs, he joined a film crew and found his passion.<sup>61</sup> Buñuel would go on to become one of Spain's most famous surrealist filmmakers. Commentary on his work suggests he is "preoccupied with themes of gratuitous cruelty, eroticism, and religious mania."<sup>62</sup>

Salvador Dalí was born in 1904, in Figueras, Spain. He joined the Residencia to study art, but in his first year he was kicked out for bad behavior. After a year away, Dalí was allowed to return to his studies. He returned to the Residencia at the same time Lorca had chosen to finish his law degree. As noted in the biography above, Dalí and Lorca began a relationship in 1923 which lasted five years. The years 1925-1927 became known as Dalí's Lorca period; of the 23 works he presented in a 1927 show, four were of Lorca. Dalí became the "world's best-known Surrealist painter" due primarily to the work he produced from 1929 to 1937.<sup>63</sup>

The three men shared many common beliefs and interests in their personal lives that were expressed in their arts. All three came from privileged families that allowed them to pursue intellectual and artistic paths. As a result, Lorca and Buñuel developed a compassionate interest in the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. The three men began expressing their left-wing views at a young age which would alter their lives in the

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<sup>61</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 85.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 171.

future. Personal experiences and religious upbringings affect their sexual beliefs and relationships in troubling ways. They would explore sex in their personal lives and in their art for all of their lives.<sup>64</sup> Having been raised with similar personal and political views, it is not surprising the Lorca, Buñuel, and Dalí became close friends over the course of their arrivals at the Residencia de Estudiantes.

The Residencia encouraged cultural enlightenment by bringing in top scholars to speak on writing, sciences, economics, and music. All three men developed a deep interest in new ideas and artistic movements developing in Spain and the rest of Europe.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Dalí and Buñuel were just two of the Spanish artists headed to Paris to discover the latest in art and poetry. Lorca wanted to travel with them, but his father would not pay for the trip. In France, they discovered the artistic movement that would change their style and lead them to fame. Surrealism was exploding in Paris; Dalí and Buñuel began experimenting with the style.<sup>66</sup> When they returned to Madrid, all three men embraced the new movements and rejected the values of the bourgeoisie and the religious communities. Each man experimented in a form that was not their concentration due to the encouragement of their friend. In their chosen medium, each of the three artists expressed autobiographical experiences, delved into the unconscious, expressed political views, and reviewed their complicated sexual lives.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Lorca, Buñuel, Dalí: Forbidden Pleasures and Connected Lives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Lorca, Buñuel, Dalí: Forbidden Pleasures and Connected Lives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4, 5, 6, 231.

Lorca, Dalí, and Buñuel were part of a group of artists and poets known as “La Generacion del 27.” The Generation of 27 were young artists and intellectuals who would come to exemplify excellence in Spanish Surrealism.<sup>68</sup> The men encouraged Lorca to also embrace the movement. The relationship between Dalí and Lorca turned negative. Buñuel and Dalí continued to be strong allies and they turned on Lorca. *Romancero Gitano* was released in 1928 and the two claimed it was a “betrayal of the avant-garde.”<sup>69</sup> Dalí and Lorca continued to write to one another usually discussing art and poetry. Lorca gave two lectures at the Athenaeum Club suggesting that imagination was not enough, artists must have inspiration. These sentiments were expressed in Dalí’s letters to Lorca at the time. Eventually “Lorca resolved that his art, following Dalí’s advice, should now be free to express the depths of the unconscious.”<sup>70</sup> In 1929, Buñuel and Dalí released a film they had written and produced, called *Un Chien Andalou (Andalusian Dog)*, reportedly it “celebrates violent termination of vision.” Lorca believed he was the “dog” referred to in the title. He felt the film was criticism of his work.<sup>71</sup>

Dalí’s and the surrealist style had a strong presence in many works following the release of the film and Lorca’s subsequent trip to New York. In 1930, Lorca wrote one of his most surrealist works, *El público*. Gibson writes, “*El público* is a revolutionary play

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<sup>68</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>69</sup> John Lyon, *Yerma*, trans. Ian Mcpherson and Jacqueline Minett Aris (Warminster: Phillips Ltd., 1987), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 222. The lectures delivered in 1928 are titled “Imagination, Inspiration, and Escape Poetry” and “Sketch of the New Painting.”

<sup>71</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 9.

from many points of view. Both a reflection on the contemporary theatre and itself a highly original dramatic work, it was far in advance of its time both in its proclamation of erotic liberty and its treatment of this theme”<sup>72</sup> *Así que pasen cinco años*, released in 1931 to strong critical review, is, “arguably his most accomplished and striking pieces of theatre.” In the “dream-like” play, “characters are seen to be echoes of or contrasts to each other and in which their conscious fears frequently assume frightening external forms”<sup>73</sup> Despite their strained relationships the men stayed in contact, especially Lorca and Dalí. Lorca, Buñuel, and Dalí met at a fortuitous time in each of their lives. Had they not come together, supported each other’s views, encouraged experimentation, and driven each other to anguish, poetry and drama, film, and fine arts would not be the same.

### *Yerma and Structure of Tragedy*

In *The Poetics*, the ancient philosopher Aristotle defines dramatic tragedy as, “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself...with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”<sup>74</sup> He observes that Greek tragedy presents grave, though plausible, events which are significant and solemn. For Aristotle, characters in tragedy portray emotional situations that evoke a passionate response in the audience; the drama itself concludes with the release of those feelings. Aristotle writes that drama is distinct from

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<sup>72</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 297.

<sup>73</sup> Gwynne Edwards, *Yerma* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007), xx.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Gerould, “Aristotle: The Poetics,” *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel* (New York: Applause Theatre and Books, 2000), 49.



narrative forms due to the inclusion of not just dialogue, but rhythm and harmony through song.

In his own tragic drama, Lorca adheres to these elements as described by Aristotle. Yerma's situation and inability to accept her fate cause serious conflict between her and her husband, her best friend, and her community. The journey that Yerma takes in the play causes some characters, as well as, and the audience, to experience pity over her inability to have a child. Three characters speak to their pity for Yerma in the play. The first is María who admires Yerma's untested knowledge of pregnancy; María expresses pity that Yerma has knowledge but not children saying, "Of all the girls that got married when you did, you're the only one..."<sup>75</sup> Yerma interrupts before María can say, she is the only one who has not had a child. In act one, scene two, the Pagan Old Woman assures Yerma she will become pregnant and encourages her to take pleasure in the act of sex- this will bring children.<sup>76</sup> Then in act two, scene one, the First Washerwoman shows empathy towards Yerma's plight saying, "She has no children, but that's not her fault."<sup>77</sup> Fear is expressed by María as she observes Yerma's descent into deep depression; her concern is also felt by the audience as Yerma's actions and moods become more erratic. In act two, scene two, María says that Yerma cries every time she visits with the baby. In response to Yerma expressing that she is sick of having breasts "and not being able to use them for the right thing" while the rest of nature progresses,

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<sup>75</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 124-127.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 140.

María expresses fear saying, “I do not like what you are saying!”<sup>78</sup> María expresses further concern to Girl 1 at the festival stating, “For the past month, she hasn’t been out of her chair. She frightens me! She has something in mind; I do not know what it is, but you can be sure it’s nothing good!”<sup>79</sup> This pity and fear is finally released when Yerma determines her own fate by killing her husband and ending hope for a child. Juan’s murder is followed by a few lines of text before the final black out. The audience is not given time to release their heightened emotions before the story is over. The story ends without the audience achieving catharsis from the script.

Aristotle’s definition of tragedy also includes key structural elements to the text (the prologue, episode, and exode) and the use of choral sections (parode and stasimon).<sup>80</sup> The prologue in Greek theatre is the beginning section which and “precedes the entry of the chorus,” and provides exposition or commentary on the action while connecting the audience to the performance.<sup>81</sup> In the *Yerma* script the chorus does not enter until act two; the first act could be considered a prologue as it provides exposition, establishes the world of the play, and moves the plot forward. The parode is the chorus’ entrance and song; Lorca upholds this in act two, scene one. The Washerwomen address “the audience directly both in character and as the poet’s mouthpiece...and as

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<sup>78</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 156.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Gerould, “Aristotle: The Poetics,” *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel* (New York: Applause Theatre and Books, 2000), 54.

<sup>81</sup> R. W. Vince, “Chorus,” *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, ed. Kennedy (Oxford University Press, Inc.: 2011), accessed January 18, 2020, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/oupotap/chorus/0?institutionId=720>.

commentator.”<sup>82</sup> Lorca’s chorus reveals new information about how the community views Yerma, but they do not have a unified view of Yerma, rather he uses the six women to express many opinions about barren women. An episode in Aristotelian tragedy is that which “comes in between two choral songs;”<sup>83</sup> in Lorca’s script this would include the two scenes after the parade of the Washerwomen and before the stasimon of the final scene. A stasimon is “a song of the chorus without anapests or trochees;”<sup>84</sup> the male chorus singing at the beginning of the scene fits this description. While the women’s song which follows is, “a *Commos*, a lamentation sung by chorus and actor in concert.”<sup>85</sup> Yerma joins with the female ensemble singing to God for fertility. The characters take part in dialogue between these musical numbers providing another episode; followed by another Stasimon when a portion of the chorus sings and performs the festival song and flamenco dance. The play returns to an episode which culminates in a final stasimon; which the stage directions indicate begins before Yerma’s final lines and continues after. The script does not provide an exode which is “all that follows after the last choral song.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet despite employing the general shape and form of Aristotelian tragedy, Lorca seems more interested in the opposing forces which define Nietzschean tragedy. In *The*

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<sup>82</sup> R. W. Vince, “Chorus,” *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, ed. Kennedy (Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), accessed January 18, 2020, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/oupotap/chorus/0?institutionId=720>.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Gerould, “Aristotle: The Poetics,” *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel* (New York: Applause Theatre and Books, 2000), 54.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 54.

*Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche posits that art is created by through the combining of two opposing forces named for two gods, Apollo and Dionysius. The force he describes as Apollonian is a dreamland in which the human remains in control and aware of the dream. Apollo's artist imitates and controls nature which creates culture with laws and an interest in the individual.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, Dionysian forces are a state of drunkenness in which humans lack control and instead embrace their primordial natures. Dionysius's artist gives into nature giving control over to base emotions and needs. Like the revelers at a festival, the Dionysian individual desires a shared experience and belonging with the group.<sup>88</sup> After contrasting these two views, Nietzsche brings them together to discuss tragedy, stating, "we must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus, which always disburdens itself anew in an Apollonian world of pictures."<sup>89</sup> Drama is the portrayal of base emotions controlled by the structure of a text.

The Apollonian world Lorca evokes in *Yerma* is based on the Spanish culture in which he was born and raised. The controls in the world of the play are the norms and beliefs held by a rural Andalucian community in the early 1930s. Each individual is responsible for controlling your own actions to protect a person's honor and reputation, or self-knowledge as Nietzsche writes.<sup>90</sup> In this world of rules and norms, Lorca

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<sup>87</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism*, trans. WM. A. Haussman (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE\\_BIRTH\\_OF\\_TRAGEDY](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE_BIRTH_OF_TRAGEDY), 22, 24, 28-29, 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 22, 24, 29, 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>90</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism*, Trans. WM. A. Haussman (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE\\_BIRTH\\_OF\\_TRAGEDY](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE_BIRTH_OF_TRAGEDY), 40.

introduces many Dionysian elements some of which resist the Apollonian control of the local culture. Yerma is a woman driven by her primordial emotions to become pregnant. While her culture encourages her to have children, she is increasingly out of control mentally and physically. Yerma's uncontrolled nature causes her conflict with her husband, friends, and the community. Chapter two includes a lengthier discussion of her transgressions. The most Dionysian element in the script is the final scene when the community is worshipping at the Shrine. The festival is what Nietzsche describes as Dionysian barbarism, due to its lack of Apollonian control. He states, "In nearly every instance the center of these festivals lay in extravagant sexual licentiousness, the waves of which overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions."<sup>91</sup> Lorca's final scene depicts a freedom that is beyond acceptable behavior in Catholic, rural life, except one night a year.

Nietzsche's view on two other components of tragedy influenced Lorca's writing of *Yerma*. First, we discuss the chorus which in Lorca's play includes the Washerwomen. Nietzsche disputes the traditional view of the chorus as an "ideal spectator" who tells the audience how to feel about the story of the play. Instead he views the chorus as an oracle or sage whose wisdom is used to build enthusiasm towards the hero. Even with these responsibilities, the chorus is seen as inferior to the hero.<sup>92</sup> Lorca writes the Washerwoman not as a unified group with one voice, rather as a chorus of individuals with differing opinions. Members of the group reveal new information to other Washerwomen and to the audience. They offer differing views on Yerma and her lack of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 70.

children allowing the audience to hear the multitude of opinions held by community members.

From the chorus, our discussion moves to the hero in Nietzschean Tragedy. Lorca's attraction to the Greek tragic form was in the telling of an epic story regarding one individual. In *Yerma* more than in any other of the plays from the rural trilogy, the focus is on telling her story from her perspective. He does not follow Aristotle's requirement that a tragic hero be of high status. Although Yerma is from a higher class than the other characters in the play, she mixes with the members of her community. According to Nietzsche, "Dionysus no longer speaks through forces but as an epic hero almost in the language of Homer."<sup>93</sup> The hero is no longer a mythical being, instead the character, "must develop individually through artistic subordinate traits and shadings."<sup>94</sup> The hero is a multi-dimensional figure who describes their inner feelings and conflicts throughout the course of the play.

In 1928, Lorca in fact addressed the subject of creating a combined Apollonian and Dionysian artwork in 1928. While Lorca refused to define his writing by one of the popular styles of his time, he refers to his work as *lógica poética* (*poetic logic*). Lorca did not appreciate the assessment of his work as surrealist due to its relation to Andre Breton.<sup>95</sup> Like Nietzsche's tragedy, Lorca writes poetry and drama in the spirit of Dionysian drunkenness with the logic and thoughtfulness of Apollo's dream illusion.

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<sup>93</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism*, Trans. WM. A. Haussman (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE\\_BIRTH\\_OF\\_TRAGEDY](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#THE_BIRTH_OF_TRAGEDY), 72.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>95</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 2.

Breton's *Manifestos on Surrealism* describe a process of automatic creation of art during an altered state of mind. The Manifestos encourage an artist to enter a state between dream and reality through natural methods, such as lack of sleep, or the unnatural use of alcohol or drugs. This allows the subconscious to automatically create without the logical brain needing to give order to the art. Breton's surrealism presents a sense of beauty and happiness in the world. Many intellectuals who begin as followers of Breton's surrealism come to disagree with his view of the aesthetic including Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille. While Artaud goes on to be famous for establishing Theatre of Cruelty, Bataille's contributions to surrealist discourse is largely forgotten.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is Bataille's brand of surrealism which influences Lorca and many other Spanish surrealists. Many of the artists and intellectuals known as the Generación de 27 including Dalí and Buñuel.

Lorca's *lógica poética* and his avant-garde style are aligned with Bataille's "counter-surrealism" both being counter to Breton. While Breton's aesthetic explored the beauty of the world, Bataille's surrealism consisted "in evocations of the subversive image, corporeal decomposition, primitive cultures, and unrestricted expression." Bataille embraced tension, reality, anguish, and death in his surrealism.<sup>97</sup> Lorca's subjects and the worlds he created in his plays live in the Bataille reality, not Breton's beautiful world. Lorca held a life-long obsession with death; his personal and public life in the 1920 and 1930s were full of anxiety which entered his writing. Lorca's *Romancero Gitanos* and *Poeta en Nueva York* reflected the early century struggles of what some would call

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<sup>96</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

“primitive cultures” the Gypsy in Spain and the Blacks of Harlem. He celebrated the spirit of these two groups of outsiders in his writing while also portraying their oppression. In these and all his works, Lorca is not afraid to present the harsh, the ugly, and the violent elements of life which Bataille also embraced. In 1922 Bataille studied in Spain where he became passionate for what he called its “culture of anguish.” Bataille and Lorca shared Nietzsche’s view of Dionysian artistic inspiration in their obsession with Spanish art forms including flamenco, *cante jondo*, and bullfighting.<sup>98</sup> In each of these arts, *duende* is prevalent and a sign of artistic excellence. We will return to the arts mentioned, but first an understanding of Lorca’s *duende* is necessary.

As discussed previously, one of Lorca’s most popular lectures was *The Play and Theory of Duende*. In Spanish culture, duende has traditionally been used to refer to a mischievous spirit who resides in a house. Lorca maintains the word’s connection to death but redefines it to apply to performers. An actor, dancer, musician, or other performer who embraces the Nietzsche’s Dionysian spirit has *duende*. Lorca describes his view of *duende* in various ways throughout his lecture. Lorca calls it “dark sounds;” “the mystery, the roots that cling to the mire that we all know, that we all ignore;” “a style that is truly alive;” “the spirit of the earth;” and “primal thorns of fire.” Unlike angels or muses who bring inspiration, *duende* is roused from within the veins, from the blood. Lorca says, it was “*duende* that scorched Nietzsche’s heart as he searched for its outer form on Rialto Bridge.”<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche and Lorca looked within themselves for *duende*, “the

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<sup>98</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche was known to visit the Rialto Bridge in Venice to think, remember, and grieve. The location was Wagner’s favorite in the city, Nietzsche had a very close relationship with the auteur which



inexplicable artistic power or spirit that motivates artistic creativity and that suggests the looming presence of death.”<sup>100</sup> While angels and muses stop their work when death is near, *duende* lives on the edge with a vision of life and death. Lorca indicates *duende* is possible in all arts, but comes most naturally “in music, dance, and spoken poetry, the living flesh is needed to interpret (*duende*), since they have forms that born and die.”<sup>101</sup> Lorca continues his lecture discussing how *duende* appears in particular arts.

Nietzsche’s Dionysian emotions were the basis of *duende* prominent in flamenco, *cante jondo*, and bullfighting which attracted Lorca and Bataille. For them the pure emotion, anguish, and proximity to death was consistent in the three arts which express “the primitive Dionysian drives of marginalized cultures.”<sup>102</sup> Bataille’s surrealism celebrated the primitive, unknown, ritualistic, and othered cultures of the world. He found these elements in flamenco, the traditional dance of the Gitano people in Southern Spain. A dancer who is truly connected to the history of flamenco and every dancer who has come before, brings forth *duende* in their performance. In the art of bullfighting, the toreador calls on *duende* to find the music and rhythms of the bull and the fight. In these two arts “the *duende* charges itself with creating suffering by means of a drama of living forms, and clears the way for an escape from the reality that surrounds us.”<sup>103</sup> The

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became strained. Federico García Lorca, *Play and Theory of Duende*, trans. A.S. Kline, accessed May 16, 2019, [http://uploads.worldlibrary.org/uploads/pdf/20121106215225lorcaduendepdf\\_pdf.pdf](http://uploads.worldlibrary.org/uploads/pdf/20121106215225lorcaduendepdf_pdf.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 56.

<sup>101</sup> Lorca, *Play and Theory of Duende*.

<sup>102</sup> David F. Richter, *Margins of Poetry: Performing the Formless in Lorca’s Surrealism*, (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2007), 75.

<sup>103</sup> Federico García Lorca, *Play and Theory of Duende*, trans. A.S. Kline, accessed May 16, 2019, [http://uploads.worldlibrary.org/uploads/pdf/20121106215225lorcaduendepdf\\_pdf.pdf](http://uploads.worldlibrary.org/uploads/pdf/20121106215225lorcaduendepdf_pdf.pdf).

audience in viewing flamenco and bullfighting will feel the emotions of life and death if the performer has *duende*. More importantly for Bataille whose surrealism was focused on the artists creation, the dancer and the fighter reach into their primitive selves to perform on the edge of life and death.

*Cante jondo* (deep song) Lorca says is an “artistic expression based in the primitive music of gypsy culture, sounds, and narratives that evoke deep emotion and suffering.” Lorca connects the Romani people of Spain and the African Americans in New York comparing *cante jondo* to jazz music in the US. In performance, Lorca says, *cante jondo* “breaks down the divide between art and life.”<sup>104</sup> Bataille attended the Cante Jondo Festival in Granada in 1922 although it is not known if he met Lorca there. Lorca’s writing changed aesthetic constantly and he preferred not to be labeled as an -ism. However, there is a clear connection leading from Nietzsche to Bataille and Lorca to surrealism. Spanish surrealism is closely related to Bataillan surrealism in its focus on demonstrating the ugly reality of oppression in life and death.

In my research, I have found that many artistic “-isms” have been assigned to Lorca’s style in an effort to encapsulate his whole oeuvre. They have been labeled as surrealist, semi-surrealist, Spanish surrealist, expressionist, symbolist, and simply as avant-garde. Attempting to assign one aesthetic to his work minimizes the fact that his art was everchanging. He was often a vanguard in poetry and drama though he is not always acknowledged as such. Rather than trying to apply a singular genre to his work, I will use the term stylized to discuss the script and production elements which are not realism.

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<sup>104</sup> David F. Richter, *García Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism: The Aesthetics of Anguish* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 57.

### *Conclusion*

*Yerma* was praised by critics and audience when it was first performed. The plays of the rural trilogy come to define Federico García Lorca as a playwright, particularly outside of Spain. The plot and characters are deeply rooted in Lorca's life experiences and the people who influenced him, particularly during his childhood in the countryside. As shown in the cultural and sociological study, Lorca wrote about the daily struggle of men and women to protect honor and reputation. The following chapters describe what the script analysis reveals about the plot, characters, and major images in the text, the remaining chapters document the process of designing and rehearsing the production of *Yerma* at Baylor University.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Analysis of Text

#### *Introduction*

Internationally acclaimed artistic director of Berlin's Schaubühne, Thomas Ostermeier, says the first approach to a play should be an emotional connection, "you then try to comprehend the play in its entirety: its dramaturgic structure, how it works, and functions as a play, and how it has managed to trigger these initial reactions and feelings you had."<sup>1</sup> A full analysis of the script first allows a director to understand the text and all its ideas, then to narrow those themes to a concept that focuses the production's elements. After this primary evaluation, Ostermeier recommends researching secondary resources to gain knowledge of the playwright, the society in which they lived, and what drove them to write the play.<sup>2</sup> While chapter one explored the secondary literature, this chapter focuses on the personal reactions and primary analysis of the script.

To begin this chapter, I describe the various analytical styles I used to approach the script and how those different styles contributed to the understanding of the text. Then I describe the plot of the play as the structure that forms the foundation on which the other elements of the play are built. I also apply specific elements of Spanish culture

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<sup>1</sup> Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 141.

introduced in chapter one to the text analysis. The primary focus of the next section is a discussion of characters in the play. This is the most in-depth portion of the analysis because, while plot provides a sequence of events, in *Yerma* Lorca is more interested in the characters and their relationships with one another.

### *Theoretical Approach*

The first play analysis system that theatre artists generally turn to is Francis Hodge's *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*, a method that first appeared in 1971. Hodge's approach for directors is based in the ideas of Constantin Stanislavsky, the first practitioner to develop a realistic acting method. This process begins by considering the given circumstances-the material that defines the world of the play. There are three primary components to given circumstances: 1) environmental facts, which relate to where and when the play is set as well as the dominant systemic beliefs of the characters, i.e. politics, religion, etc.; 2) previous action, which are the events that have occurred before the play begins which affect the events played onstage; and 3) polar attitudes, which are the personal views of the primary characters which change over the course of the play.<sup>3</sup> Hodge's framework is an excellent tool for analyzing realistic plays, but when approaching a symbolist playwright such as Lorca, this process seemed incomplete. Many of the characters in *Yerma* represent a symbol or an archetype; Hodge does not provide a path to understanding the role of these characters.

The next method I used, episodic analysis, is described by David Kaplan in *Collected Series: Five Approaches to Acting Series* published in 2007. The title suggests

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Hodge, *Play Directing Analysis Communication and Style* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 18-25.

this analysis is for actors, but the five approaches are equally applicable to directors. Stanislavsky himself found episodic analysis helpful with certain characters and scripts. While directing *A Month in the Country* a frustrated actress led him to consider each scene of the play as a segment which stands on its own, an episode. The story is a sequence of events rather than continuous moments related through cause and effect.<sup>4</sup> While Lorca writes *Yerma* in chronological order, a variable amount of time passes between scenes. Additionally, the scenes do not directly relate to one another; for example, act one, scene two features Yerma's conversations with other women in the community. However, the following scene in act two has a completely different set of characters, and Yerma does not appear. I broke the play into its various episodes, events that occur onstage that can be understood by the audience individually from the whole of the play.<sup>5</sup> After defining 48 separate episodes, I wrote a caption for each which sums up the events which occur onstage. The next step in episodic analysis defines the transaction which occurs in each segment. The transaction includes an attempt at an exchange of some kind; one character makes an offer, and the second character accepts or denies the offer.<sup>6</sup> One example is in the first scene of the play; Yerma promises to care for Juan and spend a lifetime with him, while in return she wants to have children. Juan denies her offer, stating that they will be more at peace without a child and should find happiness in what they already have. While I considered each episode and its transactions, I found that Yerma made many offers of trade, but she was denied almost every time. The process

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<sup>4</sup> David Kaplan, *Collected Series: Five Approaches to Acting Series* (New Jersey: Hansen Publishing, 2007), 61-62.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 77-79.

helped to focus the primary conflict in each episode. An episodic structure also considers a character's purpose in the play; how they fit in with other people and what they reveal about the world.<sup>7</sup> The process of asking why Lorca included each character in the play was very informative. Episodic analysis revealed conflict themes and character roles but again felt like an incomplete assessment of the play.

One of the other five approaches to acting that Kaplan discusses in his book is referred to as "Building Images." This analytical approach invites the theatre artist to consider various external and internal images for each character. People act in a certain way based on whom they are with, "consciously or not, they are acting out an image" of who they want to appear to be.<sup>8</sup> This is true for most human interactions and for characters in a play; building images asks what mask the character is wearing and when the mask changes based on the circumstances and situation. Most characters in *Yerma* have no name; they are easily seen as archetypes of a particular population. The Building Images analysis asks which archetype the character represents; this was an effective way to view the characters and their relationship to Yerma. It was also important to consider what mask the character was wearing based on who they were speaking with in each scene. This system also encourages the creation of personal metaphor for the character, which I found very helpful as I established a river as the key image associated with Yerma. I then considered how the other characters related to the river.

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<sup>7</sup> David Kaplan, *Collected Series: Five Approaches to Acting Series* (New Jersey: Hansen Publishing, 2007), 165.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 167.

Building Images analysis considers archetypes and is based in the psychological studies of Carl Jung; James Thomas' system for non-realistic plays is grounded in the same elements. Thomas, a student of Hodge, advances his mentor's work to apply to modern and contemporary drama in his book *Script Analysis: For Actors, Directors, and Designers* first published in 1992, with a fifth edition published in 2014.<sup>9</sup> In his book Thomas writes, "Nonrealistic plays, call special attention to the way each human being is both an individual and the representative of a group. Nonrealistic plays have developed specifically from the feeling that now more than ever we sense instinctively how each of us is part of a larger human existence in the world."<sup>10</sup> From this basis, Thomas considers how to analyze all aspects of a nonrealistic play. The Thomas style was helpful in determining the purpose of scenes and characters in *Yerma*. The analysis explores in a more general sense the lives of people, places, and events and their relationship to the theme.<sup>11</sup> The following is the result of analyzing *Yerma* from all of these different views; applying the elements that are most effective and dismissing components that did not apply to this script.

After completing the building images and Thomas analyses, I began to associate *Yerma* with the image of water. Although Lorca names the play and the protagonist *Yerma*, which is Spanish for *barren*, her character became associated with the image of water in my analysis. The other characters became images of an eco-system around the dominant metaphor of a river. The characters were not evaluated as individuals, rather as

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<sup>9</sup> James Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors Directors and Designers* (Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xxx.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 65.



the masks that they wore within the context of the community and the collective image of the whole play.

### *Plot*

The plot of a play is the sequence of events that connects the other parts. While Lorca's primary focus was on character, he used the plot of the play as a vehicle to showcase their growth and development. Lorca incorporates a number of songs into the script, illuminating the plot through both poetry and song. *Yerma* takes place in a small village over the course of three years and six months in the early 1930s; the action happens over three acts with two scenes in each act. The play opens with a dream that clearly demonstrates Yerma's desire for a man to give her a child. The first song falls at the end of the opening sequence, an unnamed voice is heard singing the first song calling to Nana. In our translation the lyrics continue to use the word nana, meaning grandmother. However, other translations have changed nana to baby, which does not seem to fit the original text. The voice sings of building a nest and calling for the nana to be there with him. It is as if the child is calling to a grandmother to build a place for the child to be. This music is different from most of the songs in the script which are diegetic; the characters sing to pass time when alone or when working. The first song establishes the convention of singing in this world.

The balance of act one, scene one, takes place on a May morning in 1931 and is broken into four sections that provide exposition. Yerma's husband, Juan, says he is happy without children; he focuses on his fields and sheep, he then recommends Yerma find happiness in the care of their home and him. After Juan leaves Yerma alone to sew, she fills the silence with music. The narrative of this song features a mother wondering

when her child will arrive. The child responds to the mother telling her that he is coming from the ice in the mountains to be warmed by her dress. Yerma also expresses the pain she feels because the child has not arrived, saying that her “womb aches” and the cradle is empty. The child sings that he will come when she smells of jasmine, a symbol of divinity and hope.

After the song, Yerma’s best friend and confidante María arrives revealing that she has become pregnant after only five months of marriage; this moment is the inciting incident. Maria says good-bye to Yerma a moment before the arrival of Victor, another shepherd, who is a childhood friend of Yerma. Yerma dreams of having a child with Victor and the loving marriage they could have had if her father had not made an agreement with Juan. She reprises her previous song after Victor exits, again expressing her pain of an empty cradle, this time with Victor in mind.

In act one scene two, the play moves outdoors and ten months into the future; an afternoon in March 1932.<sup>12</sup> Yerma searches for a solution to her infertility, first simply seeking advice from an older woman with nine children. The rising action includes Yerma’s conversations about pregnancy and motherhood. The external relationships begin to take shape as Yerma interacts publicly with people from the town. The scene is again broken into four major sections, the first comes when Yerma meets the Pagan Old Woman and Juan’s infertility is proposed for the first time. The Pagan old woman is an archetype, a representation of all older women and mothers. The perspective of the young wife and young mother is expressed by the characters in the next section.

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<sup>12</sup> “Granada, Spain – Sunrise, Sunset, and Length of Day,” accessed September 6, 2019, <https://www.timeanddate.com/sun/spain/granada?month=3&year=2019>.

Victor sings the first working song as he walks from the fields and onto the stage. The lyrics tell of sheep calling for the shepherd to leave his cold, stony bed and use their wool coats as a warm, soft blanket. The sheep seem to call for the shepherd to forget about the wives and comfortable beds at home. They tell the shepherd if he hears a woman's voice it is actually the water flowing. The song concludes as Victor discovers Yerma at the plaza. They converse for a moment before Yerma's imagination creates a crying child which only she hears. Juan catches Yerma and Victor talking, which leads to the first of four increasingly ferocious fights between the married couple; this is Yerma's personal climax in act one. The scene provides insight into what community women of varying ages feel about the role of women as wives and mothers, then portrays the concerns an individual must have about their reputation in society, one of the themes of the play.

In act two, scene one, the play moves forward a year and three months to a morning in June 1933. The scene remains outdoors but at one of the locations women are allowed to gather to do domestic work: the river. The women personify the old Spanish proverb, "*Tu honra en ti no está, sino en los demas.*"<sup>13</sup> After a brief prologue of music, the women gossip about Yerma, but that must end when Yerma's Sisters-in-law arrive at the river to do the wash. The Washerwomen find rhythm in their work, brushing of cloth, rinsing in water, scrubbing on a rock or board, squeezing out of water, and to this they add their lyrics full of sexual innuendo. They sing about the joy of their husbands

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 42.

returning home, the joy they take in caring for their children, and the sadness they feel for barren women.

From the world of women washing, act two advances by nine months to an evening in March 1934 and moves back into Yerma's home. As years pass still without a pregnancy, Yerma becomes more depressed and her actions more erratic. The world of the play is getting smaller and, for Yerma, it is breaking down. The rising action continues as Juan turns his anger first on his sisters, then on Yerma in their second verbal fight. In the third part of the scene, Yerma sings that her body is ready, perhaps concluding that Juan is infertile. Yerma sings of the pain she feels because her body has not given her a child. Over the course of the song, she decides her body is not at fault, turning instead to a focus on Juan. The fight with Juan, followed by Yerma's song of embracing her own body, is the climax of the act. Act two, scene two, contrasts the first scene of the play by introducing Yerma's breaking from the joy she found in friends and family. Yerma's friendship proves to be strained when María enters with her second child. Victor decides to leave their village, diminishing the joy Yerma feels from being in his presence.

The lengths Yerma will go to conceive a child are demonstrated in act three. Scene one takes place hours after the previous scene as dawn is beginning to break. Two major sections define the scene: the first reveals Yerma returning from an unknown ceremony with Dolores and two Old Women. In the second section, Juan arrives, and for the first time the audience sees him become physically aggressive towards Yerma. The scene ends the same way act one ended; Yerma ends the fight and the scene by walking away from Juan.

The final scene of the play takes place seven months later at dusk; it includes a large number of characters and the most interaction between males and females. Much like the beginning of act two, scene one, the first section begins with boisterous singing, this time featuring male voices. The rising action continues with María providing insight into Yerma's emotional changes over the last few months stating, "She has something in mind... it's nothing good."<sup>14</sup> Over thirty people are recognized in the stage directions, the women sing to the Saint to bring them children. The men and women call forth "the devil and his wife" to sing and dance for them. After the raucous song and dance number, the play returns to its most common structure of a two-person scene. The Pagan Old Woman invites Yerma to have sex with her son and come live with them. When Yerma declines, the old woman reveals the town gossip that Juan comes from a family that struggles to produce children; he is the reason Yerma is not pregnant. Juan overhears the conversation which leads to the climax of the play as Juan and Yerma have their fiercest fight. In the end, Yerma realizes that she will never get pregnant by Juan and that he does not care. Thus, she kills him and destroys the possibility of ever having children. The final song, noted in stage directions, is sung by the men and women who have gathered for the festival. The falling action is quick as Yerma shouts that she has killed her child. One can question whether or not there is a denouement.

#### *Environmental Facts*

The action of the play takes place in an unnamed rural community in Andalucía Spain. Based on Lorca's tendency to write from his own experience, the town could be

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<sup>14</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 176.

Fuente Vaqueros, Lorca's birthplace, or Valderrubio, where he lived as a child. Both cities are similar, but Fuente Vaqueros has a population of about 4,400 versus Valderrubio, which numbers around 2,000 people. The final scene of the play is based on a pilgrimage which passed both Fuente Vaqueros and Valderrubio to the town of Moclin. The hillsides are filled with sheep, olive groves, and poplar trees. I visited both cities on my research trip to Andalucia in summer 2019. Fuente Vaqueros' border is traversed by the Genil River, and for this reason, I chose to place this production of *Yerma* in Fuente Vaqueros.<sup>15</sup>

Agriculture is the primary way the characters in *Yerma* make a living. Juan specifically mentions taking care of his herd of sheep, pruning apple trees, and collecting olives in the groves. The work is hard and places great demands on the body. Economically, Juan seems to own his flock and is able to purchase Victor's sheep when Victor moves out of the town. But Juan also works the apple trees and olive groves for someone else. Juan and Yerma have the resources to purchase what they want, even ordering from other towns. Juan is able to afford to bring his two sisters to live with them without obvious concern for money. In the 1930s, Spain was seeing a downturn in the economy in general, but agricultural income was at an all-time high compared to more industrialized areas in the country.

Lorca was very concerned with the politics of Spain and became increasingly outspoken against the government until his death. While the characters are not especially

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<sup>15</sup> "Granada Province – Fuente Vaqueros," trans. Emma Cattle, accessed July 7, 2019 <http://www.andalucia.com/province/granada/fuente-vaqueros/home>.

concerned with politics, it is important to consider what was happening when Lorca wrote the play. In 1929, Spain suffered in the global depression. Realizing change needed to be made, King Alphonso XIII's advisor allowed a municipal election in 1930. The wealthy and middle-class landowners who were leaders in the provinces were expected to vote to continue the monarchy. Instead, the election resulted in the King's fleeing and the reestablishment of Republican government in 1931. Although they were anti-monarchy, the conservative membership wished to maintain Spanish Capitalism. People living in the countryside, who were not landowners, were suffering from starvation and poverty. The peasants who actually worked the agricultural land pushed for revolution. In 1933, a series of uprisings broke out in parts of Spain, including some in Andalucia. The military killed hundreds of peasants while many other militants were arrested. The elections in November returned the right-wing groups to power in Spain. As fascists took power in Germany and Austria, Spanish workers fearfully watched as the Falange Espanola fascists gained power through intimidation.<sup>16</sup> However, the "politics" that are important to Juan and Yerma are their appearances to and opinions of their neighbors, which we will discuss in the next section.

*Yerma* presents four structured systems for human behavior ranging from religion to cultural mores: 1) conservative Catholicism, 2) the Festival of Cristo del Paño, 3) Gypsy spiritualism, and 4) Spanish honor. The play takes place over 400 years after the Catholics conquered the Moors in Granada and expelled, killed, or converted Muslim, Jewish, and Romani people. While Juan and Yerma do not specifically mention

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<sup>16</sup> Geoff Bailey, "Revolution in 1930s Spain," 2011, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://socialistworker.org/2011/07/21/revolution-in-1930s-spain>.

practicing a religion or attending church services, Catholic morals were compulsory in village life, and they would have decorated their homes with icons. Mary as a symbol of motherhood would most likely be prominent. Yerma states in act three, scene one, “You’ve put your finger into the deepest wound in my flesh.” This statement may be a reference to Christ appearing to the disciples and telling Thomas to put his hands in his wounds, indicating that the statement causes her physical pain.<sup>17</sup>

The Festival de Cristo del Paño takes place in Moclín, a city 1,065 meters above sea level with a village population of 500. The Cristo del Paño (Christ of the Cloth) is a painting which King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella carried as a standard while they battled to conquer the Moors in 1492. They had stayed at the Moclín Castle during the battle of the Alhambra in Granada. In gratitude for the people’s hospitality, they presented the standard to the church. Over time the painting of the Saint was credited with miraculous powers to cure, acquiring a cult-like following by the seventeenth century. October fifth became the date to honor the Saint. As word of the painting’s curative powers spread, an annual pilgrimage through Andalucía began to take place. At some point, praying to the Saint became imbued with the power to cure female infertility. The true answer to the pilgrims’ prayers were the after-hours orgiastic activities which took place around the church.<sup>18</sup>

Dolores, the conjuror in act three, scene one, is representative of beliefs in the power of nature combined with the Catholic saints. This could be due to a background in Gypsy tradition which combines knowledge of plants and natural medicine with prayer.

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<sup>17</sup> John 20:26-28 (New International Version).

<sup>18</sup> Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 289-290.



Dolores tells Yerma to pray to Santa Ana. Saint Anne comes from both Christian and Islamic tradition. She is Jesus' grandmother, the mother of Mary. She is first mentioned in the New Testament apocrypha Gospel of James written in 150. Anne appears in the Quran, though she is not named, where she is associated with mystics, maternal heroines, and the women of Amram. She is often depicted with Mary, Jesus, or Joachim, and with symbols such as books, doors, and women dressed in red or green. She is the patron of childless people, children, mothers, pregnancy, and sterility. In Islam, she is known as Hannah, who was highly spiritual but remained childless until her old age. One day she saw a bird feeding its young which awakened her desire to have a child of her own; she prayed for a child and eventually conceived. Hannah vowed to dedicate her new son to isolation and service in the Second Temple. Upon delivering a daughter, Mary, recognized the child as God's gift to her. Hannah said: "My Lord! Truly, I brought her forth a female: And God is greater in knowledge of what she brought forth, And the male is not like the female... So, her Lord received her with the very best acceptance. And her bringing forth caused the very best to develop in her."<sup>19</sup>

Dolores also tells Yerma to say the prayer of the laurel to complete the ceremony and successfully become pregnant. The Bible associates the laurel with Christ's resurrection, the triumph of humanity, property, fame, and flourishing. Eternal glory, success and triumph are represented by the laurel; in Ancient Greece winners of the

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<sup>19</sup> Quran 3:36-37.

Olympic Games were awarded laurel crowns. As a symbol of victory, the laurel also symbolizes peace after a conflict.<sup>20</sup>

A commitment to family honor is prominent in the fights that Yerma and Juan have. The concept of family honor influences Yerma's decision to follow her duty as a daughter by marrying Juan, who was her father's choice for her husband. Also, she reminds Juan that she was happy to do her duty as a wife on the night of their wedding. She is concerned about her reputation and would not do anything to spoil the family honor. However, she is not prepared to let idle talk keep her alone at home. She asks that Juan believe in her integrity and not worry about the neighbor's gossip, something he is ultimately incapable of doing.

Both Juan and Yerma pride themselves on maintaining the appearances of integrity and honor to the rest of the population. Juan desires for his wife to act like a proper woman, which he defines as a woman who stays home, does not go out by herself, and does not speak with men without his presence. Yerma is concerned about the duties of the country wife, which she defines as birthing children. Juan and Yerma's conflict often center on how concerned they should be about the neighbor's opinions; Juan is very concerned, while Yerma believes she has done nothing wrong and so should not have to worry. The community is visible in the presence of the Washerwomen and the time they spend gossiping about Juan and Yerma.

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<sup>20</sup> "Laurel," Stories of Culture, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://symbolsproject.eu/explore/plants-and-vegetations/laurel.aspx>.

## *Character*

### *Primary Characters*

Yerma is the protagonist of the play and the primary action centers on her struggle to become pregnant and have a child. Following the Expressionist tradition, Lorca writes the play from the perspective of one character; we see the world through Yerma's eyes, while the remaining characters reflect and enhance our understanding of her. The people around her have their own lives but not their own stories. Yerma feels that, until she has a child, she cannot fulfill her one purpose as a woman. Her days and life are wasted on caring for an empty home. Yerma will try anything to become pregnant, except disregard familial honor. At the beginning of the play Yerma believes she will get what she desires. In the end, she believes it is better to extinguish the possibility of getting pregnant than to continue to hope. This journey is the core of the action.

By utilizing the name Yerma for both the title and main character, Lorca immediately informs the audience that there is little hope for a child. The name Yerma comes from the Ancient Greek word *èr-emos* which means lonely, solitary, desert, or waste, translating from Spanish to English as barren or wasteland.<sup>21</sup>

Yerma wants a fulfilling life, for her that means giving birth and raising children. Her desire to have a child is the result of external and internal forces operating on her. A country wife feels a lot of social pressure to become pregnant, but for Yerma, the greatest pull is from her own body. She feels that her entire physical being was created to give life. In her second song, Yerma says, "I crave to carry a child, but the breeze/Offers

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<sup>21</sup> "Yerma," Educalingo, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-es/yerma>.

dahlias made of the dreaming moon./ Deep in my flesh I have two warm springs, Throbbing fountainheads of milk.”<sup>22</sup> She happily leaves her family home and enters an arranged marriage because it will lead to pregnancy. She would be happy to see her husband off to work in the fields, as long as she has a child to care for at home. As the play progresses and she remains without the child, we see her wandering the streets, going out in the rain, and sitting in the cold of night. Yerma tells María, “Every woman has enough blood for four or five children, and if she doesn’t have them, it turns to poison, as it will with me.”<sup>23</sup> By not fulfilling her desire, her body is wasting away; her blood is turning to poison and causing her to die on the inside, while her relationships falter on the outside. While Yerma feels the internal pull the most, the external pressure to have children also weighs on her. She says that the purpose of a country wife is to provide children. The wife is expected to give children to her husband, to work with him in the fields, and to carry on his family name and inheritance. Yerma knows that women who do not have children provide material for the town gossips who judge an infertile woman negatively because if she “wanted children, she would have them.”<sup>24</sup>

As the protagonist, Yerma undergoes a significant emotional shift throughout the play, her mood growing increasingly dark following each fight with Juan. While there is a sadness to Yerma at the beginning of the play, she shows a youth and vibrancy even when Juan is telling her to remain indoors to prevent gossip. In scene two, Yerma returns from the fields and stops to talk with other women from the village. Ultimately Juan

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<sup>22</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 154.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 140.

discovers her talking outdoors with Victor rather than returning straight home as he has told her. He accuses her of encouraging people to gossip about her and ruining his reputation. Her mask of happiness slips, and the audience is made privy to anger in addition to sadness. Yerma's mood becomes darker in act two, scene two, when Juan demonstrates his control over her by bringing his sisters to live with them. Yerma continues to go outdoors alone despite the Sisters presence which incites Juan's anger towards all the women. Yerma makes the decision to contact a local conjurer who she has heard helps women get pregnant. Visiting Dolores is not acceptable behavior according to both the community and Juan. Yerma is once again outdoors alone at night and at the home of an outsider. When Juan arrives to find Yerma with Dolores, he again accuses her of infidelity; Yerma says she wants her voice to be free, "now that I'm falling into the darkest part of the pit!"<sup>25</sup> Yerma tells Juan she will acquiesce to his wishes by staying at home and giving up her desire for a child.

It is made clear that Yerma has not given up hope of becoming pregnant when she takes part in the rituals at the shrine. The shrine's popularity indicates that the community accepts this ritual more than Dolores's ceremony. Yerma confirms her honor by declining the Pagan Old Woman's offer of a new home and husband. The Pagan Old Woman states that the whole town knows Juan's family line is infertile. Juan then confirms he has no desire for children and begins to force himself on her. Yerma once again defies societal standards by murdering her husband. He is an affront to her values and those of the society she lives in. Much of her role in life is to be a mother, yet Juan does not want children. Therefore, though Yerma has been engaging in sex with Juan in order to create

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<sup>25</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 173.

a child, he has been using her for his own pleasure, knowing of her deep need for a child yet denying her. Her options as she sees them are to remain in the cycle of hopefulness and disappointment she has been living for the last eight years, or to destroy all hope. By killing Juan, she releases him from the constant cloud of a bad reputation and releases herself with the absolute certainty she will not have a child. For her, the finality of his death is better than oppressive, unrealized hope.

Yerma's character experiences three climaxes, one in each act with increasing intensity until the play's end. Yerma's first personal climax comes when she curses at Juan at the end of act one, scene two. She has tried to be polite and dutiful but is tired of Juan accusing her of dishonoring him when she has done nothing wrong. She maintains honor but becomes less worried about gossip. The tighter Juan tries to hold her, the more Yerma reaches for solutions to her barrenness. The next climax comes after Yerma returns from the fountain in act two, scene two. Juan is mad that his sisters have not done their duty and accompanied Yerma outdoors. When Juan confronts his wife's disobedience they fight and he shouts, "The truth is you're not a real woman, and you're trying to destroy a man who has no choice!"<sup>26</sup> With this statement Juan brings forward the theme of what defines womanhood. For him, Yerma is not a real woman because she does not obey him. Instead she insists on leaving the house causing the community to gossip. Juan strikes at Yerma's deepest pain, for she too feels that she is not a real woman due to her childlessness.

The final climax comes as the play's hidden truth is revealed in the final scene at the Festival. Act three, scene two, structurally has the greatest size and volume as it leads

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<sup>26</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 152.

to the definitive moment of the play. After Yerma is confronted with Juan's infertility, he states again that he never thought about having children. With these truths, Yerma decides to end the possibility of a pregnancy and accepts that she will never have a child, killing all hope as she kills Juan.

Yerma's husband, Juan, sees himself as a good man who does all he can to make his wife happy. He is a landowner able to provide her with any item she desires; he even states that he will order things from outside the village if Yerma wants it. He owns a herd of sheep which grows throughout the play. Juan also talks about picking apples and caring for olive groves. He has a diverse farm which allows for a steady income. When she brings up the subject of children, he tells Yerma that they will be happier without the extra expense and responsibility. He has a strong sense of honor which means he will not embarrass his name or Yerma's by seeking other women or living frivolously. He supports the community by taking his turn at guarding the water the farmers depend on for growing crops and watering their animals. Juan's one struggle in life is his wife's increasing defiance and disregard for reputation.

Juan is the play's antagonist and Yerma's greatest obstacle. If she is the river, he is the dam that stops Yerma from reaching her goal. In the first scene, he responds to Yerma's flirtations and efforts to care for him with affection and amusement. They have often fought over the idea of having children over the course of their two year and twenty-day marriage. The topic puts Juan on edge in the first scene, each additional mention of children by Yerma increases his anger towards her. Considering the cultural context, it may be easier to believe Juan wants to have children just as Yerma feels societal pressure to conceive. However, he is cursed by the lack of a son and it is easier to

deny his desire for a child than to admit he may be infertile. If so, each time Yerma mentions a baby the subtext is, “You are not a man; you are impotent and weak.” His attempts to get Yerma to forget about having children become harsher the more she disobeys him. He does not believe Yerma is being honorable until the end of the play when he hears her deny the opportunity to be with another man.

Juan wants a good wife, good sheep, and a comfortable life. He wants Yerma to do what he asks of her: stay home to alleviate the neighbor’s gossip about his family. His character climaxes come at the same time as Yerma’s. Juan is strong willed and does not change his desire during the time of the play. His moral stance is based on the code of honor of the community. He is most worried about reputation, and less worried that she is acting honorably. Juan wears a mask of machismo but his worries he cannot produce children brings out his vulnerability. This lack is compensated for by extreme masculinity.

An alternate interpretation of Juan’s character is that he is compensating for his homosexuality. There is evidence for this in many aspects that Lorca has written into the character. Juan is older when he accepts the arranged marriage to Yerma, perhaps because he has not been interested in a woman. A single man worries about his reputation in the community just as an unmarried woman does. Within the play, Juan spends many nights away from home working in the fields. Rather than spending nights with his wife he may meet other shepherds in the hills. One could read Juan’s anger towards Victor’s relationship with Yerma not as an angry husband, but as a gay man who feels unrequited love for a fellow shepherd. With this interpretation, Juan becomes drunk in the final scene to gain the strength to have sex with Yerma. However, Yerma does indicate she



and Juan have a sexual relationship. In conversation with the Pagan Old Woman, Yerma indicates that she does her duty to her husband, not for pleasure, but as a way to conceive a child. In conversation with María, Yerma wonders why she has not become pregnant. If she and Juan were not having sex at all, the conversation would be different with her confidante. If Juan truly was not interested in sex with Yerma, he could send her to the Festival by herself with permission to sleep with another man. While the community and Yerma celebrate the Cristo del Paño, Juan could arrange to spend the night with a shepherd. Instead, he drunkenly tries to seduce Yerma into sex before the Shrine.

Juan is one of the two men in the play to whom Lorca assigns a proper name. The every-man name is appropriate as Juan represents the attitudes and beliefs of male-dominated Spain. Juan is the Spanish translation of John, a name that originated in Hebrew as *Yehōhānān* meaning God has been gracious.<sup>27</sup> Juan has received much grace; he is a landowner, married to a desirable woman, and seemingly able to get all he wants, except the child that Yerma desperately desires.

María is presented as the equivalent to Yerma socially and culturally. María exemplifies everything that Yerma wants but cannot get. We can imagine them having grown up together, jointly going through all of life's major changes. As a confidante, María allows Yerma to reveal her inner most feelings. María marries later but becomes pregnant first. Both women feel joy for María's situation but also sadness for Yerma. María shares her worries and embarrassment, while Yerma acts as an experienced mother giving advice on how to care for yourself during pregnancy. In act two, when María and

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<sup>27</sup> "John," Dictionary.com, accessed on January 15, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/john>.

Yerma interact again, María becomes the mother to Yerma who is lost in despair. Yerma does not listen when María tells her to move forward, to forget the child, and to enjoy her good life. In the final scene María describes Yerma to Girl 1, saying, “For the past month, she hasn’t been out of her chair. She frightens me! She has something in mind; I do not what it is, but you can be sure it’s nothing good.”<sup>28</sup> From María we know Yerma has cut herself off from the outside world, still María has continued visiting her and tried to be a friend to Yerma.

The name María has a long history and is related to the Greek name Mariam and the Hebrew Miriam, though the latter is believed to have originated in Egypt. The Egyptian version of this classic name is associated with the word for “beloved;” the Hebrew name Miriam, on the other hand, means disobedient and the Greek variation, Mariam means bitter or strong.<sup>29</sup> In Catholic Spain, María is used as a form of Mary the name of Jesus’ mother. The María in *Yerma* embodies all of these definitions. She is beloved by Yerma and returns that love but struggles as Yerma falls deeper into her depression. María rebels against her friend, trying to avoid her and advising Yerma to accept her fate. As a mother figure, Maria contrasts most to Yerma’s barrenness.

María is like the plant life that grows at the side of the river; she and Yerma have a symbiotic relationship at the beginning that degrades over time. Yerma’s water feeds María with motherly advice, caring support, and her willingness to sew the baby’s clothes. In return, María’s grasses bring the community to Yerma, she helps create an

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<sup>28</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 176.

<sup>29</sup> “María,” Abarim Publications, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/María.html#.XjKQ5WhKg2w>.

ecosystem inviting other plants and animals to connect to the river. As María disconnects from the river, the ecosystem dies and the isolation Yerma feels causes her to dry up.

Victor is the second male presence in Yerma's life. He is a good potential husband but cannot move beyond his love for Yerma to look for another woman. They spent time together when they were younger, despite having feelings for one another they remained chaste. He has remained honorable in adulthood even as his love, Yerma, was married off to another man by her father. Victor is a friend to Juan and uses the friendship as an excuse to spend time with Yerma. When he interacts with her, he makes excuses about looking for Juan, and he keeps visits brief. He remains aware that being caught alone talking to Yerma could damage both of their reputations; he risks scandal by lingering to speak with her in a public space in act one, scene two. Through Victor, Yerma's passion and sense of honor is revealed. We see the opportunity for infidelity between Yerma and Victor, but they remain moral. Her mind, however, does stray and it is obvious he feels the same way she does. Their scenes together contain very little text, but the sub-text is voluminous. Victor is an honorable man and when it becomes too difficult for him to see but not be with Yerma, he leaves town.

Victor's function in this play is to demonstrate the strength of Yerma's convictions. She is a passionate woman fully capable of love for a man, but she is governed by loyalty to her family, her husband, and her own name. Without Victor in the play, the only evidence of Yerma's strict honor is her own word. The inclusion of Victor allows for the audience to witness Yerma's honor firsthand.

Interestingly, Victor is the only other male given a name aside from Juan. Victor is a Roman name that was popular with early Christians. In Latin, it translates to victor or

conqueror. Victor is the conqueror of Yerma's love; Juan may have power over her body, but Victor wins her heart and passion.

For most of their lives Yerma and Victor have been parallel rivers. They once flowed together, providing support and strengthening each. Yerma's fate however is like the Darro river in Granada which was diverted from its natural course and turned uphill to feed the Alhambra and Generalife. Yerma's waters are diverted towards Juan and away from Victor by her father. Only the dream of the fertile fields they could have made together is left for each of them to contemplate. In Yerma's mind, had she been able to marry Victor she would have already had a house full of children. Together they would have made a family and had everything they needed.

Dolores is the only other character in *Yerma* who is given a name. In act three, scene one, Lorca introduces her and her followers as they are returning from the cemetery with Yerma where they have said "prayers." Dolores assures Yerma that the ceremony and prayers they practice will bring forth the child of her dreams. Yerma states that she does not believe that Dolores is a dreadful woman, indicating there is adverse community gossip towards Dolores and her practices. In exchange for the ceremony Dolores conducted she asks for a bushel of wheat as payment once Yerma becomes pregnant. According to the stage directions day is breaking and it is important that Yerma return home unseen under the cover of darkness; it is imperative to Dolores and the Women that Yerma not be observed leaving Dolores's home. To Yerma, Dolores is mystic who is able to combine the powers of the earth and God to bring life into Yerma's womb. The name Dolores has an interesting translation that is singular to Spain. The name comes from *María de los Dolores*, which means Mary of the Sorrows, a reference

to the seven sorrows Mary suffered as the mother of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> Dolor comes from the Latin meaning pain or sorrow and is associated with being torn apart by painful emotions.<sup>31</sup>

Dolores is the rain clouds that appear over the river that is Yerma. She exists in the same world but separate from Yerma. Her mystical nature could bring abundance to the river or she could float past on the wind. To some she is the promise of relief, while others see her as an ominous threat to their world.

### *Secondary Characters*

The remaining characters do not have proper names, rather they are described by their gender and age. The Pagan Old Woman is also named for her personal belief system. She meets Yerma as they both return from delivering lunches to their husbands in the fields. For a character who appears in two scenes, the Pagan Old Woman reveals more personal information than any character in the play except Yerma. The Pagan Old Woman has had two husbands and given birth fourteen times; nine of those children, all boys, lived. She has no advice to offer Yerma about conception because she found it so easy, it came naturally. She was a fun-loving young woman who knew Yerma's family and found Yerma's uncle too hardworking to be marriable. Despite revealing many intimate details, the Pagan Old Woman is reluctant to discuss fertility with Yerma. She changes the subject to love, asking Yerma how she feels about Juan. Yerma is unsure how to respond and the Pagan Old Woman tries to end the conversation rather than

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<sup>30</sup> "María," Abarim Publications, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/María.html#.XjKQ5WhKg2w>.

<sup>31</sup> "Dolores," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed January 19, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/dolores>.

revealing details to Yerma. The Pagan Old Woman is the secret keeper, her suggestion that Juan's seed is "rotten" falls on naïve ears. If María is Yerma's ideal of the present, the Pagan Old Woman is how Yerma imagines herself to be in the future.

After the Old Woman, Yerma meets two young women from the village on their way to the fields. Girl 1 has a husband in the fields and a baby that she left home alone. Yerma, in her mothering way, warns the girl that the child could be harmed by anything. She admonishes the girl for leaving the child and tells her to rush home. Girl 1 is an example of a woman who does not appreciate the worth of a child; Yerma finds her behavior simple-minded. Despite their similar ages, Yerma shows the wisdom that seems to reside in her instinctively. Girl 1, María, and the Pagan Old Woman present a spectrum of motherhood. Girl 1 represents motherhood neglected; she leaves her child alone, which Yerma cannot imagine doing herself. She urges the Girl to stop acting frivolously and to consider the child's safety. María is the potential a woman holds to become a mother; she both cherishes and fears having children, but primarily focuses on the joy of giving birth. The Pagan Old Woman represents motherly fulfilment; she nears the end of her life having cared for and raised a flock of children. Yerma is appalled by Girl 1 as she dreams of being María and becoming the Pagan Old Woman.

Girl 2 is socially similar to Girl 1 except she has no children and no desire for them. She tells Yerma she dislikes being forced to marry her sweetheart. Girl 2 would have preferred to remain committed to him but unmarried. Her mother who demanded the marriage is now also insisting on children. She and Yerma share the feeling of being confined at home doing things they do not want to do. She rebels by taking to the streets, ringing church bells, and drinking liquor; Yerma rebels by walking alone and sitting

outside at night. Yerma recognizes the girl and asks for her mother's name. The brief inquiry gives the sense that the mother is known through gossip and is not accepted in the greater community. The Girl exits without learning the reason for Yerma's interest; she and the audience are left to wonder what is on Yerma's mind.

The First and Second Old Women demonstrate some commonalities in the feminine culture of the village; older women are not immune from worries about reputation, but their age makes them bolder. The Women participate in and support the ceremony over which Dolores presides. The First Old Woman asks Yerma why she does not take life as it is, accepting what the world offers. Both Old Women have probably participated in such a ceremony before and still do not want to have the community witness their visit to Dolores's home. As they encourage Yerma to return home unseen, they must be thinking of their own paths home through the darkness which must remain unobserved by other community members. They are the silent rebels in the female community who act against the norms but are not willing to do so in the light.

Lorca presents many communities of women in *Yerma*. We see the social bonds between women of the same age in the women discussed above. The Washerwomen demonstrate friendships of women of a variety of ages. The Washerwomen are lower class than Yerma and gather at the river to wash clothes and for comradery. The women say that gossip is wrong, but in reality, they relish it; the characters who have knowledge of Yerma's activities hold the attention of the others. They reveal information and commentary to the audience similar to a Greek chorus, which will be discussed later in this chapter. One Washerwoman states that "you have children if you want children," causing much debate among the women. They also speculate whether or not Yerma has

been honorable; one of the women suggests that Yerma “looks” at a particular man in a way that is as guilty as sleeping with him. Though his name is not stated, the audience is left to assume they are speaking of Victor. The women recommend that Yerma find satisfaction in what she can do - caring for her husband, preparing food, and gardening. Like María and the Pagan Old Woman, they suggest that Yerma settle and enjoy her life. The Washerwomen finish the scene singing about their love, and lust, for their husbands. They lament the sad of life of barren women and encourage finding joy in work. The Washerwomen are the eyes and ears that see and hear everything in the community. They are a reminder of the tradition of honor and importance of reputation in Spain. The Washerwomen are an example of the community that Yerma desires in her dreams. They all have children and, based on the song, healthy sexual relationship with their husbands. Despite the prevalence of the patriarchal society in Spain, Lorca presents the world of the women in the village, a world that excludes Yerma.

Another female pairing is the Sisters of Juan who have little verbal presence but speak as symbols. The Washerwomen tell us that the Sisters previously lived at and cared for a church, but Juan has brought them into his home to keep watch over Yerma and her actions. The Sisters do not have husbands or children to care for. Rather they serve the Catholic church and, later, their brother. When the Sisters let Yerma leave home on her own, Juan reminds them of their place and their duty to his honor. Yerma tells María that she will not speak to them, implying to the audience that there is much tension and strife in the home. The Sisters-in-law are the physical embodiment of honor. They are present to enclose the space and personify the walls that Juan wishes Yerma would stay behind.



As described in *Environmental Facts*, the festival that makes up act three, scene two is based on real traditions. The people at the shrine are the pilgrims who overrun Moclín each year for five days of celebration of Cristo del Paño. By night, women bring offerings to the shrine in hopes of becoming pregnant, while the men come to sleep with the women allowing “miracles” to happen. The town’s men are there to have sex with married women desperate to become pregnant. The town’s women come to make offerings to the shrine, watch over each other, sleep with men other than their husbands, and to take part in the celebration. Within the play, song and dance call forth the devil and his wife, represented by a male and a female performer, to bring fertility to the women at the shrine. In this place and time, behaviors which would normally be illicit are promoted and accepted. This scene of Carnavalesque demonstrates an alternate community in which Yerma and Juan take part. Here Yerma could leave family honor in the day light and find fertility with another man in the night. The Pagan Old Woman specifically invites Yerma to go with her son. Yerma is appalled at the suggestion that she would sleep with another man even at the festival. The pilgrims’ joyous drinking, singing, and dancing creates strong contrast to Yerma’s dark mood. Their excess gives her permission to act in a way that she would not normally.

The only other figure who appears onstage is a child. Yerma’s dream child is ever present in her mind; the feeling so strong that he manifests physically onstage. He is what Yerma wants and what drives her action throughout the play. The cries of the child visit her when she is with Victor in act one, scene two; she believes she would have had a child if she had married him. In this moment, Yerma hears the child from her alternate future dying as if drowning in a river. Again, the life-giving water turns destructive. In

the final moments of the play, Yerma says she has killed her child when she kills Juan because her chance of motherhood is gone.

### *Images*

The imagery that Lorca creates is expansive enough to fill volumes of writing with various interpretations. In this section I focus on the major imagery that lead to the concept for the play: flowers, blood and poison, and water. These represent the feminine world as well as referencing the *gitano* culture he admired.

References to flowers are found throughout the play, representing the fertility of the land in Yerma's village but more importantly the passion and fertility of the people. The Washerwomen make multiple analogies to flowers when they talk about their husbands returning home from nights with the sheep and how they will celebrate the end of their separation. However, in the first scene Yerma uses a reference to flora in a different way when Juan brings up the gossip in the town. She says, "when the rain falls on the rocks, they soften and make the wild mustard grow, and people say it's useless... But I can clearly see its yellow blossoms moving in the breeze."<sup>32</sup> Yerma has not lost hope and believes she and Juan will conceive a child, she is the water which will soften the rock that is Juan's family history of not producing children. Even on a rock the mustard plant is able to grow; while people find the plant useless, Yerma appreciates its existence and its beauty. Like the water, early in the relationship Yerma believes her love will grow with Juan and create the child of her dreams.

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<sup>32</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 114.

In relation to children and life, Yerma often discusses blood and her body; her desire to bear children comes from her body and courses through her veins. Yerma tells María that suffering is part of having children and seeing them grow up. She says, “Every woman has enough blood for four or five children, and if she doesn’t have them, it turns to poison, as it will with me.”<sup>33</sup> Throughout the time passing in the play María, and the audience, watches as this statement becomes truth. The life force that Yerma holds in her body begins as a light but turns to darkness the longer she is barren. The poison takes over, causing her to become angry and depressed; she grows more defiant towards Juan. Then, based on María’s description in act three, Yerma goes quiet and unmoving. The defiance turns to acquiescence while the poison continues to course through Yerma; it is in this state that she talks of becoming a torrent of water and washing away Juan and her sisters-in-law.

Throughout the play, water imagery is used by Yerma as a representation of life. Yerma recommends that Juan swim in the river or stand in the rain because he is “growing backwards.”<sup>34</sup> The child that she sings for is coming from the “ice at the mountain’s crest;” the child will come when “the fountains leap, and the river runs.”<sup>35</sup> The child that she imagines while talking with Victor in act one, scene two, is crying because he is drowning. Yerma compares her barren state to being dry and thirsting for water, while women with children “swim in sweet water.” The location Lorca chooses to present women gathered to gossip is the river as they are washing clothes. The

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<sup>33</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 115.

Washerwomen all have children and the river is a metaphor for the life that flowed and continues to flow from them. Laundering is the domestic duty that allows the women to get out of the house and share their experiences with one another. They can also spread the “news” that they have learned in their part of the town. Yerma’s song about her body giving life references “two warm springs” as “fountainheads of milk,” meaning that life flows through her breasts into the child.

As Yerma becomes more desperate in the play the water turns from life to death. When María asks Yerma how she is getting along with Juan and his sisters, Yerma says that she can become a “torrent of water” that will sweep them away. Then as Victor is saying his good-bye to Yerma, she has “hated the water from these wells.” In the final scene, after Yerma has killed her husband, she says her body will be “dry forever,” she has killed her one chance to have the life-giving waters flow from her.

### *Metaphor*

My analysis of character in the play led me to conceive of Yerma as a river. Yerma’s embodiment of motherhood, despite never having her own child, is equivalent to a flowing river giving life. Additionally, the most fertile character in the play, the Pagan Old Woman, describes conceiving children and giving birth like water flowing. In the first scene Juan is parched earth focused on getting to work rather than caring for himself. Yerma waters him with nutrition, laughter, and affection in her effort to join together with him in creating fertile land. She is a gush of joy when María reveals her pregnancy; Yerma hydrates María with advice, support, and love through her words and her sewing skills. With Victor, Yerma is like whitewater rafting, exhilarating and slightly dangerous; together they navigate between the rapids of personal happiness and familial honor.

In the second scene with Pagan Old Woman, Yerma acts more like a stream in July looking for the mountains waters to fill her shores; she needs the Pagan Old Woman to fill her up by solving her problems. When she meets the two Girls, she lets them know their waters are not for play when they have responsibilities at home. Like the tide, she pushes Girl 1 to return to care for her child, while pushing back at the selfish attitudes of Girl 2. She returns to a fully flowing river with Victor's arrival; then she begins to spray back when Juan accuses her of inappropriate behavior. All this time Juan is acting as a dam, directing her where to go and what to do, primarily holding her back in her home. He adds supports to push against her waters by bringing his sisters to live with them. Yerma still finds cracks and crevices to flow through the dam escaping to revive herself at the fountain and to engorge her waters at Dolores's home.

With María in act two, scene two, Yerma states that she could be a torrent of water that washes the sisters away. Her life-giving nature threatens those she has nurtured in the past, suddenly her banks are running over. She frightens María, almost goes too far with Victor, and demolishes the dam by leaving to see an outcast woman in the middle of the night. Dolores and the Old Women offer her hope and calm her waters by participating in the ceremony and allowing her to speak her mind. However, when Juan arrives, he tries to control her flowing waters without realizing he is trying to gather the high waters of the Genil River in spring with only a bucket. After Yerma allows her voice and frustration to wash over everyone, she dries out of energy, regains her composure, and washes out of the room.

In the final scene, Yerma has hidden the fast-flowing waters deep inside with a surface of calm water. She joins the other women in asking God for a child in the part of

the festival that is honorable. When the Pagan Old Woman again wades into her waters offering a new home and an illicit relationship, Yerma begins to pull the woman into the deeper parts of her riverbed. The Pagan Old Woman surfaces unscathed and moves on. Juan is not as fortunate; when he approaches, he wades into the middle of her waters, she guides him further and further from land where her deep, rushing waters overcome him and she pulls him underwater to his death. With this act she shifts the path of her waters to a completely different direction.

### *Conclusion*

A thorough analysis allows the director to take apart the pieces of the script and exam them closely. This allows the director to understand how the plot, character, ideas, and other components are constructed and how they work together to make a whole play. From there the director creates a concept, or unifying idea, to guide the decision making. The next chapter will address how the concept is applied in the production process to create cohesive designs.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Collaboration with Designers

#### *Introduction*

This chapter illuminates the process of collaborating with designers to create the physical elements of *Yerma*. With the director's concept in mind, the design team begins exploring various ideas for the world of the play, continuing to refine until a final design is realized. This chapter documents discussions, decision-making, and challenges in each technical area. The research and analytical work from the previous chapters guides the collaboration between director and designer.

#### *Concept*

The director uses a concept as the unifying idea to guide choices of artistic elements. Each script provides a wealth of themes and ideas that a director must prioritize in order to narrow the focus of the production. To express this focus, a director chooses an image, phrase, or object as the concept to stimulate collaborators. After completing an analysis of the script, I chose an image as my concept for the production. Along with determining the concept, it is important to consider the playwright's style. The director and design team determine how to implement that style during the design process.

My process to determine the concept image began with a line from the script. In act one, scene one, Yerma describes the rains softening a rock to the point a mustard plant grows on it; she finds beauty in this blossom that most people find to be useless (see

inspirational research image Figure A.1). There were many ideas in this image that spoke to who Yerma is as a character and to the story of the play. Although rocks and stones have a solid structure, water can break them down. Rivers create their own path, not allowing the earth to direct where the water's shores lie. Rather, the water cuts through earth and stone creating canyons and beaches. Humans try to manage the water, containing it in reservoirs and dams but the water tears on these manmade fixtures. In Yerma's description the rock will remain infertile without the rains; but with water, a representation of womanhood, the rock, a representation of the man's world, gives life to beauty. While Yerma says her neighbors will not appreciate the mustard plant because it is not useful, she sees that the plant provides beauty as it waves in the wind. The image of water's power to make the hardest terrain fertile became the focus of my concept and the idea for the set. After working through these different ideas, I determined the concept for the production was a river coursing through the countryside. Just as the characters were each considered in relation to the concept that Yerma is a river, the designs would reflect this central image.

Lorca wrote *Yerma* after *Bodas de Sangres* and before *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. The style of *Yerma* reflects a level of surrealism that falls in the middle of the rural trilogy. As I worked with the designers, we had to consider how surrealist our production would become, and which elements would express the non-realistic moments. The set design was intentionally stylized, while the costume design remained more fully in reality. The elements closest to the actors, namely costumes and props, were more realistic to ground the show. The setting and time of *Yerma* are important elements and while we do look into Yerma's distorted view of life at times, the production concept was



based in the physical reality of her life and connection to the earth. Using literal costumes and props would ground the world of the play in reality and allow us to explore the moments when Yerma's truth overtakes the world. Having the actors in realistic costumes handling real props would help ground them and the audience in the real moments. The set, music, movement, lighting, and sound would live in both real and stylized worlds. Moving into the rehearsal process, I would choose an acting style that works with the design.

### *Scenic Design*

The set designer and I had initial conversations in the summer of 2019 via video conference. I expressed my concept image for the play as a river. With the images of a river, rocks, parched earth, and plants in mind, we talked about shapes that would create Yerma's world. With water and natural elements as our focus, straight lines and corners would not be desirable. We wanted to create a sense that, like a river, the actors and the scenery could flow onto and across the stage. Indirect lines of the set would symbolize the organic patterns in nature and the feminine world. The curved lines of the female body are described throughout the play, the set would reflect this female quality. Additionally, the lines would express the indirect power women hold, in contrast to the direct power of men. In our meetings, we focused on two different ways to create flowing movement onstage. We discussed using a doughnut revolve that would allow characters to flow on and offstage. The idea of water onstage was also introduced but initially seemed unlikely due to practical considerations.

In September, we had our first face-to-face meeting, incorporating research from my trip to Fuente Vaqueros and Granada. At this meeting, much of our discussion was

about making the natural world present onstage. A sense of reverence for the earth were evident in both my reading of the script and in my visit to Fuente Vaqueros. The rural community subsisted by working the earth to grow food, water plants and animals, and clean themselves and their homes. Even when the characters are indoors, their actions and worries are based in nature. Shops would close and homes were shut off from the intense light of the sun; the villagers respected the power of the sun and the tradition of siesta still occurs. Villagers were outdoors primarily during the cooler parts of the day. I visited many restaurants which were empty inside because most people dined under the stars and moon after dark. I wanted to bring to the set this sense of communing with nature. The question became, which elements of the natural world did we want to put onstage.

Other images that recurred in early conversations with the set designer were the Spanish tiles and terracotta shingles. However, these were all manmade elements. As the design developed, we decided they did not fit well into the natural world we placed as a priority. The colors of the tiles and shingles are present in the costume design.

Our set design ideas were strongly based in reality, but this would change as we considered various drafts of the set. We turned to an image from Fuente Vaqueros as a model for the look we wanted to achieve. The Genil River flows from the mountains past the city across the countryside to Granada (see inspirational research image A.2). I walked the stretch closest to the village and found a spot where I could almost picture the washerwomen. Further down, I found a flock of sheep drinking the water and resting in the shade. Plants and rocks were at the edges of the river and at times within the full flow of the water. Using the photos, we moved closer to a final design. We imagined a river

coursing through a flat surface that would have a mountain in the background like the photos of Fuente Vaqueros.

Given that the play also has scenes which occur indoors, we had to resolve how to place both onstage. We chose to mix the indoor and outdoor spaces, choosing weathered furniture that could be an old table and chairs inside or sun-bleached wood outdoors; the lighting and sound design would help indicate the location to the audience. As we worked in realism something seemed not to fit the play. It became clear to me that we were leaning too real for a Lorca play which falls half-way between the surrealism of *Bodas de Sangres* and the realism of *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. How would we represent the broken world that Yerma perceived?

One of the photos from Fuente Vaqueros that the set designer and I were drawn to depicts deteriorating buildings where tobacco was dried after harvest. The buildings had a cement block foundation structure topped with an a-frame roof. Between the foundation and roof were slats of weathered wood spaced inches to feet apart in the outer walls of the structure (see inspirational research image A.3). The weathered wood of these seemingly deserted buildings felt appropriate for our set initially; we discussed many ways to incorporate the slats in the backdrop and within the set. We struggled to fit the straight edges of the rectangular shapes into the natural world we had focused on in the rest of the set; we considered many places and methods of incorporating the slats. The designer brought forward the idea of a broken mountain-scape painted on the slats. This broken landscape inspired a move towards a more symbolist look for the final set design. While the slats did not end up in the final design, the idea was an important part of our process.

During this part of the production process, the set designer created a piece of art in response to the play. The piece held the blue and green tones of Spanish tiles and of the natural world, but also featured lines like webbing that broke up the background. Where the slats from the tobacco buildings were too straight for our concept, the webbing pattern was the organic fit we needed. The pattern reflected the cracks of barren earth and emphasized the brokenness of Yerma's world. Once this discovery was made, the designer began to sketch. They created a theatrical world of rocks, river, and mountains then overlaid a webbed pattern to stylize the real elements.<sup>1</sup> After we determined the pieces that would be part of the design, we discussed color. Returning to the concept image of the parched earth led us to a golden brown as the base color and a dark brown for the webbed pattern. This became the rough plan which we would experiment with and refine to become the final design.

To address the challenge of a flowing river, the designer suggested creating a raked platform. They sketched an organically shaped stage area that was smaller than the Mabee Theatre at the Hooper Schaefer Fine Arts building where the production would be performed. The edge of the raked area nearest the audience would touch the true floor while the point furthest from the audience would rise to approximately two feet. The rake would allow the mechanics of the river to be placed at stage height as well as create many leveled acting areas. The raked platform would have the natural look of the rest of the set; it had no straight lines. The raked portion of the acting area would leave a flat surface at

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<sup>1</sup> "Chicago Style for the Singular *They*," *Chicago Manual*, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://cmosshoptalk.com/2017/04/03/chicago-style-for-the-singular-they/>. A writer (or speaker) may also use *they* to refer to a specific, known person who does not identify with a gender-specific pronoun such as *he* or *she*.

the stage directly in front of the audience. The designer and I determined the flat surface would indicate indoor spaces for the majority of the show; lighting would support this scenic design choice. Lighting would have a separate look in the house on the flat areas than in the raked stage area which was outdoors

The final design was dynamic and carefully crafted both in the ideas and in the 3-D model (see scenic design scale model image A.4). The river feature began with a waterfall that cascaded down rocks then moved down and around to a large pool. The raked stage provided rock formations for seating and walking. A ground row of rocks at the back of the rake masked the actors' entrances and exits providing the image that the characters were truly entering through the rocky countryside. Behind the rocks we included a mountain to further trap Yerma in her village. A black cut-out drape prevented the straight lines of the proscenium from cutting our backdrop and cyc feature into rectangular shapes.

The process of moving the set from model to full scale begins with the designer creating detailed drawings which the technical director uses to build each element. Once the process of creating technical drawings was complete, construction could begin. Our organic set pieces created some challenges. The river form and mechanisms were the first pieces installed. Around the river, the raked platforms were installed and covered with muslin in preparation for painting. The paint crew mixed sawdust with paint to disguise the fabric and rectangular edges. The dried sawdust and paint created roughness giving the impression of rocks worn by the elements. Measurements for exact cuts were difficult, the shapes in the model and set were curvy. The plywood platforms needed to appear natural. There was some variability from model and drawing to the full-size

objects. The actors and I adapted to the differences including the reduced size of some spaces on the raked stage and on the open floor.

We had accepted having a river with a waterfall onstage would create a lot of ambient sound. The model had rock formations that eased the river's flow incrementally down to the base level. When the river and stage were built, sound dampening rock formations were not initially installed at the spot that the water entered the stage. Therefore, the water fell straight down about four feet creating noise. The technical director and set designer worked together to adapt the existing framework with the limited remaining materials. They positioned cross boards in descending heights and increasing distances from the source of the water. Pool liner was attached across the wood framing to create earthen formations in the river. All of this dampened the water sound but concerns about the volume continued to challenge the design team until opening night.

### *Costume Design*

The faculty costume designer reached their 200<sup>th</sup> production with *Yerma*. The designer is known for extensive research and a love for folk costuming, a great combination to have on this production. The placement of the production at the beginning of the semester meant that a new group of students would be joining costume crew and would be in the early stages of learning how to sew. For this reason, and because the cast included 27 people, it would not have been possible to completely build all of the costumes. The costume designer and shop manager decided they could commit to building three full looks from start to finish; the remaining costumes would come from the stock collection. The designer chose to build *Yerma*'s two costumes and the female

flamenco dancer's costume. For the rest of the cast, the designer searched through costume storage to find pieces that fit the characters, period, and style of the play. Maria and Yerma would be the only character to change clothes; the costumes would reflect the journey of the two women. Although four years pass during the play, the remaining characters would not change costumes from one scene to the next. The costume shop could not provide enough costumes to change all of the characters. Additionally, we felt the audience's willing suspension of disbelief would accept this convention.

While walking along the Genil River in Fuente Vaqueros, I found the dirt road was littered with broken, discarded tiles and multi-colored rocks that pressed through the dirt. There was a great sense of beauty to the varied colors and I took photos of the refuse and rocks. One collection of broken tile work particularly caught the costume designer's eye and became the color palette for all of the costumes in the play (see research images A.5 and A.6). The pieces included the vibrant blue on white that I saw in the tile motifs at most homes. Because of her connection to water, this blue became Yerma's color. The vibrant green became Maria's color due to her connection to fertility and plant life. The older broken tiles on the roadway had more subdued colors of grey-blues and distressed terra cotta that became the colors of the Washerwomen and other townspeople.

With the Washerwomen as a form of Greek chorus and a collective onstage, we decided to costume them in similar elements and complimentary colors. Rather than dresses like the wives of landowners, the washerwomen would wear shirts, skirts, and aprons in different fabric patterns. This look was consistent with the research we found of women whose husbands were not land or flock owners (see inspirational research image A.7). The costumes would indicate their lower to middle class status as peasants in the

Spanish village. Like a traditional Greek Chorus, the costumes would link the characters whether they were all together onstage or in different parts of the set as they are in the final scene. The Washerwomen were also united by the surreal masks they wore which is discussed later in this section.

The gravel-scape included vibrant colors in some tiles including yellows, teals, pinks, and oranges that fit the “colorful” Romani people. Dolores’s costume was our interpretation of a research photo of a real Gitano woman (see inspirational research image A.8). The Old Women at the ceremony with Dolores would have clothing with more color as well representing their connection to both the townspeople and to Dolores’s world. These two characters were not fully involved in Dolores’s culture but rather lived in the town and held the same beliefs. They had costumes from the dusty shades of the color palette with accents of bold color that demonstrated their existence in two worlds.

The costumes helped to distinguish the characters’ different socio-economic classes. We determined that the costumes for Yerma and Maria would ground us in the 1930s; these two women were higher class and Yerma could have sewn fashionable womenswear for them both (see costume renderings images A.9 and A.10). Yerma’s and Maria’s dresses were obviously new while the Washerwomen’s costumes reflected a sense of age. The men’s costumes distinguished the townspeople from the Gitanos. Research photos showed many men working in the fields and farming in white button-up shirts, slacks, and vests. At first the actor’s shirts were very white and crisp looking, with a little dye the costume staff were able to soften the texture and color to look well cared for but used.



With the majority of the costume design finished, costumes were pulled from stock. The cast had a number of fittings to find stock pieces that were the best fit for their bodies. Then items were altered as needed to our actors. Adornments such as lace and embroidery were added to set the costumes in 1930s Spain.

The stylized moments and Festival scene were opportunities for specialty costumes including masks. The opening and closing dream moments were enhanced with bull horns. Each year the town of Casavieja host a festival inviting surrounding villagers to dress in traditional costumes and parade through the village. The bull horns with mask are worn by carnival attendees dressed as “Tora,” other costumes include bears, wolves, and other animals or elements of nature (see inspirational research image A.11). Similar carnivals are held around Spain as a way of keeping cultural heritage alive. In Casavieja, the festival commemorates when shepherds would come from the mountains to get paid; they dressed up in costumes to entertain the town’s children.<sup>2</sup> The Washerwomen’s masks made of white fabric with eyes and mouth holes are part of a similar festival in the city of Luzon which has been held since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century if not before. The costumes for this carnival include the “Diablos” (devils), men covered in soot who wear bull horns and belts of cowbells.<sup>3</sup> The other character in the festival, who wear traditional costumes and the white masks, are known as the “Mascaritas” (masks), the

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<sup>2</sup> “Costumed Characters Converge on Spanish Town,” *Associated Press*, April 07, 2017, <https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2017/4/7/costumed-characters-converge-on-spanish-town>.

<sup>3</sup> “Carnivals This Week,” *Avax News*, February 2, 2017, [https://avax.news/fact/Carnivals\\_this\\_Week\\_28-02-2017.html](https://avax.news/fact/Carnivals_this_Week_28-02-2017.html).

Diablos are not allowed to get soot on those dressed as Mascaritas (see inspirational research image A.12).<sup>4</sup>

The masks were used in two different ways. In the opening sequence the bull horns represent the masculinity that Yerma needs to become pregnant in her dream. In the final scene, the dance of the bull who loses his horns, foreshadows Juan's death at the hands of his wife. We used the white masks on the Washerwoman to enhance the impression that Yerma was increasingly feeling the pressure of people watching her and the sense that she is trapped. In the final scene they appear again in Yerma's dream state after killing her husband.

The final scene required some extra consideration due to the traditional pagan elements Lorca introduces. The traditional costuming for the dancers who perform as the Devil and his Wife were quite stylized. The costume designer and I discussed which elements of real festivals in Spain would be accepted by our audience in Texas. The pagan elements of the costumes worn in the actual spring festivals were dynamic visually, however we believed they would draw the audience out of the performance because a US audience would not understand the costume's meaning. For this reason, I decided to use a flamenco performance in the final scene to give the Spanish influence without alienating the local audience.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Kirkham, "He Devils of Luzon: CREEPY Pictures as Spanish Carnival Sparks Horror in Luzon," *Express*, February 25, 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/923724/Devils-of-Luzon-carnival-festival-creepy-pictures-spain-horror-Luzon-photos>.

## *Lighting*

As mentioned earlier, the success of the set design would depend on the ability of the lighting design to create distinct indoor and outdoor spaces. The lighting would also work with sound and movement to enhance the stylized moments. The process of creating the lighting design for *Yerma* turned out to be a unique situation as the student designer who completed the concept work in the fall semester did not return, leaving a faculty designer and student assistant to complete the design. The different lighting looks we discussed based on my concept and their ideas could be divided into three categories, some were character based, dream moments, and indoor versus outdoor. To enhance that idea that the audience is seeing the world through Yerma's eyes, the designer chose a color that represents the character. This color would subtly alter the general design when the character was onstage interacting with Yerma. The designer and I discussed the appropriate color for characters; we decided when María entered the world a hint of pink would be added; for Victor the light would be warmer increasing in amber, and Juan would have a dimming effect when onstage.

The set had different spaces to represent indoor and outdoor areas, aside from the final scene. The lighting design would need to support this and show a difference between sunlight and ambient indoor light. The outdoor lighting would be harsher particularly during the daytime scenes. The indoor lighting included a window gobo that helped to establish where the sun was in the sky. The intensity of light in both spaces and the lighting on the backdrop helped to establish whether the dim lighting was because it was dusk or dawn.

The dream moments offered an opportunity for great innovation and conceptualization. The designer was delighted with the opportunity to light the river and create non-realistic colors for the distortions. The design included three other main elements: side light with texture created through the use of gobos, moving lights that would create a dream-like effect, and a backdrop filled with unnatural colors (see inspirational research image A.13).

### *Sound and Music*

In regard to sound design, the student designer initiated a conversation about sounds that only Yerma could hear. From this inspiration, the composer, sound designer, and I decided to incorporate *musique concrete* in the dream moments and as a way to portray Yerma's thoughts. *Musique concrete*, or concrete music, uses recorded sounds, both natural and man-made, then manipulates those sounds to create a composition. Pierre Schaeffer originated the term to separate "music assembled from concrete sound objects and music based on the abstract medium of notation"<sup>5</sup> In the fall, the sound designer was learning to manipulate sound using Max, an interactive media software which allows the designer to connect and alter sounds.<sup>6</sup> We created a list of sounds that would be our "instruments" which would be layered to create a unique composition. Those instruments included representations of the four elements, 1) earth sounds included rocks, sand paper and chia seeds, beans, corn, and quinoa in different containers; 2) fire

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<sup>5</sup> *Musique Concrete*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* (6 ed.), ed. by Joyce Kennedy, Michael Kennedy, and Tim Rutherford-Johnson, (Oxford University Press, 2013), accessed November 15, 2019, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-6328>.

<sup>6</sup> "Products," Max, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://cycling74.com/products/max>.

sounds included sheep bleating, birds tweeting, actors singing, and baby cries; 3) water sounds included a rain stick and various sounds of water moving and falling; and 4) wind sounds including breath and wind blowing. The designer would enter the sounds of these instruments and atmospheric sounds into Max and then alter to fit the show's pitches, rhythms, and moods.

There were three categories of sound which we determined we would use in the production: atmospheric, those in Yerma's head, and those in Yerma's dreams. First, we listed realistic sounds that would set us in a rural community in Spain and were indicated in the script. The realistic atmospheric sounds included the elements that were related to animal care such as sheep bleating, sheep bells, and shepherds calling on the conch shell. Sound was also used to help indicate time of day to the audience including a clock chiming, different birds calling, cicadas, and other insects. These elements helped to create the real world which was at the base of the production.

The second category of sound was what Yerma heard in her mind while interacting with the real world. These sounds could be real or just in Yerma's head; they are separate from the third category because the sounds were not accompanied with lighting changes. The script specifies one moment when Yerma hears a baby crying but Victor does not hear it. We added this sound in additional key moments of the play when Yerma was experiencing the deepest yearnings for a child yet had not escaped into a dream. Some of the atmospheric sounds were enhanced in the heightened romance moments when Yerma is with Victor to demonstrate her mood and how, for her, the world was altered by his presence.

The final category of sound was those heard during the dream moments in the production. These primarily occurred during the movement sequences at the beginning and the end of the production, along with Victor's dream appearance. Using Max, the sound designer altered sounds that were part of the first two sound categories: the "instruments" previously mentioned, and recordings of the live music. The designer composed these elements into musique concrete based on the actors' movement sequences and the mood we wanted to create. Rather than using the main speakers in the theatre, the designer and mentor placed speakers in different locations in the audience. Then the designer patched different sounds into different locations; audience members in each section heard a unique arrangement.

The first time we incorporated the soundscape was in week four. Initially we wanted to have the cast respond to the sound design and enhance the movement collaboratively. However, at that point the cast did not have time to devise; instead the sound was adapted to fit the movement.

### *Composed Music*

From my initial reading of the script which indicated characters were to sing verse lines, I thought of the "poetry" as being sung. This is the approach the composer and I proceeded with; where indicated the characters would sing. This seemed appropriate for Lorca's style. In addition to being a poet and playwright, he was known for his great talent as a music composer. Should he direct Yerma it seemed obvious he would have included songs in the tradition of Andalucian music. We considered the different styles of sung music in Southern Spain including traditional guitar, flamenco and cante jondo, Moorish influences and the Iberian Fado sounds.

As the composer and I discussed the different distortions, heightened romance, and working songs, we came to determine which music style to use for the different moods. The working songs would be based in traditional Spanish guitar. The heightened romance moments would be grounded in flamenco to indicate an intensified mood. The distorted moments would use *musique concrete* with sounds from the other styles to build an alternate reality.

To begin the composition process, the faculty composer created motifs that illustrated the moods of the play and elements of Spanish culture that we could incorporate. By December a number of the scripted songs were written then tested with the actors who would be performing them. From there, the composer adjusted the pitches and notes to best fit the actor's voice. For the most part the students learned the music quickly and were able to embellish their songs as they gained skill and confidence. The composer and I wanted to create more music moments to help express the time change between scenes and to cover a quick exit and entrance for the actress playing Yerma. The students learned these numbers later in the rehearsal process, but we were confident based previous experience that the five students involved could learn the songs for the performance.

### *Props*

Properties, or props, are the items that the actors handle in the course of a performance. Props have many purposes that support the set design, acting, and directing. A good properties person is as involved in creating the look of a show as the rest of the design team. The props person is responsible for the final items that appear in a performance. They also support a production by providing props during the rehearsal

process allowing actors to incorporate the object comfortably. Additionally, the director judges in rehearsal if prop a is right for a scene.

There were a number of props that added positively to the overall performance of *Yerma*. Some of those items were specified in the script, while others were added as a result of discoveries in rehearsal. For the opening dream sequence, I chose to present Yerma with other women all of whom were pregnant. She dreams of having a child and friends with other women. The women in the scene wore pouches filled with fabric under their aprons. In the dream the women “give birth” to flowing water by pulling the fabric out of the pouch. The women proceed to create a gentle flowing river around Yerma as she gives birth. As Yerma’s dream child arrives, the women swaddled their fabric waters and exited.

The Washerwomen scene was in the real world and required real washing items for the women at the river. Originally the women were only using buckets, brushes, and soap to wash the clothes. I found a research photo that showed a fully wooden wash board that was used in the 1930s at the river. Women put the board partially into the water and leaned their elbows on the top. I had hoped that the rock surfaces would allow for the women to rub wet clothes on them, but the set could not handle that repeated abuse. The washboards gave the women more activity and a surface they could scrub on.

### *Conclusion*

The months of developing and refining ideas with the design resulted in a cohesive plan. The concept guided the process and the world of the play was unified. The next step was to bring the characters alive by adding the actors. The next chapter will address the audition and rehearsal process.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Rehearsal Process

#### *Introduction*

Having completed the work of creating the world of *Yerma* with the designers, the next step was to incorporate the actors into the production development. During the rehearsal process, I planned to use the same collaborative approach that was successful with the designers. From the first rehearsal, I encouraged students to bring their own ideas about character and story rather than looking to me for the “right” answer. I encouraged the cast to incorporate elements of character analysis that they were familiar with including given circumstances and objectives. However, because the play is not traditional realism, I had additional questions for them to consider. Those questions included: how does Yerma view your character, how does the community view your character, what is your character’s purpose in this play, and what does your character represent in the story? We would discuss the answers to these and other questions over the following weeks.

#### *Casting*

Incorporating the actors into the theatrical process begins with casting. For *Yerma*, I asked that auditioning actors prepare a paragraph from the script and a song. Female identifying actors prepared two paragraphs, one from the title character and one from the Pagan Old Woman; this would allow me to apprise their range and ability to play different types of characters. Male-identifying actors prepared one of Juan’s

speeches and a song. Juan's physicality is described specifically in the text, the men's physical look would also be important in casting. The first night we auditioned most of the department's performance majors. The second night we called back a smaller number of actors to work with in different settings.

The format for night two included learning a song, performing a scene with a partner, and improvising a movement piece. The majority of the cast would need to be able to sing, act, and perform choreographed movement; some would also need to perform flamenco and play instruments in character. In the singing portion, the composer and I were looking for actors who could learn quickly and bring their own flourish to the music while still working well within a group. In the scene work, we were looking for actors who fit the agrarian world of the play. We also needed to see the ability to stay in character when working with another actor. In the movement piece, we were looking for people who were not afraid to explore the use of their body in cooperation with fellow actors. Following these activities, faculty mentors and I discussed who was best for certain roles and who would work best within the context of our rehearsal process. After receiving approval from department faculty, the *Yerma* cast list was posted.

### *Rehearsals*

Our four-week rehearsal period was scheduled to begin when students returned from winter break; our schedule also included a week of technical rehearsal. The stage manager and I began creating a schedule in December that reflected the days we could rehearse and when we would need to take days off. Rather than planning to rehearse in the Mabee Theatre the first weeks, we planned to spend the first several days in a separate space. This would allow the technical director and crew to install the river and

the raked stage more quickly. They were already working under a time crunch because the build period was a week shorter than for other productions. The experience of working in a rehearsal space would also prepare the students for working with professional companies which often have separate rehearsal and performances spaces.

To optimize rehearsal time, multiple activities would take place at the same time. Determining who would be where, do what with whom, was a challenge. Within the play we tackled acting, movement, singing, playing instruments, and dancing. Many of the moments in the play had two-person scenes, which meant that while working small scenes the rest of the cast could be working on other areas as long as we had leadership to guide them. At times we had groups working in three different locations in order to maximize the cast's time.

The experience of the Washerwomen offers a good example of all the activities and the different ways of working. Due to scheduling, our first rehearsals were primarily music rehearsals, with the singers working with the composer/music director on learning pitches, rhythms, and style of the music. The women were encouraged to use the notes on the sheet music as a framework and to embellish the music with character and their own specific strengths. We repeated that this was not a musical where you hit all the notes as written in order to stay with the orchestra and the conductor. Our show was about making the music natural and springing from the emotions of the characters as real people would sing in their own lives. We reminded them that these women could not turn on the radio or search for their favorite singer on YouTube; the music came from within them as they staved off isolation or found the musical rhythms of their work.

The spoken lines and the song demanded two different processes with the actors playing the Washerwomen. Within their scene the characters' lines expressed alliances and adversarial relationships which Lorca did not expressly state in the character descriptions. The Washerwomen are distinguished only by a number, one through six, I created relationships rooted in the lines they spoke and Brandes' research on female relationships in Spain.

In chapter two the Washerwomen were discussed as a group, our Greek chorus. In casting the Washerwomen, we considered the actors' appearance and vocal quality. What brings the woman together is their friendship; they argue but always remain friends. They also are all married and have at least one child, except the Sixth Washerwoman who we decided was recently married and reveals she is pregnant in the scene. To distinguish each woman, I looked at the different opinions expressed about Yerma in the scene. There were clearly varying camps among the women. This helped me begin to create different characters. For example, I noted pro-Yerma and anti-Yerma sentiments in this exchange between the women:

First Washerwoman: It's his fault, his! If a man can't give his wife children, he'd better keep an eye on her.

Fourth Washerwoman: It's her fault. Sha has a tongue that could sharpen knives!

First Washerwoman: What the devil has got into you head to make you talk like that?

Fourth Washerwoman: Who gave your mouth permission to give me advice?<sup>7</sup>

From there it became clear that the Fifth Washerwoman was an ally to the Fourth; they both know details of the latest gossip:

Fourth Washerwoman: The husband is going out to the fields again.

First Washerwoman: Can I just know what happened?

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<sup>1</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 142.

Fifth Washerwoman: She spent the night before last sitting on the doorstep, in spite of the cold!<sup>8</sup>

The Fourth and Fifth Washerwomen also both know that Juan brought his Sisters to live in his home and watch Yerma and they believe that Yerma desires another man.

Based on the research on female relationships in Spain, I decided the most outspoken Washerwomen – the Fourth, Fifth, and First – were old enough to be bold and in the know, not mature enough to be discreet. I determined they were the older characters placing them in their late 20s. I cast the more mature looking actors in these roles. The other three Washerwomen seem more naïve and less strident in their opinions; I determined they would be younger, in their early 20s like Yerma. I decided the Third Washerwoman had a familial connection to the First Washerwoman; these two characters had the same lack of knowledge but were inquisitive about the latest Yerma gossip. To justify these lines in the script, we imagined that the Third Washerwoman had recently married a younger brother of the First Washerwoman's husband.

Finally, the Sixth Washerwoman is the least outspoken. She has no spoken text only lyrics in the song that express a sense of innocence. She sings, "So that a child can fuse/ Crystal shards of dawn," and "The new dawn that my child/ Is wearing on his apron."<sup>9</sup> As scripted this character arrives late and misses the gossip about Yerma; I imagine her as a recent addition to the group who only joined the others after her marriage. This kind of specificity and use of imagination helped the student actors develop their portrayal of their Washerwoman character.

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<sup>2</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 139.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 147.

I encouraged the actors to play the relationships of the Washerwomen in the subtext of their lines and overtly only when appropriate. The result was a strong adversarial relationship between One and Four with the others taking sides or trying to be peacekeepers, very realistic roles in a group of women then and today. Within and between the lines, the actors began to add looks, water splashes, and vocal responses that were appropriate to their relationships. I chose to cast two actors who can make strong choices in these roles to facilitate this interpretation. We discovered where group laughs felt justified, not just where they were in the text and how to create the scripted outburst of all the women talking at the same time. The actors found motivation for their change in attitude toward each other when Juan's Sisters enter the scene; they may bicker with one another, but they have a common enemy in the upper class. When the Sisters are washing, the Washerwomen join forces to make them uncomfortable and get them to leave.

The Washerwomen's song had its own challenges that we faced in the rehearsal process. Concern about sounding perfect was an obstacle to communicating the intention of the song. After they learned their music, we asked the actors to make their character prominent rather than the musical notes; this was a hard thing for students of Musical Theatre. To overcome this problem, we looked at their sung lines dramaturgically and paraphrased what they were singing. The actors initially misunderstood the song lyrics because they did not think a play with numerous sexual innuendos would be part of the mainstage season. In speaking with them about the meaning of the references to flowers, husbands returning, and "moaning on our bed sheets," the song's bawdy content became clear. They seemed to need permission to understand the text in a sexual way. I

encouraged them to embody the lyrics not just sing them. The characterization continued in the song lyrics; older characters spoke frankly about their intimate relationships with their husbands encouraging the younger characters to be bolder. For example, the Fourth Washerwoman sings: “He’s coming on the breezes,/My husband, to bed./ My gillyflowers are crimson./His gillyflower is red.”<sup>10</sup> Gillyflowers are an archaic name for carnations which are the romantic equivalent in Spain to giving a red rose in the U.S. In Spain the color matters as well, if you truly love someone you will give them bright red or crimson carnations. We helped the students to understand that a reference to red flowers are often a reference to genitalia. With this increased understanding, I told them to determine how they would perform their lyrics if there was no music; they were to return the next rehearsal only speaking the text and portraying the meaning that way. It was a challenge to get the music out of their heads, but they returned with excellent results overall. In rehearsal they were pushed to incorporate the expression they used in speaking and transfer it to the singing. We continued this work and the actors began to really forget about the notes and pitches; they told stories and made each phrase appropriate to their character and a response to previous phrases. In the end this was one of the most successful scenes as the women worked together and presented vivid characters and told the story of life in the small village.

The chorus of Washerwomen existed in both the real and surreal world. They were real women who wash clothes or stay home; in these moments they could watch all that happened in Yerma’s home and on the street. The women came onstage in masks that gave them a surreal look; as Yerma’s break from the real world increased, these

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<sup>4</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 145.

surreal observers came closer and increased in abstraction. The masks were addressed in chapter three under costume design. Along with the Washerwomen, the male musicians were a strong presence onstage throughout the play. They signified that not only the women were watching Yerma, but that men gossip as well. The musicians' presence also provided underscoring to scenes and when Yerma sang; they covered pauses while characters entered and exited helping the play move from scene to scene.

Helping the two lead actors through the process of developing their characters was an enjoyable experience. The woman playing Yerma would develop the skills necessary to carry the show. Part of the challenge in playing Yerma is modulating her emotional journey. Each scene must build from the previous but also allow room for the following scene. The actor and I discussed the different levels of emotion in each scene. We determined what level the emotion starts where it changes, and finally at what level the character ends the scene

Both of the lead actors worked to build their level of emotion and intensity. The actor playing Juan had some personal obstacles to overcome in order to find Juan's dark side. We found props and physicality that helped move the actor forward. In act two, scene two, we thought that Juan could have a pocketknife which he would use to express his anger at his Sister. The act of cleaning his fingernails with the knife then pointing it at the actor playing the Sister helped find emphasis and feel power. The directing mentor suggested the actor complete push-ups before he entered for act three, scene one. The physical activity pumped up the actor for the scene in which Juan slaps Yerma.



### *Rehearsals and Music*

During the rehearsal process, the guitar players in the cast along with the music captain began working with a specialist in the style of Spanish guitar. We wanted actor musicians to understand the style of Spanish guitar and be able to incorporate that style into the compositions. Our goal was to empower the musicians to enhance the base chords with stylization and their own strengths to make the underscoring and music specifically their own. Some of the instrumentalists and singers took advantage of this freedom more than others. Two guitarists and the violin player were going to be onstage much of the show to play underscoring and support the singers. They are an example of the success of empowering the students to imprint themselves on the music and the overall production. The composer and I charged the three musicians to improvise music when they felt it would help support what was happening onstage. For example, many times in the play a character exits Yerma's house and then another character is meant to enter shortly after. The musicians began to play under these transitions determining themselves when and what to play. From there the composer and I were able to give notes to the musicians about which times they played worked, when their choice for mood was appropriate, and if the duration of the music was effective; the musicians' work in this area is an excellent example of how actors were actively engaged in making artists choices in the rehearsal process. A specific moment of strong choice by a performer is seen in act two, scene two. The actor playing guitar added underscoring for the fight between Yerma and Juan which helped support the dramatic tension in the scene. The guitarist created this moment himself based on the other music in the

production and his knowledge of the style. We finessed his composition slightly and ultimately kept it in the final production.

The composer and I wanted to create more music moments to help express the time change between scenes and to cover a quick exit and entrance for the actress playing Yerma. The students learned these numbers later in the rehearsal process, but we were confident based on previous experience that the five students involved could learn the songs for the performance.

The amount of music in the final production of *Yerma* felt appropriate, but the rehearsal plan should have taken this into consideration. The rehearsal period was appropriate for a play that ran one hour and forty-five minutes. However, the four weeks before technical rehearsals were not sufficient for a play that incorporated more than ten songs. Rehearsal time focused on character development and scene work was decreased to give more time to the music. I tried to keep both music and acting rehearsals within the four-hour rehearsal period. In retrospect, I should have worked more with the composer, music faculty, and students to find more time outside of the evening rehearsals to work music. The actor playing Yerma did take time to meet outside rehearsal to work on her solos, but had we been more strategic from the beginning all singers would have done the same. I also made the mistake of not meeting with the composer, music captain, and support faculty on interpretation of the songs.

One challenge of the script is it includes many two person scenes and ends with a big festival. When considering translations, there were versions of *Yerma* that cut the number of characters, but often these translations were not true to the original work in language choice. My plan when proposing the play was to double cast many of the

characters to keep the cast smaller. After I decided to use the Washerwomen as a Greek chorus, appearing onstage throughout most of the show, the doubling opportunities decreased. As design work progressed, the costume designer advised that in a double cast show, actors need two costumes, in that case it would be equal labor to cast more actors. The result was a cast of 27 which I was able to use to create more of a sense of village life. The actors in smaller roles provided opportunities to show relationships in the play's community. When Juan leaves to go to the flocks, for example, he joined other men headed to the fields, displaying a comradery among the men. According to the translation's stage directions, the only males who appear onstage before the final scene are the child, Juan, and Victor. The world of men is evident in the final scene: by adding more actors, we created a stronger male presence in the world of the play. An audience in 1934 Spain would have felt the invisible presence of men, our modern audience required additional reminders.

There were other relationships between characters that I wanted to introduce before the actual scripted scenes in which they appear. I felt this was important to establish the intertwined relationships of people in a small village. Marià's character attends the festival with Girl 1 but their relationship is not established until that final scene. I added a pantomime moment when Marià, Girl 1, and Girl 2 meet and Marià shares the news of her pregnancy; the three women celebrate as Yerma mournfully looks on from the window. Early in the play, to indicate Dolores is outcast in the community, I had her cross paths with two of the Washerwomen who turn away from her greeting. Without adding text, these moments gave the impression of a bustling community right

outside Yerma's door, a community that she was isolated from due to her own strange actions and lack of acceptance of her infertility.

Finally, the large cast allowed me to put more bodies onstage for the festival giving the feeling that there were hundreds in attendance just as the text describes. The real festival that this scene is based on, encourages attendance by a range of people with different beliefs. The men are the first to exclaim their presence at the festival; they sing: "I couldn't see you,/ When you were single,/ But now that you're married,/ I will find you."<sup>11</sup> The men are there to find barren wives to impregnate after midnight which is the tradition for this festival. This is confirmed by the Pagan Old Woman who later in the scene tells Yerma, "Women come here to find other men. And the Saint performs the miracle!"<sup>12</sup> After the men's song, the women sing a prayer asking for fertility. These women leave offerings at the shrine in order to pray for children for themselves, their familial relations, and for women in general. They sing, "Lord, let all the roses bloom,/ Don't leave mine in the shade!"<sup>13</sup> They ask the Cristo del Paño to cure infertility because, as Yerma says, a country wife's purpose is to bear children. The Romani characters and musicians are at the festival to entertain the collection of people who gather to admire the traditional Spanish flamenco dance and singing. The Sisters pray to the Saint for a child for Juan and Yerma but are also there for the performance. Had the cast been a total of only twelve, this variety of opinion and activity would not have appeared onstage. With 27 actors in the final scene, the mood was more festive and startled the audience. The

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<sup>5</sup> Dewell and Zapata, *Yerma*, 174.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

large numbers also foreshadowed the enormity and gravity of the events to come in the final moments. I was pleased at the effect of blanketing the stage with people and surrounding Yerma, keeping her trapped, at the end.

### *Blocking*

Staging a show with both intimate and large group scenes challenged me in different ways. My process for blocking a scene with one to five people is usually to let them move in the space and determine moments that create strong pictures for the audience. As we work through the scene and play different tactics the movement in the scene evolves. I tell the actors what definitely does not work and what is best in regard to props, vocalization, and storytelling; eventually the movement is set. This approach is often referred to as organic blocking. Hopefully the actors maintain the blocking in future runs and take notes about changes as the rehearsal process evolves. Organic blocking worked effectively in some scenes, for example, act one, scene two between Yerma and the Pagan Old Woman. Part of the discovery with this scene was the shoes; the espadrilles were initially challenging for the actors to put on. We had blocked the scene to have the Pagan Old Woman take both shoes off and put both feet into the river. Within the scene she would put her shoes back on, move to Yerma, and still have time to return to the sewing project she had in her basket.

When the actors first began working with the espadrilles, however, they took a long time to get on her feet properly. We first set the blocking to move forward when the shoes were tied on, but when we began tech rehearsal, putting on the shoes took too long. I gave the actor a note to only take one shoe off and then hit particular places on the stage during her conversation with Yerma. The more she worked with the shoes the faster she

was able to get them on. I realized we could go back to the original idea of taking two shoes off because she was able to get them on fast. The movement of the Pagan Old Woman from seated with feet in the river to shoes on and seated downstage center was not set on a particular line in the scene, rather we allowed it to happen whenever she had both shoes on. Both actors handled the variation well, and in performance the timing of the movement in the scene became consistent. Allowing the actors to work through this problem, to find a solution was successful.

We struggled with discovering organic blocking for the two person moments in act three, scene two, because the actors habitually worked in straight lines not diagonals. In scenes with two actors, Francis Hodge suggests, “The diagonal is more emphatic than a line parallel to the front line of the stage because it moves horizontally and vertically in the imagination of the spectator.”<sup>14</sup> The actor’s position in these moments was primarily before the shrine on the upstage left side of the stage. Features of the set also forced actors into less dynamic positions. A rock formation forced the actors into a flat line with one actor upstage and the other actor directly downstage of the first. We moved one rock formation to allow actors the space to create a diagonal line to the left of the river. However, the actors continued to move into a direct line, or face-to-face stance that continued to leave one actor facing fully upstage, only visible in profile to two sections of the audience and blocking the view of the actor facing downstage. I encouraged placement of greenery at a location that I thought would force the actors to create a diagonal line when conversing at the base of the upstage left rock formation. Despite

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<sup>8</sup> Francis Hodge, *Play Directing Analysis Communication and Style* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 106.

these two scenic alterations and notes to create a more dynamic line, the actors continued to find themselves in a straight line in profile to the majority of the audience. In hindsight, letting them stay organic did not work.

Another struggle with blocking the small scenes was the proximity between actors. The young actors wanted to be physically close to their scene partner the majority of any interaction. During indoor scenes this was partially due to a lack of footprint, but the problem persisted during outdoor scenes. This proximity should be saved for only climatic moments. Hodge states, “When they are close together (less than 6 feet) they are in a climatic composition.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on to say, this closeness, what Hodge calls the kiss or kill zone, should be reserved for moments when the characters are about to embrace or about to fight. I reminded the actors that from the audience’s view the space between them seemed much smaller than it feels. However, perhaps due to the lack of space onstage for indoor scenes and the lack of stage experience of the cast, there were still moments in which the actors’ physical proximity was too close when not climatic.

Blocking scenes with large numbers of actors takes a different technique. With large groups, I find myself setting the blocking ahead of time, telling actors exactly where to go and when. I often move figures around a model of the set to create positions, although inevitably things look different in full scale and adjustments are made. This is usually known as paper blocking. Hodge encourages blocking ahead of rehearsal in some cases, stating a director, “can improvise in the quiet of his study without all the confusion

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Hodge, *Play Directing Analysis Communication and Style* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 112.

and speed of a rehearsal situation.”<sup>16</sup> Hodge counsels this should be a “pre-examination” that is investigated with the actors in rehearsal. Paper blocking should not lock the director or actors into final decisions, but rather provides, a starting point from which the director can test their initial ideas and refine them with the collaboration of the actors. This was the only scene that used the full stage space and all of the entrances to the stage.

This process was effective in *Yerma* as we worked through the full cast scene. By providing a starting framework, staging the festival took less time. The blocking evolved as the actors created stories and added to the boisterous mood. I wanted a real sense of people coming and going from the central location where the shrine is placed. I hoped to create a sense of community, people mingling with different people over the course of the scene. The Washerwomen are an example of the interaction. They did not arrive to the festival as a full group; instead, they were broken into pairs and given various times to enter the stage. They then find times within the scene to greet each other, as you would with a friend at a party, but they do not stay with one another exclusively. The Second and Sixth Washerwomen arrive together and initiate the Women’s song at the shrine. Throughout the scene, they greet the other Washerwomen, then separate and proceed to different locations onstage to view the flamenco performance. In the meantime, the First and Third Washerwomen pray at the shrine, then choose to begin a conversation with one of the Gitano men. The Sixth Washerwoman watches the performance with one of the Sisters-in-Law. The Fourth and Fifth Washerwomen bring in extra mugs of wine, they say hello to the Third and Sixth Washerwomen, share their extra drinks with

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<sup>16</sup> Francis Hodge, *Play Directing Analysis Communication and Style* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 156.



townspeople, and sit to watch the performance together. The Washerwomen interact with all types of people onstage demonstrating the communal nature of the event and how the activities at the festival do not follow the same rules of decorum found in the everyday interactions of the village.

As we worked on the murder in the final scene, the location changed as we discovered the best and safest area of the stage to use for this action. During the design process and in the rehearsal space, I imagined the death sequence with Yerma and Juan downstage center and the crowd upstage from them. When we moved into the actual set, I realized I had blocked the ending for a proscenium stage rather than the thrust space. I first thought about moving the ensemble and spacing them out, but spacing the actors to allow the audience to merely “peek” through, was not desirable. After exploring different places on the stage, I decided the upstage right rock formations would be most effective and provide the best view for the whole audience. The upstage rock flats had not been installed yet when we worked the murder. Once they were installed, we did not have enough space upstage right to move through our choreographed fight sequence. In stage combat it is important that the actors are always in control of their bodies while portraying a sense of being out of control. We ultimately moved the murder upstage left where there was more space for the actors to get their footing. Space considerations are very important for fight sequences. The size of the rock landings and the location of the rock flats allowed for a safe, repeatable, physical moment.

As a result of these changes in location the ensembles position was also altered. They ended up having a place on the stage to which they were assigned during the major events of the final scene. Those events were: their particular entrance, the women’s

chorus singing, the flamenco dance, the bull ritual, and Yerma's scream. The actors determined their own motivations their assigned spots and to arrive there at the appropriate time. This is a good example of a successful blend of organic and paper blocking. The result was the scene felt lively when appropriate and provided focus where it needed to be.

### *Thrust Stage*

I enjoyed working in the thrust space of the Mabey Theatre; having audience on three sides creates an intimacy I greatly appreciate. The audience positioning means actors need to move around more than may seem natural, but this also leads to more realistic body positions. They found it challenging not to face fully upstage at times. Although two groups of audience can see the actor, the view is only in profile and no one has a full-face view. This struggle may be due to a lack of full body awareness which is common in teens and young adults. I kept working with actors to find angles rather than straight lines when talking to each other. We also worked on not having full eye contact with a scene partner. Adding in active props helped to solve this problem.

### *Technical Rehearsals*

Moving onto a set and incorporating technical elements during the rehearsal process will create benefits and challenges for any show. The costumes benefited the characterization of the actors. From the first week, I had worked with the cast using Viewpoints to discover the posture and walk of the characters they were playing; when they put the costumes on they more naturally fell into a world where men and women stand at their full height rather than slouching into their chest or hips. The women acted

with their skirts expressing joy by spinning their skirts or using the fabric to emphasize a line.

Our primary challenge was the sound of the flowing water. From the beginning, we knew it would be loud. As we began working onstage the river was not running until the fourth week for the actors to get a true sense of the sound. At some rehearsal we left paint drying fans on to acclimate the actors to the sound. As the river basin was finished and we were able to run the river, the whole team began to problem solve ways to make sure the voices carried through the theatre. The actors were instructed to slow down, focus their voice directionally, and ensure they pronounced their consonants clearly. We also worked with actors to not upstage themselves by facing their voice and body fully towards the upstage area. The faculty sound design mentor added a microphone and speaker to support the more intimate indoor scenes. He also brought in porous rocks that would slow the water and allow the water to flow more softly through rather than creating a strong obstacle. Additional rocks and a stump were used to attempt to slow the direct fall of the water but were not effective in sound dampening and removed. The technical director was able to slow the flow of the water mechanically from the pump which reduced sound, but at a certain point the sound of the pumps became audible. He had to strike a balance that allowed the water sound to cover the mechanical noise.

As we reached preview, the team and I felt we had exhausted all options for reducing sound other than turning the river off. Taking into consideration various opinions, I decide we would run the river for the opening dream sequence. Then we would turn the river off for the following indoor scene and act one, scene two, which does take place outdoors at the river. The water flow was important for the

Washerwomen scene, the water was turned on in the transition, the start of the motor was covered by music. The river was turned off for act two, scene two, which is another primarily indoor scene. With the support of the microphone and the increased intensity of the final act, I decided the river would come on at intermission and stay on for the remainder of the show. This made sense to me dramaturgically because Yerma threatens to become a torrent of water in the final scene before intermission.

### *Conclusion*

Developing the production during the rehearsal process is exciting. Auditioning and casting actors is challenging, particularly in *Yerma* because the success of the production is dependent on one actor. The acting must support the style of the designs. The director brings the script analysis to life in the actors. Then the director steps back as the production moves into performance. The next chapter is a reflection on the whole process and the responses to the final product.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Reflection

#### *Introduction*

*Yerma* was performed at Baylor University in the Mabee Theatre from February 18 through February 23, 2020. There were a total of seven shows, five of which were almost at capacity. Overall, the production was successful. It received positive comments from patrons and faculty alike. A patron sent a text message on February 24, 2020 saying, “I can’t tell you how much I enjoyed *Yerma* yesterday. Everything from the set design to the costumes and the performers were so good. Props to the director. That last act was breathtaking.” While such feedback is encouraging, it is not formative for me as a director. In an effort to elicit a more critical and useful evaluation, I looked to my professors and mentors. They offered assessment of my work throughout the process of developing this production and notes on specific directorial choices. Informed by this critique, the following chapter presents a self-analysis of my personal strengths and opportunities for growth as a director.

Much positive feedback has been given regarding the performance of the actor playing Yerma, the look and sound of the production, and the impact of the final scene. These are three key elements of the *Yerma* script. The spirit of the performance was true to Federico Garcia Lorca’s legacy.

Audiences engaged with the show right from the beginning as they connected with Yerma sharing the joy of pregnancy with the Washerwomen in her dream. The

opening movement piece and song portrayed Yerma as a part of the community. She celebrated with the other women as she gave birth and received the child she wanted. As the production moved forward, the audience was intrigued by the presence of the Washerwomen onstage. In the real world outside of Yerma's dreams, their presence without text achieved the effect of contrasting Yerma to other women in the community. The unity of action and costume portrayed a group of women who belonged together while Yerma was primarily alone aside from her complicated relationship with Maria. The audience found the Washerwomen entertaining thanks to the outstanding performance of two of the Washerwomen in particular. Women reacted strongly to the washing scene, perhaps recognizing themselves and their friends. The joy that the Washerwomen took in their song extended into the audience and brought smiles to many. Faculty feedback regarding the Washerwomen was especially positive. One faculty member even commented that he was going to steal my ideas and the way I used the Washerwomen as a group chorus. The Washerwomen were successfully used to provide more eyes and attention on Yerma by having them on stage for most of the performance. Adding the surreal masks to the women and placing them on stage looking directly at Yerma's home provided an even greater sense of eeriness of the community closing in on her. It also helped to convey to the audience the sense that she was becoming less in touch with the real world.

Many audience members had strong positive reactions to the climactic, large festival scene. The humor of the men's song to the wife and their direct engagement with the audience, provided full tonal change from the previous scene. The flamenco song and dance, with the full participation of the ensemble, felt as if the audience had arrived at the

festival. Audience members commented specifically on the acting skill and vocal quality of the actor playing Dolores.

The final moments of the play included a stylized movement piece and a shocking murder. When Juan physically assaults Yerma, audiences often responded with audible gasps. Many audience members were shocked and surprised that Yerma killed her husband. In response to the murder scene on opening night, one audience member was overheard saying, “I’m scarred for life now!” During the closing movement piece audiences felt the weight of despair as Yerma says she killed her son. An email from a patron stated:

I just wanted to say a quick congrats on a successful production! I enjoyed the play and thought you did a lovely job directing. The ending literally had me in shock. Every prior event made so much sense because of it, but also, it was quite the plot twist. Again, I appreciate you and everyone else involved in helping Baylor put on this!

This quote sums up two important elements about the final scene, 1) as written, the scene has many challenges and 2) the overwhelming audience reaction.

The scene at the Shrine was challenging to me as a director and for the audience. This scene had a large number of people onstage and deviated morally from the rest of the play causing some confusion in the audience. As discussed, the play before this scene is scripted as many moments between two to five characters but in the final scene the stage is suddenly filled with people. To lessen the contrast of a whole community onstage for one scene, I added the Greek chorus’s presence and the movement of the villagers in various scenes throughout the play. Also, the ending was shocking for many in the audience. Viewers imagined many scenarios, including Yerma’s suicide, in the end. They were shocked when Yerma instead kills her husband which led to many unanticipated

responses from the audience including laughter. Lorca gives little to no resolution to this moment which also unsettled the audience often leading to a long silence in and after the blackout at the end of the play.

I was particularly honored to receive high praise from two native Spaniards who separately attended two different performances. They stated that they greatly enjoyed the show and the style was appropriate for a play by Lorca. I knew I did the script justice to receive such feedback from natives of Lorca's home country where he is a much-beloved playwright. I think the strengths of the project are related to my good choices in research and collaboration and my willingness to make some hard decisions.

### *Research*

A key element that contributed to the overall success of this project was the depth of my directorial research. Before the work of the actual production, I had the opportunity to go to Spain to research the culture of village life in Spain, the background of the playwright, and the historical context of the play itself. This research created volumes of images and experiences that I was able to share with the design team and the actors. I was better able to convey the true atmosphere of a small Spanish village due to my own experiences being in Fuente Vaqueros. I was fortunate to stay in the home of an *española*, a female Spaniard, who was willing to tell her story. Eighty-six years after *Yerma* was written, many of the cultural expectations of gender still persisted in village life in Spain. Along with my personal experience in Spain, I did extensive reading in preparation for the rehearsal process so that I was able to properly convey to the actors what a 1930s Spanish village would have been like for men and women. Additionally, sharing further research on gossip, and drawing on my own experience growing up in a



small town rife with gossip, helped the Washerwomen to better understand their characters. While there was a common misunderstanding among some cast members about the life of the Roma people, for those who welcomed conversation, I was able to explain this community's complex place in Spain both historically and today.

### *Collaboration*

The overall production had many people working on it to create not only the usual design elements, but also the additional music, instrumentation, and dance. The creative team included a combination of faculty members and first-time student designers. Early on I brought together the whole design team to express my concept, begin brainstorming ideas, and answer their questions. I held regular design meetings, inviting everyone to share progress on their own designs and to comment on each other's design work. Although I had the final authority, I wanted to use the expertise of each member of the team to improve upon my initial ideas. With the student designers, I sought to be a positive mentor, pushing them to work harder and expand their thinking, and to overcome their reservations and insecurities. Knowing that my organizational skills are one of my strengths I worked hard to ensure quality, efficiency, and clarity of direction. This was particularly appreciated by the stage management team who were both students and reported to me that they felt empowered and supported by me as a director. The actors also appreciated this quality and stated that they felt the rehearsals were well organized.

This focus on collaboration was especially useful as we tried to solve the issue regarding the sound of the river on stage. During technical rehearsal the music director and I worked with actors to build their skill, projection, and articulation. At the same time the designers and technical director brainstormed and attempted many ways to soften the

noise created by the waterfall, from microphone placement to adding components to the river to help absorb the waterfall's sound. The presence of the water on stage added to the overall effect of scenes and was a central element of the production. Using a collaborative approach, we were able to use the running water extensively while also ensuring the audience could hear and connect with the actor's dialogue. The technical director expressed his concerns for the pumps having to be turned off and on numerous times. Therefore, we tried to limit the number of times it had to be turned off during the show to three. We hoped that the pumps would sustain throughout the run. It was truly a team effort to incorporate the river while ensuring the audience was able to enjoy the full show with all of its dialogue.

The actresses who portrayed the Washerwomen seemed enthusiastic about working in a way that was more collaborative. However, often, due to their lack of experience, they would not make choices for big bold action for their characters. As both the composer and I encouraged them, and confirmed their ideas, they seemed to grow and offer more variety in their performance. The successful combination of their acting and singing with big expressive actions made the hard work and collaboration in rehearsal worthwhile.

My goal as a director was to take a collaborative approach with the design team, actors, and faculty advisors and mentors. However, I also knew it was my responsibility to lead the production and make final decisions when necessary. I welcomed feedback from everyone involved and used it to help shape the production, but ultimately held the authority to make directorial decisions in accordance with my vision created from extensive research. In teaching the cast the movement piece for the closing scene, while I

had the vision, my cast had the knowledge to utilize an eight count for teaching the steps. Applying this feedback helped create a more fluid piece.

### *Decision-Making*

I made changes to a central part of the stage design, the river, based on responses from my faculty mentor and others during technical rehearsals. At our departmental preview, despite our best efforts, the audience had difficulty hearing the actors during intimate scenes in the house. In order to improve the audience experience, we needed to make a change. The design team had run out of ideas and I decided that the river needed to be turned off in order for the audience to be able to hear the dialogue during the more intimate scenes. While the scenic designer was upset by this choice, I needed to make the ultimate decision and determined that ensuring a positive experience for the audience was more critical. This was a tough decision because the water feature was a highlight and one of the first elements that we placed into the design.

At times I also needed to make artistic decisions, even if they were not always well received initially. One of these decisions was regarding the opening scene. During the rehearsal process, I was encouraged to cut the opening movement sequence. I chose to keep the element with some changes after receiving specific notes. My original vision for the production included a dream sequence, as suggested in the script. I expanded on the idea, incorporating a song from the script into the opening dream sequence. The celebration of pregnancy and women felt true to Yerma's character and the dream she had for her life. In the dream, she became part of the women in the community and she gets the child of her dreams. I believe the movement and the sound worked well together with the lighting to create a moment of happiness in the dream. The incorporation of

stylized movement and surrealist sound was true to Lorca's surrealist writings and was appreciated by audiences based on feedback received after the production. The cast movement captain, who has expertise in dance, felt that the scene was a very appropriate opening to the show. The cast, as a whole, appreciated starting off the show with positivity to help audiences feel compassion for Yerma.

Another artistic decision in which I needed to assert my director's position was with the final movement piece and the soundscape that went with it. Like the opening movement and sound, I was encouraged to cut the moments because the audience would not understand it. I felt strongly that the surreal movement with the sounds told the story of the community's reaction to the murder in a way that could be understood. Perhaps the audience would not know precisely what each gesture or step meant, but the overall emotional impact was clear. The progression was grounded in storytelling of how the spectators at the festival would feel. The spectators did not acknowledge the murder and Yerma's words in a synchronized manner, rather the crowd made realizations at different times. This was expressed through the varied focal points during the movement until the final look to Yerma. I felt that the movement was appropriate to the cultural traditions of Spanish performance that I viewed in Granada. The stylized physicality, abstracted sound, and spiritual song were elements I saw at a performance celebrating Lorca while I visited Spain. Audience response, both in the theatre and later in written comments, demonstrated it was an effective ending.

### *Areas for Improvement*

Having had the opportunity to reflect on feedback from mentors, design team members, and collaborators, I have identified three key areas of weakness in my direction

of the production of *Yerma*. The first concerns choices in the floor plan for the show's set, the second relates to how I gave notes to actors, and the third involves my ability to assess and communicate about music needs.

In the model of the scenic design, the space between the raked platform and the audience appeared to be larger than the area actually was when built. When we first started working onstage, I realized the amount of space the actors had to move in was quite tight for the three indoor scenes. The result was repetitive blocking patterns and limited the desirable angles for a thrust stage. The small space did create a sense that *Yerma* was trapped in a small home while the larger world was just outside her door. However, this theme would still have been portrayed with a larger set area. Looking back, once I realized the space was difficult to work in, I should have met with the technical director and set designer to discuss removing some of the raked stage to increase the square footage for indoor scenes.

I also learned an important lesson about meeting the needs of actors throughout the rehearsal process. While working in close proximity with actors at the beginning of the rehearsal process, I had many opportunities to give positive notes. The nature of these rehearsals allowed me as the director to more consistently respond to what they were doing well. As rehearsals progressed, I began looking at the wider picture and moved physically further from the actors into the audience area. To shape and finesse the blocking and scenes, I gave fewer encouraging notes instead focusing on the actions or interpretations that needed improvement. The result was an unintended loss of morale for some actors which affected their work and our collaboration. I have learned from this

process and will be more aware of balancing positive and corrective notes in future directing projects.

The third area for improvement I determined after reflecting on the final production was the handling of the music in the play. While the original music was mostly successful, some numbers were stronger than others. The most successful songs were the Washerwomen singing at the river, the added song at the top of act two, and the music in the final scene. The transition music and underscoring by the guitarists and violin aided the movement between moments in scenes and from scene to scene as well. The work on Spanish guitar style helped remind the audience of the location and culture of rural Spain. In considering Yerma's and Victor's songs, I see now that they would have benefitted from the work that was successful with the Washerwomen. I have described earlier in this thesis about the process of rehearsing the Washerwomen song with a focus on interpretation and storytelling rather than beautiful singing. Yerma's first song could have been more playful keeping the mood of the scene lighter. This was the intention of the composer which he suggested at the beginning of the rehearsal process. Yerma's second song, meant to express her anguish, did not go far enough emotionally. These two numbers would have been better received if the focus was less on the singing and more on the character's storytelling and emotion. Victor's song in rehearsal and performance varied from night to night. The actor playing the role sometimes indulged too much in the beauty of the song and his own voice. The song was much longer and slower than was helpful to the story. Additionally, the repetitiveness of the lyrics and need to have him stationary while playing the guitar resulted in a slowing of the momentum of the scene. I should have assessed these shortcomings sooner and

communicated with the composer to find solutions that would have improved the production as a whole.

### *Conclusion*

Many elements of the *Yerma* script excited me from the first time I read it. The female protagonist, Washerwomen characters, dream elements, and music offered many possibilities for me as a director. Additionally, presenting a play from a country with a strong theatre history that is not often staged in the US was exciting. Visiting Spain was a vital element of understanding Lorca as a playwright and the theatrical style of Spain. The primary research I did in Spain, along with my work on historical and critical resources supported and shaped the directorial vision for this production. Overall, the production was successful in process and in performance. Many of the individuals involved in the production were challenged by their participation and developed artistically as a result; this is particularly true of me as the director. I will take the lessons from this production with me in my future theatrical work.

## APPENDIX



## APPENDIX

### Research and Design Images



Figure A.1: Research concept image #1 – parched earth from <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/germany-schleswig-holstein-desiccation-cracks-at-the-ground-news-photo/545012029?adppopup=true>



Figure A.2: Inspirational Photo of Genil River in Fuente Vaqueros (dry period).



Figure A.3: Inspirational Photo of tobacco shed Fuente Vaqueros.





Figure A.4: Scenic design scale model.



Figure A.5: Inspiration research image of gravel in Fuente Vaqueros.



Figure A.6: Inspiration research image of broken tiles in Fuente Vaqueros.



Figure A.7: Inspirational research image for Washerwomen.





Figure A.8: Inspirational research image of Romani woman.



Figure A.9: Costume rendering of Yerma's looks.



Figure A.10: Costume Rendering for Maria's looks.

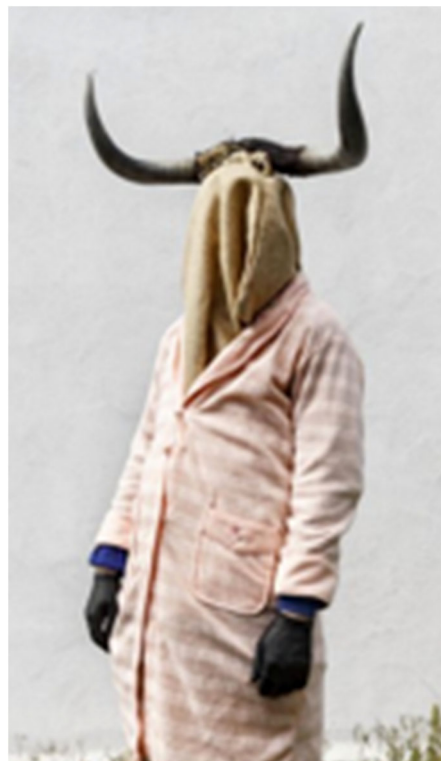


Figure A.11: Inspirational research image for bull horn mask.



Figure A.12: Inspirational research image for Washerwomen's masks.



Figure A.13: Inspirational research image for lighting in Yerma's dream world.

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