

“Where love can have its way”:
Conformity versus Resistance in Brendan Kennelly’s Version
of Federico García Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*)

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Abstract. Considerable critical attention has been paid to Brendan Kennelly’s versions of the ancient Greek plays, *Antigone*, *Medea*, and *The Trojan Women*, while his version of Federico García Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*) has largely been ignored. This article examines the ways in which Kennelly’s *Blood Wedding* challenges fixed gender patterns and traditional social codes. Thus, although set in 1930s rural Spain, the play resonates with issues that have for long been central to Irish identity. Linking Lorca’s artistic concerns to Kennelly’s, and locating the play within areas of great importance to Irish feminism, which questions traditional constructions of womanhood, the article argues that Kennelly’s play proposes a resistance to dominant behaviour, represented as highly restrictive, as well as to the unquestioning conformity to oppressive norms that prevent women, and men, from leading fulfilling lives. In other words, the article suggests that the play ultimately voices the possibility of change, the driving force of which lies in a kind of sisterhood. The play therefore takes part in a questioning and a renegotiation of Irish identity.

Key words. Brendan Kennelly, Federico G. Lorca, *Bodas de sangre*, *Blood Wedding*, Irish drama, Irish identity, Irish feminism, resistance, gender

Resumen. Las versiones de obras de teatro griego antiguo de Brendan Kennelly como *Antígona*, *Medea*, y *Las Troyanas* han recibido una cantidad considerable de atención por parte de los críticos, sin embargo su versión de *Bodas de sangre* de Federico García Lorca ha sido en gran medida ignorada. Este artículo examina la forma en que *Bodas de sangre* de Kennelly desafía las pautas establecidas de género y los códigos sociales tradicionales. Así, aunque la obra de Lorca se desarrolla en la España rural de 1930 sus temas se hacen eco de cuestiones que han sido durante mucho tiempo el centro de la identidad irlandesa. Vinculando ambos autores a través de temas relevantes a la naturaleza del arte y asentando la obra dentro de áreas de gran importancia para el feminismo irlandés, que examina las construcciones tradicionales de la feminidad, el artículo sostiene que la obra de Kennelly propone una actitud de resistencia al comportamiento dominante, representado como sumamente restrictivo, así como a la conformidad incondicional a normas opresivas que impiden a las mujeres y a los hombres la realización de vidas plenas. En otras palabras, el artículo sugiere que la obra en última instancia expresa la posibilidad de cambio, un cambio cuya fuerza motriz emana de una especie de hermandad. La obra, por lo tanto, contribuye a un cuestionamiento y a una renegociación de la identidad irlandesa.

Palabras clave. Brendan Kennelly, Federico García Lorca, *Bodas de sangre*, *Blood Wedding*, teatro irlandés, identidad irlandesa, feminismo irlandés, resistencia, género.

There is little doubt that Brendan Kennelly's reputation mainly rests on his poetry, particularly the long sequences *Cromwell* (1983; 1987), *The Book of Judas* (1991a) and *Poetry My Arse* (1995). It would be fair to say that many of his early as well as late poems have a dramatic quality; *Cromwell*, for example, relies on exchanges between the main speakers, Buffún and Cromwell, and both *The Book of Judas* and *Poetry My Arse*, and indeed his later works, are permeated with voices and conversations overheard in the street and in public as well as private spaces, capturing the ruthlessness but also the humour in human interaction. In his preface to *Familiar Strangers: New and Selected Poems 1960-2004* (2004), Kennelly reiterates his belief in the need to open up to voices:

Some forty years ago, I began to understand that poetry is a house of voices, that objects need voices as people, ideas and feelings need them. Furthermore, it is the damaged and outcast, the unforgivable and unspeakable who need voices most of all, perhaps, because these very voices – repulsive and horrific though they may be – help us to understand our own mysterious humanity, or lack of it. ... Listening to a voice means making a space in yourself, deepening your capacity for surrender to such things as difference, diversity and memory, which are three strong sources of challenge and stimulation (18).

Given his openness to voices, it is not a coincidence that parallel to his large poetic output in the late 1980s and 1990s, he wrote versions of four well-known plays: *Antigone* by Sophocles (1986; 1996a), *Medea* (1988; 1991b) and *The Trojan Women* (1993), both by Euripides, and *Blood Wedding* by the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca (1996b). It is the last of these that is in focus here; more specifically, my discussion deals with the ways in which the play represents, on the one hand, conformity to social pressures and, on the other, how it proposes a resistance to these pressures.

As many commentators on Irish drama point out, for some considerable time there has been among Irish dramatists a fruitful creative attraction to canonical plays from other countries and time periods, or as Nicholas Grene puts it, “there has been a felt need to assimilate into Irish terms theatrical borrowings from abroad” (1999: 266). This

attraction has resulted in a large number of plays, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, but also earlier and more recently, which are either fairly close translations of their originals or reworkings of them. Not surprisingly, perhaps, classical Greek plays seem to have a special appeal since, Grene argues, “Greek tragedy is a sort of common theatrical joint stock, borrowable and adaptable at will in all ages and countries for different local purposes” (1999: 266); Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990), an adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984), a version of *Antigone*, together with Kennelly's three Greek plays, are but a few examples of Irish dramatists' contemporary exploitation of Greek drama. If the use of Greek plays may not be surprising, Grene claims that “the perceived affinity between Irish and Russian drama, above all Chekhov, is more remarkable”, and he goes on: “Versions of *The Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* by both Friel [1981 and 1995 respectively] and McGuinness [1990 and 1995 respectively] in each case, a *Seagull* (1981) by Kilroy, Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* [1987] and his play *A Month in the Country* [1992] adapted by Friel, all represent a special sort of Hibernicising appropriation of nineteenth-century Russia” (1999: 266). Furthermore, in 2008 Friel also wrote a version of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* to great critical acclaim. Thus, Kennelly turning his attention to Greek, and indeed Spanish, drama in the 1980s and 1990s is in keeping with the trend of rewriting international canonical plays for a contemporary Irish audience, presumably because the cultural and political concerns represented in these plays are perceived to be analogous to concerns in a contemporary Irish context.

Of Kennelly's four plays, critical attention has almost exclusively been given to his versions of the three classical Greek plays. Of these, in turn, *Medea* seems to have gained most critical acclaim and was awarded one of the most prestigious prizes at the 1988 Dublin Theatre Festival, the Critics' Special Harveys Award. John McDonagh, for instance, in his *Brendan Kennelly: A Host of Ghosts*, refers to *Medea* as “arguably the most successful of his three plays” (2004: 108). However, not everybody agrees and Kathleen McCracken instead holds that “*The Trojan Women* is

Kennelly's strongest work for theatre to date" (1994: 140), while Anthony Roche devotes considerable space to Kennelly's *Antigone* in his exploration of the three versions of *Antigone* by Tom Paulin, Aidan Carl Mathews and Kennelly respectively, arguing that "[w]hat adds to the interest of his version, particularly as it reflects however wittingly on the contemporary state of Ireland, is the proximity of its writing to the major work of his career, the long poem *Cromwell* ..." (1988: 238). It is worth noting, though, that while Kennelly's Greek plays have been the subjects of considerable critical discussion, *Blood Wedding* has so far hardly received any attention, at all. Nevertheless, even if critics do not agree as to which play constitutes Kennelly's best work for the stage, there does not seem to be much disagreement with the notion that his plays broadly explore similar issues, focusing on gender politics, particularly women's oppression by men and how women deal with this situation.

While most of Kennelly's critical writing, as in *Journey into Joy: Selected Prose* (1994a), mainly focuses on male Irish writers, his creative writing demonstrates a deep interest in women's experience. As McCracken argues, "much of Kennelly's writing attests to an acute listening and giving voice to women" (1994: 116). In fact, she even goes as far as to suggest that women's experiences constitute an "obsession" (1994: 116) and especially "women's fight, women's rage – a paradoxically empowering, creative rage – against centuries of oppression and exploitation of men" (1994: 116). Significantly, then, to McCracken 'rage' "is a key concept in Kennelly's treatment of women. It is a term which invariably implies a degree of physical or psychological violence ..." (1994: 118). Indeed, she even suggests that central to much of his creative writing is a "feminist-oriented agenda" (1994: 122), which steadily moves in the direction of "more overt cultural criticism" (1994: 122). In other words, it is a kind of criticism that recognises the fact that women – for Kennelly, particularly Irish women – are "still victims of men's language" as well as of "turgid, humourless, self-important 'morality' ... emanating from Maynooth and other places", a way of thinking he also terms "pious tyranny" (Kennelly 1994b: xx-xxi). This 'tyranny' manifests itself in a number of ways, and it would be fair to

argue that one of the most important consequences is the exclusion and silencing of women at almost all levels in Irish society.

However, this situation is not unique to Irish women, and Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt argues that "women's familiar world has historically been devalued, the hearth and home to which they were relegated deemed intrinsically less important than the more public world of 'masculine' pursuit ..." (2006: 2). Still, even if, broadly speaking, the position of women, as Pat O'Connor suggests, "is not peculiar to Ireland" (1998: 106), the situation of Irish women is arguably different from that found in many other western countries because of "the consensual character of [Irish] culture" (1998: 106), for example, the fusion in important ways between state and church. O'Connor argues: "The influence of the Roman Catholic Church, culturally and socially, is still considerable in Ireland and, in collaboration with the state, it has continued to foster a particular definition of the position of woman" (1998: 3).

Most importantly, historically Irish women have been perceived as domestic creatures suited to take care of the home. This view is clearly expressed in the 1937 Constitution, which has shaped the lives of and the attitudes to generations of Irish women. In articles 41.2.1–2, we can read:

1. In particular the state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties within the home (qtd. in Scannell 2001: 72).

Yvonne Scannell holds that the dominant perception and interpretation of this article is that it defines the essence of womanhood, strongly implying "that the natural vocation of woman (the generic is used, so it means *all* women) is in the home" (2001: 72; Scannell's emphasis). Ideologically, then, there is little doubt that "the state endorses the desirability of women's full-time work within the home" (O'Connor 1998: 46). It means that the state has systematically excluded women from paid employment, which in turn maintains women's economic dependence on their husband. Moreover, the "equation of male with skilled

work and female with unskilled work” (O’Connor 1998: 56) reveals a desire to preserve the male dominated structure of society. Evelyn Mahon agrees and calls Irish society “a predominantly patriarchal society ... because of its traditional stance on reproductive rights and the low participation of women in the labour force” (1995: 675); she also points to “[h]egemonic Catholicism ... and a state employment policy which discriminated against women in employment” (1995: 675) as principal reasons for the strongly patriarchal nature of Irish society.

If the state has upheld an ideology which has viewed women’s economic opportunities as secondary to those of men, the state has also been keen to control women’s bodies, illustrated for example by the repressive attitudes to contraception and abortion. As is known, until 1979 contraception was prohibited, but in 1979 legislative change allowed “condoms to be available on medical prescription for “bona-fide family planning purposes”” (O’Connor 1998: 51); only as late as in 1993, condoms were made available in vending machines. And as is also familiar, abortion is in effect forbidden, Ireland having some of the most restrictive laws in Europe. Both these issues illustrate the role the state has played in reinforcing the status of women as child-bearers and mothers.

As O’Connor contends, “caring, reproduction and familism are key elements in the concept of womanhood” (1998: 108) in Ireland. Not surprisingly, these attitudes to women and to womanhood are reflected in the public arena when it comes to employment. If women were employed, they were so in “a small range of paid occupations which”, O’Connor suggests, “can be viewed as ‘simply’ an extension of their domestic and familial activities – manifestations of their ‘essential’ female nature – rather than as activities requiring skill and/or training” (1998: 101). Their work, she goes on, “usually involves ‘service’, i.e. caring (e.g. primary teaching, nursing, cleaning) ... gendered identities [that] fit easily within existing definitions of womanhood” (1998: 101). O’Connor concludes that this work is “not highly valued by the economic system”, as historically it is “devalued and marginalised” (1998: 101) by what she terms “the dominant institutional structures” (1998: 103).

However, a gradual erosion of the concepts of womanhood, as outlined above, is slowly taking place, which to a considerable degree reflects the influence of the Women’s Movement in Ireland. O’Connor argues that more and more, Irish women are beginning to say “no to ‘the morality of victimisation’, and yes to ‘the ethics of personhood’” (1998: 103), a position that insists on giving priority to women’s own needs. Irish feminists point to several possible strategies to move forward and to shift from ‘womanhood’ to ‘personhood’. Or as Katherine Martin Gray puts it: “Irish women seek to revise cultural practices so that new opportunities for women’s identities within Irish cultural identity can take shape” (2000: 271). One such strategy is what is referred to as “the family feminist” (O’Connor 1998: 103) which, as the term suggests, concerns the family unit; here “[t]he focus is on recognising women’s status as persons engaged in the highly responsible, exhausting and frequently isolated task of caring for children; on their entitlement to have that work validated and to have it shared in a non-stigmatising way, and on their entitlement to participate in other kinds of personally satisfying activities” (O’Connor 1998: 104).

Another strategy is to zoom in on the notion that womanhood cannot easily be defined and that it instead contains many diverse definitions; according to O’Connor, it

involves the acceptance of ‘difference’ – the idea that women will vary in their needs and desires, and that this diversity is an enriching rather than an inappropriate manifestation of the reality of womanhood. Implicit in it is the idea that women, whether they are in or outside paid employment; whether they have children or not; whether they are heterosexual or lesbian; and regardless of their race and class, have a reality which needs to be understood rather than be fitted into a Procrustean definition of womanhood (1998: 105).

It would not be an exaggeration to state that this kind of diversity is subversive in an Ireland that has so heavily relied on what Martin Gray calls “traditional configurations of dominance and subordination between genders” (2000: 278), as it undermines and questions men’s power and control over women.

In many ways, then, even if the situation for women in Ireland has gradually improved over the last couple of decades, it has been

characterised by exclusion from the public sphere, mostly due to womanhood having been constructed by notions such as caring, motherhood and domesticity. It is against this definition of Irish women, which to a considerable extent lingers on, despite recent changes, that Kennelly writes much of his work on women, including his plays. Or as McDonagh puts it,

The violence experienced by women in contemporary Ireland, from the overtly physical to the elision of their personal experiences, drives Kennelly's versions and injects a passion into the texts that resonates with a sharper contemporary social and cultural critique (2004: 108).

In this respect, Kennelly is arguably in line with what Anthony Roche suggests is central in contemporary Irish drama; interestingly, Roche identifies some common features in contemporary Irish drama, the most important of which is an urge towards a greater sense of freedom at the individual and collective levels. As he claims, "The best contemporary Irish playwrights are engaged in a search for dramatic means to reinterpret by re-imagining [the] past. All offer alternative narratives whose aim is liberation, a setting free of ghosts" (1994: 12). Thus, according to Roche, contemporary Irish drama is implicitly and explicitly seeking sociopolitical and cultural change by insisting on exploring and questioning traditional norms and behaviour perceived as stifling and oppressive.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance when Kennelly allies himself with Lorca and indirectly with his artistic and political position. Before his execution by the fascists in 1936, Lorca had established himself as one of the leading and most radical writers in Europe, particularly but not exclusively through his plays. As Suzanne W. Byrd writes, Lorca looked upon theatre in public and didactic terms (1991: 205); this kind of idealism at the heart of Spanish theatre was the basis for Lorca's setting up his travelling theatre, *La Barraca*, in the early 1930s. Primarily giving outdoor performances in town squares, thus bringing theatre to the people, the company was hailed as a new force. Later, when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, *La Barraca*, albeit "avowedly apolitical" (Byrd 1991: 205), was used by the Republican forces "to serve as force to boost the morale of their troops in the bitter struggle for survival" (Byrd

1991: 205) at the battle front and continued to be such a force after Lorca's death, when they also staged Lorca's own plays; indeed, *La Barraca* inspired the setting up of several similar theatre groups to act in "the battle zones to entertain the fighting forces." As Byrd notes:

[T]hese performers went into the front line areas of combat to entertain the outnumbered, poorly equipped soldiers of the Republic, and to transmit their message ... to the fascist enemy. ... it is said that their battlefield performances at times resulted in the desertion of Nationalist soldiers who elected to join the forces of the Republic (1991: 211).

Lorca, then, took part in and inspired resistance to oppressive forces and fascism before and during the Civil War. If one explores his artistic position and activities, it would seem that they are to a large extent close to Kennelly's own position and activities, as they would appear several decades later. For example, according to Moraima Donahue, Lorca, much like Kennelly, was highly critical of "the persistent habit of labelling everything we do not understand, nor are willing to investigate" (1991: 73). Lorca – similar to Kennelly's perception of the Irish middle class – saw this destructive habit as dominating the Spanish middle class "whose members", as Donahue puts it, "infect each other with the microbe of stern, narrow behaviour" (1991: 78).

Thus, there are a number of concerns in Lorca's work that are implicitly and explicitly consonant with Kennelly's own, not least the notion of the writer as a public figure and a liberating force, taking part in the transformation of society. Kennelly states in "A View of Irish Drama" that "the writer is the people's truest voice, and probably never more so than when his art offends his people" (1994a: 73). Like Kennelly in Ireland, Lorca frequently gave public readings and lectures to audiences around Spain. Particularly relevant to the present discussion is Lorca's deep interest in women's situation and their subordinate position in a repressive male culture. Leslie Stainton holds that Lorca was dismayed by the treatment of women in Spain where, as in Ireland, village mentality restricted women's lives and reduced them to domestic creatures (1998: 396-97); for example, they were denied access to higher education, they were excluded from the public

sphere, and they were not given the right to vote until the early 1930s. Stainton writes:

For years Lorca had been appalled by the plight of women in Spanish society, particularly in rural Spain. As an adolescent he had written compulsively – in prose, poetry, and theatre – of the constraints imposed on women in Andalusian villages. In their tightly circumscribed lives he saw a reflection of his own struggle to transcend hidebound social and religious convention; he saw what happens when instinct is suppressed and nature denied (1998: 396-97).

In his three plays, *Yerma*, *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, frequently referred to as his rural trilogy, Lorca focuses on the overt and covert social and religious strictures and norms that rule women's and men's existence and that cause deep frustration as well as unfulfilled lives. For instance, Carolyn Galerstein argues that central to *The House of Bernarda Alba* are "social [and] political attitudes toward women" (1985: 183). Paradoxically, Bernarda herself represents harshly traditional values, internalised to become the sole measuring rod by which life should be lived and organised. As Galerstein puts it, "Bernarda's order is the epitome of social and political order. If a person is disobedient, he or she becomes an enemy of society, an enemy of the state" (1985: 187). This view is echoed by Cedric Busette, who finds in Lorca's rural trilogy "the conditions of victimized women" (1985: 173), denied their rights by "the values of a restrictive and repressive society" which is "structurally unjust" (1985: 181). Consequently, judging from his plays, Lorca seems to put forward the idea that the Spanish society of his time is flawed, since it prevents women from living a full and meaningful life as human beings.

If this theme is central in *Yerma* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, it is not less so in *Blood Wedding*. Interestingly, Stainton points out that Lorca looked to Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) for inspiration – linking Irish and Spanish experience – and "it showed Lorca how effectively one could translate into tragedy the harsh circumstances of contemporary life in an isolated, agrarian community" (1998: 310). Perhaps it is not difficult to see why Lorca's plays about women, and especially *Blood Wedding*, would appeal to Kennelly, as they voice concerns shared by him and express realities close to

him, albeit cross-culturally and despite the fact that Lorca's play is set in 1930s rural Spain, seemingly remote in time and space from 1990s Ireland. In his preface to the play, Kennelly pays tribute to Lorca's achievement and especially his urge to resist destructive and life-denying social forces:

Lorca's daring knows no bounds; his imagination riots and orders among forces that are real, troubling and forbidden by ourselves to ourselves. He lives in, and stubbornly explores, those areas that made the recurring 'Thou shalt not' of the Commandments towering and necessary injunctions, as necessary and towering, indeed, as the impulse to rebel against the ethical tyranny of that very same 'Thou shalt not' (1996b: 7).

As the title indicates, *Blood Wedding* focuses on one of the most central phenomena in Catholic life, namely the wedding, which in turn is the ritual that cements the social and religious institutions on which traditional Catholic society rests, that is, marriage and family. It should be stressed again, though, that Lorca's play was written for Spanish audiences in the 1930s. Interestingly, however, while the realities represented in the play may seem distant to contemporary Spanish audiences, Kennelly apparently finds in it disturbing similarities to women's situation in 1990s Ireland. Arguably, the whole play revolves around the various attitudes to marriage, and it is in these attitudes that the dominant norms and behaviour are set against freedom and "untamed instincts and urges" (Busette 1985: 174). Throughout the play, social pressures and expectations are implicitly and explicitly expressed, laying bare a culture and an ethos that are repressive in nature. Indeed, in almost every exchange, references are made either to marriage and what is expected by the man and the woman respectively, or to what it requires in order to live and survive in a physical and social environment like the traditional rural world of southern Spain, and by implication 1990s Ireland.

In the preface to the play, Kennelly refers to himself as a "version-maker (a term I prefer)", rather than a "translator" (7), suggesting that his play departs from the original in significant ways. However, a comparison of his text to two texts that are termed translations of the play (Lorca 1989 and 1993) – on which I have had to rely since my knowledge of Spanish is too limited to read Lorca's play in the original –

reveals that, although obviously differing in, for example, choice of words and phrases, Kennelly's "version" is to a large extent loyal to the original as represented in the two "translations", with the crucial exception of the ending, to which I will return below. Thus, the characters correspond to the original, as do the setting, chronology, events and main thrust of the exchanges. Nevertheless, even if Kennelly's text comes across as being fairly close to the other two texts, one can of course detect Kennellian traits in his version. For example, similar to Friel's strategy of giving "most of his characters an Irish turn of phrase" in his Chekhovian plays (Tracy 1999: 69), Kennelly relatively frequently introduces what could be referred to as colloquial "Irishisms" into the dialogue, giving the play a markedly Irish slant. For instance, when early on Mother and Neighbour discuss Bridegroom's prospects after buying the vineyard, Neighbour says "He'll get married so" (1996b: 15), while in the other two texts we read "And now he'll get married" (Lorca 1993: 13) and "He'll be getting married now" (Lorca 1989: 35).

Perhaps more importantly, though, Kennelly's version seems more keen to emphasise the sexual undertones in the attitudes to the wedding and to marriage. It is particularly Servant and the wedding guests who voice the physically erotic nature of both marriage and the wedding night; for example, to Servant, Bride is a flower, "opening, opening/Again, again" (1996b: 35; 39), and she refers to the wedding night as "the throbbing night", where "Your man is a dove/With his heart on fire./The fields are waiting/For the fresh blood spurting" (1996b: 45). By contrast, the other two texts are more cautious in their expression of sexual desire; in one of the two translations Maid (as she is called in these two texts) instead says about the bride: "Let the bride awaken/with the stem and bough/of the white laurel flower" (Lorca 1989: 62), while in the other we read: "Let her awaken/By the trunk and the branch/Of the laurel in flower" (Lorca 1993: 49). Moreover, the latter two do not refer to the wedding night as "throbbing"; instead, in one Maid says "the moon is watching, watching/over the bride's white balcony" (Lorca 1989: 69), while in the other she says "Let the branches spread open/And the moon embellish/Her white verandah" (Lorca 1993: 58). Admittedly, in both these texts, the groom is referred to as a

"dove", "with a burning heart of flame" and "With his whole heart an ember" (1989: 69-70 and 1993: 59 respectively), but the physically erotic connotations of Kennelly's "fresh blood spurting" become in the other two "the spilling of your blood" (1989: 70) and "the blood that has been spilled" (1993: 59). I would argue, therefore, that Kennelly's greater emphasis on the physical and the sexual in turn implicitly underscores the deep frustration felt by several characters, since the promise of sexual fulfilment on the wedding night and subsequently in marriage is frustrated by a culture conforming to repressive norms regarding the roles women and men are expected to play.

Therefore, Kennelly's play seems to aim at creating a world where the individual is exposed and where various cultural and physical burdens weigh heavily on her/his shoulders. In order to achieve this strong sense of exposure, the play stresses the harsh existence in a hot climate and a cruel physical landscape. For instance, working in the fields is exhausting due to the almost unbearable heat:

MOTHER. Have you ever known a day of such burning heat? Such a day it's been. Such a hot day!

NEIGHBOUR. Yes, the children were worn out and black with the sun taking water to the reapers in the field (1996b: 17).

The physical environment as well as the tools needed for working the land, the play suggests, are in constant conflict with the individuals and frequently inflict pain and suffering on them. In the very first exchange, between Bridegroom and Mother, we are told that tools used for cultivating and working the land, such as knives, scythes and pitchforks, have also been used for killing Mother's husband and one of her sons (1996b: 11-12). In the same scene, we are informed that a young man's hands have been cut off by a machine on the farm (1996b: 15), further emphasising the notion that the land and the labour required for working it are violent and mutilate people. The landscape itself also seems to offer fierce resistance to those living in it. When the wedding has taken place and Father and Mother sit and discuss the future, the land is perceived as a force that has to be fought and conquered, rather than a friend or companion;

as such, the land in fact becomes an extra character in the play:

FATHER. I hope they have children in plenty. This land needs workers that don't have to be hired. This land need [sic] fighters – fighters against weeds, thistles, rocks that come from God alone knows where; and stones, endless, endless stones that would break your heart if you gave in to them. And these workers with the hearts of warriors must belong to the house, must be powerful and patient, must kill the weeds and grow the seeds. Sons! Only sons can work like that! God send them son after son after son (1996b: 47).

It is, then, a physical and economic necessity to tame the wild beast that is the landscape; if you do not, you will perish.

If the play carefully points out the enormous challenges posed by the environment, it simultaneously implies that such an environment requires and thus generates particular qualities in order to survive, which in turn helps to construct and define a particular kind of manhood and a particular kind of womanhood that this society is governed by. In other words, the play sets up a close link between the physical landscape, on the one hand, and social norms and values, on the other, showing that the two have become intertwined over time. In the first two acts, what emerges as the male ideal is one usually referred to as 'macho.' This kind of man is defined principally by physical strength and the ability to produce predominantly male children, as in Father's wishes in the quotation above. Moreover, Mother insists that her husband, and his father before him, were perfect men, since they did what had to be done, according to the demands and needs of this society; in fact, this kind of man is, she suggests, part of the natural order:

MOTHER. Your father used to take me [to the vineyard]. There was fierce, good breeding in him, the best of blood. Your grandfather left sons behind him wherever he went, strong sons at every twist and turn of his road. And that's what I love: men to be men, grapes to grapes, wheat to be wheat (1996b: 12).

Furthermore, this macho ideal produces a man who is the dominant figure in the family; he is at the top of the power structure and therefore in charge; his word is law, as Mother advises her son, Bridegroom:

MOTHER. Love her. Always try to love your wife and if she's acting bitchy or foolish or mean, give her the kind of love that hurts a bit: a rough hug, a bite, and then follow that with a gentle kiss. When you do this, do it in a way that doesn't make her angry but in such a way that she'll know for sure that you're the man, the ruler, the boss, the one who gives the orders and expects to be obeyed without question. I learned all this from your father. But he's dead and gone from you, and I must be his voice, and I must tell you what to do so that you'll be the master of your house and the king of your land (1996b: 54).

Somewhat paradoxically, this ideal, fundamental to a society in which men set the rules, is upheld and forcefully voiced and passed on to the next generation by a woman. As the speech just quoted strongly suggests, it is also a society which has sadomasochistic undertones, that is, it relies on a power relationship, often agreed upon, between, on the one hand, one part that exercises power through various acts of inflicting pain and, on the other, one part that is submissive.

The male ideal is one where physical strength, the spawning of as many sons as possible, a sound financial situation and an unquestioned position of power in the family are sought and praised; in contrast, the female ideal is one where the woman's ambitions and wishes are secondary to the man's. From very early on, the play establishes that the woman should take care of the man, for example when Leonardo's wife, being very attentive to her husband's needs, caringly asks him if he would like "a drink of cold lemon" (1996b: 20), and shows a strong wish to please him: "Is the drink all right? Is it cold enough?" (1996b: 21). The woman should stay indoors, at home, while the man goes out to take care of the land. Thus, women are represented as domestic creatures who must take care of the men and perform domestic duties within the home. Therefore, particular qualities belonging to the domestic sphere are praised; for example, when Mother and Father settle the wedding, Bride's qualities are singled out by Father, who guarantees that she will make a very good wife:

FATHER. She's a good girl. She makes the best bread I've ever eaten. She knows how to keep her tongue quiet. She's soft and gentle and

she'll work from dawn to dark with willing strong teeth can cut a piece of string in two heart and hands. She embroiders well, and her (1996b: 27).

What is needed and expected, as suggested by this quotation, is a woman who is capable of keeping the house in order, of cooking well, of sewing and mending clothes, of staying healthy, in short, of devoting herself fully to the home and the family. Importantly, Father echoes Mother's views that the woman should be quiet and not challenge the man's position and opinions.

Consequently, the gender roles in this culture are fixed and the social pressures are so pronounced that the woman knows, or at least should know, what awaits her when she gets married. Her destiny when marrying is to enter a lonely and regulated life, where the needs of others are more important than her own. Indeed, she arguably becomes a prisoner, entrapped and figuratively boxed in by pressures and literally so by the four walls. For example, Mother tells Bride, her future daughter-in-law:

MOTHER. Such a beautiful expression. You know what marriage means, child?

BRIDE. I do.

MOTHER. A man, children, and a wall that's two feet thick.

BRIDE. What more should I desire? (1996b: 28).

In such a marriage, there are, it would seem, no outlets by which to act out one's desires and personality; instead, this kind of life generates a culture of silence, which in turn results in deep frustration, principally for the woman, but also for the man. This sense of frustration is amply illustrated by the marital quarrels between Leonardo and his wife. That this kind of frustration is not unique but deeply embedded in women's situation across generations is signalled as Wife gives out to Leonardo for ignoring her:

WIFE. ... You have ditched me, cast me aside.

But I am the mother of your son. And there's another on the way. ... My mother found herself in the same awful situation. ...

And she goes on:

WIFE. I remember I left my home too – just like [Bride]. They could have packed the whole damned countryside into my mouth, I was so gapping with trust (1996b: 44).

Leonardo's wife implies here that she and women in general are locked into rigid and traditional constructions of gender. Moreover, she suggests that there is a vast difference between the ideal advocated by society, on the one hand, and the reality every woman has to face when married, on the other. Therefore, she is in a sense cheated into believing in a false image of what married life entails, in a cruel, conspiracy-like promotion of codes and norms by those who have been in the same situation.

The rosy picture persistently presented of marriage seems to have a strong hold on the members of this society. In acts one and two, society's views on the wedding and marriage are voiced by various representatives of society, most notably the bride's servant, but also by the wedding guests. These views are arguably the ones that are officially sanctioned and transferred from generation to generation. For example, to the bride-to-be, Servant voices the idea that the wedding night and the subsequent marriage are for sexual fulfilment; to her, marriage means intimacy denied her as an unmarried woman: "You're a lucky woman, your life is blessed, you'll be able to kiss a man, hug him, caress him, feel the weight of his body on yours." She goes on: "But child, *what* does it *mean* to get married? ... Marriage is a happy bed and a man and a woman, two becoming one ..." (1996b: 33; italics Kennelly's). As a single woman, we understand through her frank talk to Bride, her dream is to get married. Thus, the servant's words to a large extent represent the official version of marriage.

If Servant represents the socially and culturally correct view of marriage, and the ritual of the wedding, there are other characters through whom this view is voiced. For instance, the wedding guests, representing, I would argue, society at large, express the social pressures on individuals in their collective singing and cheering. Their chorus-like comments, with strong sexual undertones, frequently refer to the wedding night; the bride will be a full woman, and the groom is referred to as a king. For example, the woman's sexual transformation is stressed:

GUEST. Bride, crown of flowers on her head:
Virgin of morning,
Tonight, a wife in bed (1996b: 40).

And the groom is god-like in his fertility:

THIRD GIRL. A golden flower –
That's what I call the bridegroom.
And where he walks the land becomes
A flowery kingdom (1996b: 41).

The wedding, and the subsequent marriage, is celebrated as personal fulfilment and as a state in which the woman and the man complement each other. Furthermore, the wedding is seen as an event which affects everybody; it is both a unique social event at the local level, to which family and friends travel from far away, and an event which seems to be of next to universal importance. As one wedding guest exclaims: "Every window gives a shout of joy/For the wedding, for the wedding" (1996b: 41).

Taken together, the views voiced represent a culture which firmly conforms to traditional norms and behaviour, which in turn serve as a way by which to uphold static gender patterns in a coercive manner. It is this systematic oppression which Bride has been born into and which she has to come to terms with. She is the receiver of all the attitudes to the wedding and marriage, and it could be argued that she becomes the site where they are all negotiated. Unlike, for example, Leonardo's wife, who innocently embraced society's version of marriage, Bride early on shows signs of not being comfortable with the life awaiting her. In act one, scene two, although she plays along when the wedding is being settled, stating that she is happy, her happiness is muffled, signalling that she does not fully accept her situation. Her frustration is confirmed later in the scene, when she voices a passionate wish to be able to avoid the wedding; she even wants to be a man in order to avoid the pressures and obligations (1996b: 30).

However, her attitude is considerably changed when Servant mentions Leonardo's secret visit to the house. Although she feels threatened by the thought of him, she also opens up to possible resistance to and defiance of the social and cultural pressure she is under. Significantly, Bride refers to Leonardo's act of visiting the house in metaphorical terms, which indicates the urge, perhaps even the necessity, to go outside the dominant group mentality: "That horse must have strayed away from the herd in the darkness" (1996b: 30). From being a woman weighed down by her fate, she comes alive when they see Leonardo from the window; in a life-affirming utterance, she

exclaims: "Yes. Yes. That's him. That's the man" (1996b: 30). Hence, the play contrasts the harsh social pressures which, Bride feels, will make her "waste away here" (1996b: 33), to the disruptive force of Leonardo, whose energy operates as a threat to the social order in that his appearance and words appeal to Bride's own instincts and desires.

Therefore, both Bride and Leonardo in their different ways are subversive forces; Bride, because in her exchanges with Servant she shows signs of disobedience and a wish to distance herself from dominant attitudes; and Leonardo, because as a married man he violates the prevailing code by visiting Bride before the wedding to voice his feelings. Resistance to stifling social and cultural norms is perhaps most explicitly voiced by Leonardo in his encounters with Bride. Bride's and Leonardo's love a few years back, it is implied, could not last as they belong to different economic spheres. Instead, Bride initially tells Leonardo that she will marry Bridegroom out of pride. However, to Leonardo, pride is just another denial of true life, as it does not allow oneself to follow one's feelings. In one of the play's most central exchanges, Leonardo passionately expresses his frustration with this culture of silence and repression which according to him results in despair, bordering on insanity. Significantly, presumably realising the subversive nature of Leonardo's words, both Bride and Servant are terrified by his declaration. But Leonardo's plea seemingly taps into Bride's own thoughts and feelings, as well as her urge to resist cultural pressures, and she becomes a site of struggle. It is worth quoting the passage:

LEONARDO. Pride is pointless, useless.

(Comes nearer)

BRIDE. Don't come near me!

LEONARDO. To burn with passionate desire, and not speak of it, is the most atrocious punishment we can inflict on ourselves. Pride! What did pride ever do for me – alone in my heart – not seeing you – knowing you were lying awake night after night after night? Pride is worse than useless – it only brought the red-hot coals of despair raining and flaming down on my head. You think that time can heal love's wounds and that walls will hide love's cries; it isn't true, it isn't true! When wounds and cries are buried so deeply in the darkness of my heart, nothing on God's earth can change them, or pull them back into

the light where wounds may be cured and cries heard.

BRIDE. (*Trembling.*) Your voice! I mustn't listen to your voice! I feel as if I were drunk and had fallen asleep all wrapped in a silken quilt of roses. I'm being dragged down, I'm drowning, I know I'm drowning, but I'm lost and trembling and I plunge on down and down...

SERVANT. (*Seizing LEONARDO by lapels.*) Get out! Go away! You *must* go away!

LEONARDO. This is the last time I'll ever speak to her. There's nothing to be afraid of.

BRIDE. I know I'm out of my mind and I know my breasts rot with longing for him – but look at me, here I am, my heart at peace because I hear him, because my eyes follow the lovely movements of his arms and hands (1996b: 37-38).

Subsequent to this crucial and intense exchange, Bride's behaviour indicates that her inner struggle and resistance continue, visible not so much to the other characters but to the audience/reader. It would appear that she does not trust herself, so she wishes to hurry to the church to marry, as if she were afraid of her true emotions (1996b: 42). Moreover, after the wedding, the stage directions for Bride reveal a character whose mind strays elsewhere, away from the here-and-now to an alternative life; for instance, we read “(*Sullen.*)” (1996b: 48) when she is asked to comment on the wedding, and “(*Looks strangely at him.*)” (1996b: 49) when she looks at her husband. In other words, there is a tension between social expectations and her own emotions, and she seems more and more determined to follow her own desires despite the high cost. Indeed, that in her mind she is preparing to leave is further revealed when her husband touches her: she reacts as if it is Leonardo who sneaks up on her, and she wants her husband to stop (1996b: 52). In a sense, Bride's resistance shows her refusal to be pinned down. Consequently, when the wedding guests are looking for her after her elopement with Leonardo, unable to locate her, it also means, I would suggest, that she refuses to be boxed in. This unthinkable violation of the code makes the family and guests terrified, a feeling emphasised by the nervous repetition of the questions and answers:

BRIDEGROOM. (*Enters.*) She's not there.

MOTHER. (*Uneasily.*) She's not?

FATHER. Where is she? Where's she gone?

SERVANT. Where is she? Where is she?

MOTHER. We don't know.

(GROOM *leaves. Enter three guests.*)

FATHER. (*Worried.*) The dance – is she at the dance?

SERVANT. No, she's not at the dance (1996b: 55).

It does not seem like a coincidence that Bride's and Leonardo's love for each other has to seek refuge in the forest, outside organised society and removed from the sociocultural norms. They are, then, figuratively and literally outsiders who must be hunted down and punished for their crime; the culture demands a punishment, since if they were not punished, society as they know it would run the risk of crumbling. As the personified Moon, a symbol of death, declares: “They will not get away./They must not get away” (1996b: 63). However, to Bride and Leonardo, the forest is instead a site of possibilities, “[w]here love can have its way/Free from the poisoned eyes of men and women!” (1996b: 69). Here, their love for each other can, albeit temporarily, be fully expressed and here they are able to resist social demands while simultaneously embracing their own desires. This emotional honesty, it is strongly suggested, is the only way out of social strictures, and it is a necessary antidote to closed social norms which deny the individual's needs and which rely on cemented gender and power structures. Of course, the two lovers are hunted down by those slavishly upholding traditional values and their rebellion is crushed – Leonardo is killed and Bride has to live in shame for the rest of her life. Order is thus restored.

However, the play does not end here, and the last scene gives space to women, especially Mother, Bride and Wife, that is, the three grieving widows. Significantly, it is in the final scene that Kennelly's version radically departs from the original. The latter leaves the reader/audience with a strong sense of despair; the final lines in the two translations both end with Mother's suppressed scream and a feeling that nothing will ever change; she states that the knife, symbolising death and a destructive male culture, “stops, at the point/where, trembling enmeshed,/lies the dark root of the scream” (Lorca 1989: 105). Kennelly's version, on the other hand, ends on a note of hope. Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to claim that the three women constitute a sisterhood, but in their shared experiences of

pain, suffering and frustrated desires, there are arguably the beginnings of one. Although on the surface Mother and Wife are angry with Bride, as they voice their anger expected of them, beneath the surface they also seem to support each other. In a near-therapeutic session, they seem to realise and acknowledge that the fault lies elsewhere, as Mother states: “She’s not to blame. Neither am I!” (1996b: 77). Instead, it is implied that what is to blame is a culture that makes women vulnerable due to the pressure on both women and men to conform to values that result in death. Indeed, the violence and the many killings indicate that this society is self-destructive as it literally kills itself from within.

What is ultimately put forward as a possible solution is one that comes from an increased awareness, particularly in women – an awareness that unites rather than divides and alienates. Therefore, the play’s two final voices belong to Bride and Mother whose words and feelings echo each other to the point where they almost seem to merge (1996b: 78-79). The way forward, and a possible resistance to a culture steeped in male-dominated norms and behaviour, is unity and reconciliation, a kind of sisterhood which will challenge patriarchal hierarchies and macho views on life. This unity might, in turn, open up the possibility of social transformation where both women and men can lead more fulfilling lives and where fixed gender patterns can be re-constructed. Kennelly’s play ends on Mother’s insight that such a change is necessary:

MOTHER. ... And I am left
 With the torn, dirty remnants of a dream,
 A dream that I must change,
 In this blood-haunted place,
 Into a dream of peace (1996b: 79).

The play’s final exchanges arguably offer strategies of emancipation that are similar to those that O’Connor identifies at the grass root level in the Women’s Movement in Ireland, which has “played an important part in

providing a positive and gendered definition of personhood which incorporates but transcends the family setting. ... Such a concept of personhood involves an element of connection” (1998: 103-104). “Typically”, she goes on, “the language used is that of ‘empowerment’, ‘support’, ‘personal development’ ...” (1998: 104). This change will not happen overnight, but in the play’s urge to connect the three women and their shared experiences, it hints at the possibility.

As I have argued, Brendan Kennelly’s version of Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* brings to the surface the restricted lives women in a society formed and governed by rigidly patriarchal values are forced to live. Thus, the play zooms in on the unquestioning conformity to these values and the tragic consequences of conforming to them. The solution and the way forward, it is suggested, is a defiance of the values or, as I have proposed elsewhere (Persson 2000: 4), a betrayal of them, in order to make Irish society equal and more humane. It is noteworthy that Kennelly’s *Blood Wedding* was published and staged within a year of the 1995 Divorce Referendum in Ireland, and the play could be read as a response to that referendum in that it denounces women’s situation as well as the institution of marriage, putting forward the idea that marriage is often a kind of imprisonment, especially, perhaps, to women. In *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation*, Christopher Murray argues that “[d]rama helps society find its bearings; it both ritualises and interrogates national identity” (1997: 9). Kennelly’s version of *Blood Wedding*, I would hold, participates in an interrogation of Irish national identity, an identity shaped by sternly ritualised conformity to repressive norms and fixed gender patterns, and proposes ways by which to resist them, thereby re-constructing individual and national identity.

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