

Lorca's Yerma and the *beso sabroso*

During the 1920s and 1930s films excited many minds and enriched many talents, and Spanish writers reacted to the cinema with particular distinction.¹ If we heed the sober writings of moralists and sociologists, films had a harmful effect on the conduct of young people. Some sociologists focused particularly on scenes that contained kisses; in his study *Movies and Conduct*, Herbert Blum observed that "some young men deliberately employ passionate motion pictures as a means of inducing a greater attitude of receptiveness on the part of their companions;" and he went on to quote a sixteen-year-old girl's confession that "It is on her [girl friend] that I make use of the different ways of kissing that I see on the movies," and an eighteen-year-old college girl's admission that "These passionate pictures stir such longings, desires, and urges as I never expected any person to possess."²

The works of some Spanish writers suggest that sociologists such as Blum had cause for concern. In the first act of Gregorio Martínez Sierra's *El corazón ciego* (1922), María Luisa declared that she had learned in the cinema, which she ironically called "la escuela del crimen," "seis maneras distintas de dejar que le den a una un beso: al pasar una puerta, con portiere, sin portiere, con biombo, con cierre de cristales, a obscuras y con luz."³ In his novel *Cinelandia* (1923) Ramón Gómez de la Serna added one more salvo to his satirical assault on Hollywood by making one of his characters found an "Academia de besos" in chapter XXXIV, where the frenetic repetition of *beso* and *besar* captures sibilantly the tireless pursuit of the perfect kiss; in their "tertulias de besos" the students substitute the kiss for conversation as they deliver themselves up singlemindedly to "el dúo besucón de la práctica cinematográfica":

Se mantenía en aquellas salitas unas suculentas tertulias de besos y como quien cambia de conversadora o de conversador se cambiaba de besuqueadora o de besucador, todo seguido, sin tener que haber hecho nuevas declaraciones o nuevos méritos. Encontrando sin la angustiada dureza de la oposición la espontánea riqueza de unos labios o el nácar fraterno de una mejilla.⁴

However fanciful or grotesque Gómez de la Serna's Academy of Kisses may seem, it did—like other features and episodes of his novel—reflect reality, in this case the desire of cinema stars to perfect kissing, to make of it an art. In his novel *Locura y muerte de nadie* (1929) Benjamín Jarnés situated in a night club Tres Hermanas Argelinas, who "coinciden acaso en el modo de besar, que aprendieron en la misma revista de cine."⁵ That magazine could be any one of a group that during the 1920s and 1930s published articles on "Los besos cinematográficos" and

"El nuevo arte del beso."⁶ In 1896 cinema audiences had the opportunity to witness a man and a woman enacting, in less than a minute of running time, *The Kiss*; on May 9, 1929 the members of the Cineclub Español, Madrid, were treated to an "Antología del beso," which signalled the attraction kisses held for cinema-goers and the importance accorded to them by film-makers, whose efforts to vary and stylize the act of kissing are seen at their best in the ardent encounters of Greta Garbo and John Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil* (1927).⁷ The shooting script of the film makes it clear that the first kiss of Garbo and Gilbert is not a simple act but a delicately orchestrated performance from the moment Garbo utters the trite gambit "Have you a match?" The words "they kiss" are submerged in the precise directions governing the careful play with match and cigarette, the glow reflected on their faces, and the movement of hands and arms:

"Have you a match?" she asks, and puts the cigarette between her lips. Leo reaches for his match case, strikes the match with eager, trembling fingers, caps the flame in his hands against the light spring breeze as he leans towards her. She leans nearer, cigarette extended, but before the match and cigarette meet there is a pause in which their faces are clearly defined in the flare of the match. There is a challenge and a yielding in her eyes. For one breathless moment their glances are held, then slowly, almost deliberately, she drops the unlighted cigarette. His hands slowly open, the match falls and goes out. His arms go around her; his lips seek hers, they kiss and as they do so, her white arms slowly encircle his shoulders in a tight embrace.⁸

If we turn from this elegant and precisely modulated love-play to Juan's clumsy, uncharacteristically impetuous attempt to kiss Yerma at the very end of Lorca's tragedy, no greater contrast is possible between the kiss as a stylized act and the kiss as an expression of direct, indelicate passion. Although *Yerma* contains much explicit sexual statement essential to Lorca's diagnosis of physical incompatibility, little attention has been paid to Juan's kiss. It is of course ironic that the first time Juan directs towards his wife any kind of passionate feeling comes moments before she throttles him; his sudden rush of desire, her revulsion, and her murder of him are thus so closely interconnected that his kiss acquires a significance out of all proportion to its gaucheness or to its voltage. As James A. Parr has aptly pointed out, Juan's demand for a kiss "es el colmo, el golpe de gracia, la gota que colma el vaso;"⁹ it certainly occurs at the wrong place and at the wrong time. John Atkins has indicated in his study *Sex in Literature* that "The kiss is clearly an act of enormous potential, a promise, a danger sign, a decision;"¹⁰ Yerma instantly sees the danger sign and recognizes that her husband has taken a decision induced by the heady, electric atmosphere, which, although intensified by Lorca to create dramatic thrust and emotional pressure, had its basis in reality: the pilgrimage of Moclín, situated about fifteen miles north-

west of Granada. Marcelle Auclair has written that "Le pèlerinage est une *fiesta* enorme, avec tout ce que cela comporte de cuisines en plein vent, de débits d'alcool et d'eau fraîche, d'attractions de foire, dans l'incessant raclement des guitares et l'obsession des castagnettes." Both Auclair and Francisco García Lorca adduce the reason for the notoriety of the Moclín pilgrimage when they recall the offensive and indiscriminate cry of "¡Cabrones!" with which boys and youths greeted the husbands of those women seeking in the *romería* a remedy for their childlessness.¹¹

Influenced by the moonlight and by the drinks he has taken with other men, Juan suddenly relishes his wife as he tries to assert himself as a husband by observing the erotic rules and masculine standards of the pilgrimage pronounced by the Macho and the chorus of men earlier in the same scene. As if to explain the third Hombre's urgent command "¡Dale ya con el cuerno!" the Macho declares:

En esta romería
el varón siempre manda.
Los maridos son toros.
El varón siempre manda,
y las romeras flores,
para aquel que las gana.¹²

Compounded of song, dance, music, alcohol, and moonlight, this atmosphere has operated an almost magical change in Juan; the irascible, exasperated husband who in the previous scene had pushed away his wife with the curt commands "Apártate," "¡Quita!," and "Calla" (II, 727, 728) is now the eager and impulsive lover who exclaims "¡Abrázame!" and "Bésame . . . así" (II, 743). Yerma is totally unmoved by her surroundings—and disgusted by his approach; her impassivity on the one hand and her revulsion on the other must be understood in order to appreciate Lorca's purpose in creating a character so morally strait-jacketed and so sexually benumbed that a single kiss generates a murderous impulse.

Let us put Juan's kiss in its exact context: Yerma has rejected the Vieja's urging to live with her and her son and for the first time hears the word "Marchita" said to her face; Juan has overheard their conversation, and tells Yerma unequivocally that he is not interested in having a son:

JUAN. (*Fuerte.*)

¿No oyes que no me importa? ¡No preguntes más! ¡Que te lo tengo que gritar al oído para que lo sepas, a ver si de una vez vives ya tranquila!

YERMA.

¿Y nunca has pensado en él cuando me has visto desearlo?

JUAN

Nunca.

(*Están los dos en el suelo.*)

YERMA

¿Y no podré esperarlo?

JUAN

No.

YERMA

¿Ni tú?

JUAN

Ni yo tampoco. ¡Resígnate!

YERMA

¡Marchita!

JUAN

Y a vivir en paz. Uno y otro, con suavidad, con agrado. ¡Abrázame!

(*La abraza.*)

YERMA

¿Qué buscas?

JUAN

A ti te busco. Con la luna estás hermosa.

YERMA

Me buscas como cuando te quieres comer una paloma.

JUAN

Bésame . . . así.

YERMA

Eso nunca. Nunca. (YERMA *da un grito y aprieta la garganta de su esposo. Este cae hacia atrás. Le aprieta la garganta hasta matarle. Empieza el coro de la romería.*) (II, 742-4)

Having categorically rejected the possibility of fathering a child, Juan—with a monumental lack of tact and finesse—proceeds to make a sexual advance that constitutes physical contact for its own sake on its own terms. And it is Yerma's repudiation of sexual passion for its own sake that explains why Víctor García omitted from his celebrated production of the play four key words: Juan's command, "Bésame . . . así," and Yerma's instinctive, instantaneous reaction: "Eso nunca." García's expunging of something intriguingly called *eso* is not a surprise in his overheated production, in which Nuria Espert as Yerma bares her breasts and rolls on the floor with Juan in the misplayed opening scene. A London critic of García's production—Harold Hobson—made the apt observation that "the emotional temperature of Lorca's poetry is many degrees lower than that of Mr. García's production."¹³ If the relationship between Yerma and Juan were as close and skittish as García would have us believe, then the words "Bésame . . . así" and "Eso nunca" have no purpose and Yerma's repudiation of a kiss is both unprepared and unexplained. If we cannot see that a kiss of passion can revolt her, we have not even begun to understand the pressures and traditions that

have shaped her. García's omission of these words is consistent with—and a consequence of—his misinterpretation of the play, and misinterpretation is a hard taskmaster. Yerma could never roll on the floor with Juan. If those four words hindered García's interpretation, his omission of them highlights their significance.

When Juan says eagerly, hungrily, "Bésame . . . así," what did he do? What did he mean? We know what his kiss is not: it is not a *beso casto* or a decorous kiss on the cheek, defined by the Romans as *oscula*; they used two other words for kisses to the mouth: *basia*, applied to the mouth in affection, and *suavia*, applied to the lips in passion. Two critics have attempted to construe Juan's words; without going into details, Parr contends that "lo que desea Juan es que le bese de una manera pervertida, y no en la boca;" and Murray Baumgarten maintains that Juan's command is a request "that she perform oral intercourse with him instead"—instead, that is, of inseminating her. Baumgarten elaborates:

While he complies with his husbandly duties in the rare occasions when he is not devoting himself body and soul to the increase of his flocks or vineyards, Juan's occasional sexual forays are either, as Yerma tells us, cold and dutiful, or, as we witness in the last scene, power plays and thus perverse. He refuses to choose the prone position, and it is this act of intentionality which is expressed in his preference for oral love at the conclusion of the play.¹⁴

Talk of perversion and oral love run the risk of diverting the reader's attention from the inner logic and verbal texture of the play, which invite us to associate Juan's command with the liquidly passionate kiss advocated by the Vieja in her first meeting with Yerma. Yerma is completely bewildered by the Vieja's question "¿A ti te gusta tu marido?," which she has to gloss as "¿Si deseas estar con él?" (II, 683). Yerma's replies—"¿Cómo?" and "No sé"—elicit the following advice from the old woman: "Los hombres tienen que gustar, muchacha. Han de deshacernos las trenzas y darnos de beber agua en su misma boca. Así corre el mundo" (II, 684). In the final scene of the play she advocates once again the need for passionate contact between man and woman when she tells Yerma, totally insensitive to the erotic pressures of the *romería*, that children "Están hechos con saliva" (II, 738).

Lorca's caustic mention in *Libro de poemas* of an "examen de lujuria" (I, 87) and his constant allusions to prostitutes and prostitution in *La casa de Bernarda Alba* encompass a deep and consistent interest in sexuality, and particularly in the sudden irruptions of passion that conflict with Catholic doctrine on the one hand and with decorum on the other. That interest, transparent in *Yerma*, *Bodas de sangre*, and *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín*, is illustrated by his use of picturesque metaphors found in erotic poetry of the Golden Age. In describing

herself as "una mujer con faldas en el aire" (II, 681), the *Vieja* models herself on the warm-hearted and compliant *fregona* of an erotic sonnet, whom we see "alzándose las faldas hasta el rabo," and on "la humilde sor Quiteria," who in another sonnet

se fue a la portería, diligente,
y alzó las faldas con muy gran paciencia.¹⁵

In the same way, the sexual charge of Lorca's ballad "La casada infiel" is contained in the lascivious recollection of the gypsy as he advertizes his virility and stamina:

Aquella noche corrí
el mejor de los caminos,
montado en potra de nácar
sin bridas y sin estribos. (I, 407)

However much delicacy is contained in the word "nácar," this boast reproduces graphically both the words and the spirit of those Golden Age expressions that represent the male's sexual drive as *cabalgar*; as one cooperative female explains at the end of a sonnet,

El tuétano sabroso está en los huesos,
y con traer cojín quien me cabalga,
sin mataduras correrá a la brida.¹⁶

If we focus on kisses and kissing, we can trace the same consistent fascination they exercised on Lorca as acts of passion. The "besos de fuego" for which his Andalusian spinster yearns in *Libro de poemas* in the poem "Elegía" (I, 39) and the "labios de ascuas" of which the inadequate Perlimplín dreams (II, 359) are translated into a scene of passion in his screenplay *Viaje a la luna*, which contains the following sequence:

- 62 The harlequin boy and the nude woman ascend in the elevator.
- 63 They embrace.
- 64 A view of the sensual kiss.¹⁷

It is base, earthy sensuality devoid of romantic idealism that makes the gypsy describe the married woman after their night of love as "Sucia de besos y arena" (I, 407); it is the threat of hungry kisses and excited hair-tugging that we hear uttered in the poem "Lucía Martínez," which belongs to "Eros con bastón," written in 1925:

Aquí estoy, Lucía Martínez.
Vengo a consumir tu boca
y a arrastrarte del cabello
en madrugada de conchas. (I, 350)

Let us remind ourselves of the Vieja's prescription for sexual harmony: "Los hombres tienen que gustar, muchacha. Han de deshacernos las trenzas y darnos de beber agua en su misma boca." What she is urging is the kind of kiss that, known in English variously as the wet kiss, the deep kiss, the French kiss, and the soul kiss, was widely categorized in Golden Age poems as the *beso sabroso* and, in an equally sensuous metaphor, the *beso zumoso*. It is the type of kiss that inspired Góngora to write his elegant sonnet "La dulce boca que a gustar convida . . ." Juan's urgent command "Bésame . . . así" compresses the intense appeals of the excited lover who, in a kind of incantation, hymns the pleasures aroused by the tirelessly repeated contact of lips, tongue, and teeth:

Bésame, espejo dulce, ánima mía,
bésame, acaba, dame este contento,
y cada beso tuyo engendre ciento,
sin que cese jamás esta porfía.

Bésame cien mil veces cada día,
porque, encontrando aliento con aliento,
salgan de aqueste intrínseco contento
dulce suavidad, dulce armonía.

¡Ay, boca, venturoso el que te toca!
¡Ay, labios, dichoso es el que os besa!
Acaba, vida, dame este contento,

y dame ya ese gusto con tu boca.
Bésame, vida, ya, si no te pesa,
aprieta, muerde, chupa, y sea con tiento.¹⁸

What Juan is saying to Yerma—in the words of one line of this sonnet—is simply "y dame ya ese gusto con tu boca." In recoiling with disgust from the very idea that two mouths, two tongues, can give pleasure, Yerma repudiates *gusto* and the premises on which it is based. As we saw in her bewildered reaction to the Vieja's question "¿A ti te gusta tu marido?", she does not know what *gusto* means or implies; Yerma's mind moves from incomprehension to a flat denial as the old woman rephrases her question:

VIEJA 1.^a

Oye. ¿A ti te gusta tu marido?

YERMA

¿Cómo?

VIEJA 1.^a

¿Que si lo quieres? ¿Si deseas estar con él? . . .

YERMA

No sé.

VIEJA 1.^a

¿No tiemblas cuando se acerca a ti? ¿No te da así como un sueño cuando acerca sus labios. Dime.

YERMA

No. No lo he sentido nunca. (II, 683)

This failure to feel any kind of tremor, any kind of vibration, in the presence of her husband explains the coldly functional way in which she describes sexual intercourse. The verbs Lorca put into her mouth are an eloquent comment on their sexual relationship; Juan, she says to Dolores, "me cubre" and thereby "cumple con su deber" (II, 723); she of course also discharges a duty as is clear from her confession to the Vieja that "Yo me entregué a mi marido por él [mi hijo], y me sigo entregando para ver si llega, pero nunca por divertirme" (II, 684).

In putting into her mouth such chill verbs as *cubrir* and *entregarse*, Lorca is inuring her in her pride and virtue and separating her from those female characters who use explicit sexual language and transparent sexual symbols in order to celebrate the passionate union of man and woman. Yerma does not belong to the world of sensuality peopled by the Vieja, the Lavanderas, and the Hembra; she feels out of place in it, sets herself not only apart from it but above it. "Así corre el mundo," says the old woman in justification of man's erotic domination of woman; "El tuyo, que el mío no," retorts Yerma, whose primness and moral superiority lead her to equate passion with indecency in her conversation with Dolores in the third act, in which she longs to be able to have children without the aid of her husband: "No soy una casada indecente; pero yo sé que los hijos nacen del hombre y de la mujer. ¡Ay, si los pudiera tener yo sola!" (II, 723). In her longing for a kind of immaculate conception in which Juan would play no part, Yerma—without naming religion—follows unswervingly the religious doctrine inculcated in her and in so many others; Yerma was undoubtedly instructed that

El cristiano debe respetar la pureza de su cuerpo, que es templo del Espíritu Santo. Así, que cualquiera acción fea consigo o con otra persona, es pecado mortal.

También es pecado entretenerse en malos pensamientos o deseos de cosas torpes.¹⁹

The Vieja's claim that women go to the pilgrimage and "el santo hace el milagro" (II, 739) aims to give a veneer of respectability to the rum-bustious events of Moclín. We know—and Yerma knows—that those who work the miracles are the virile opportunists whom María likens to "Un río de hombres solos" uttering "palabras terribles" (II, 732); one such opportunist is the Vieja's son, who, she tells Yerma, "está sentado detrás de la ermita esperándote" (II, 739). Yerma's mention of her cross (II, 707) reflects her vision of herself as a victim, as a martyr to childlessness and to the sexual impassivity that makes her relationship with

Juan so cold, so perfunctory, and thereby so fruitless. Yerma recognizes the need for passion; so much is clear from her longing to be like a mountain of fire when Juan makes love to her, as she confesses to Dolores:

¡Es bueno! ¡Es bueno! ¿Y qué? Ojalá fuera malo. Pero no. El va con sus ovejas por sus caminos y cuenta el dinero por las noches. Cuando me cubre cumple con su deber, pero yo le noto la cintura fría, como si tuviera el cuerpo muerto, y yo, que siempre he tenido asco de las mujeres calientes, quisiera ser en aquel instante como una montaña de fuego. (II, 723)

In other words, she acknowledges the need to be the type of woman she could never be, the type of woman who revolts her: the uninhibited, pleasure-seeking female amply represented in the play by the giddy Muchacha, the Vieja, the *lavanderas*, and the Hembra. The common attitude connecting these women is the delight in sexual activity, which the Vieja summarizes with exemplary and ecstatic simplicity when she sidesteps Yerma's probing questions with her reminiscence: "Yo me he puesto boca arriba y he comenzado a cantar. Los hijos llegan como el agua" (II, 682).

The implicit setting for the Vieja's graphic recollection is the bed, which also underlies Yerma's accusing questions to her husband at the beginning of the play: "¿Lloré yo la primera vez que me acosté contigo? ¿No cantaba yo al levantar los embozos de Holanda?" (II, 670). In the second act, in a similarly acrimonious confrontation with Juan, the marriage bed again comes to her mind, but in a way that suggests her acknowledgement that to sing when she and Juan went to bed together for the first time was not enough: "Cada noche, cuando me acuesto, encuentro mi cama más nueva, más reluciente, como si estuviera recién traída de la ciudad" (II, 707). Her bed shines in her imagination with a kind of virginal purity because it is untouched by passion; it is not the place of the singing and the moaning with delight celebrated by the washerwomen. Harmonizing plain statements, simple arithmetic, and explicit sexual symbols, Lorca put into their mouths hymns to passion and prescriptions for pleasure, which follows a cycle as simple and as natural as sleeping and eating. The second Lavandera sings in anticipation:

Por el monte ya llega
mi marido a comer.
El me trae una rosa
y yo le doy tres. (II, 701)

The fifth Lavandera continues the cycle with a song recording an immediate experience:

Por el llano ya vino
mi marido a cenar.

Las brasas que me entrega
cubro con arrayán. (II, 701)

The fourth Lavandera directs our minds to the marriage bed with her evocation of a passion shared:

Por el aire ya viene
mi marido a dormir.
Yo alhelies rojos
y él rojo alhelí. (II, 701-2)

The passion felt mutually and instinctively by husband and wife in these songs becomes the principle governing a series of rules the voicing of which classifies the Lavanderas as the *mujeres calientes* so repugnant to Yerma; "Hay que juntar flor con flor / cuando el verano seca la sangre al segador," declares the first Lavandera (II, 702). "Hay que gemir en la sábana," advises the first Lavandera; "¡Y hay que cantar!" retorts the fourth (II, 702). In the last scene of the play there is a parallel series of highly charged songs constituting an essential element of the pilgrimage. Apart from demonstrating Lorca's sure sense of structural balance, they show the need he saw for parallel choruses to comment on—and thereby insulate—Yerma. The second group of songs contain some important differences: some of them are sung by a man, the Macho, and a chorus of men; and instead of exalting the erotic pleasures explored by a husband and wife, they advocate an extra-marital solution for the problems of the childless wife, categorized in three distinct songs as "la esposa triste" (II, 734), "la triste casada" (II, 735), and "la linda casada" (II, 737). The sensual moaning explicit in the verb *gemir* connects the advice of the first Lavandera with the Macho's excited evocation of a sexual marathon:

Siete veces gemía,
nueve se levantaba,
quince veces juntaron
jazmines con naranjas. (II, 736)

This excitement—sustained in a transparently symbolic way by men's shouts of "¡Dale ya con el cuerno!" and "¡Dale ya con la rama!" (II, 736)—shows sexual passion to be a powerful current linking two scenes and uniting male and female in an embrace which can take place in the marriage bed celebrated implicitly by the Lavanderas or—in a challenge to the marriage bed—behind the walls mentioned by the Macho in his entreaty to "la triste casada":

Si tú vienes a la romería
a pedir que tu vientre se abra,
no te pongas un velo de luto,

sino dulce camisa de holanda.
Vete sola detrás de los muros,
donde están las higueras cerradas,
y soporta mi cuerpo de tierra
hasta el blanco gemido del alba.
¡Ay, cómo relumbra!
¡Ay, cómo relumbraba,
ay, cómo se cimbre la casada! (II, 735)

At the end of the Macho's urging, the childless wife is no longer sad because she has discovered the passion of a real man and reacts luminously and sinuously to the virility of a *macho*.

While the erotic songs and visions which resound from the second to the third act exalt a vibrant passion that is timeless and universal, they also demonstrate that Yerma has learned nothing. Those who voice them are free, emotionally, morally, and sexually; Yerma, however, remains a prisoner of morality, of her constricted mind, and of her house, which for her is a "tumba" (II, 706). She is also, like so many of Lorca's heroines, a victim of the customs and traditions that restrict women in the doctrinaire way Yerma summarizes in Act II when she tells Juan: "Pero yo no soy tú. Los hombres tienen otra vida: los ganados, los árboles, las conversaciones, y las mujeres no tenemos más que esta de la cría y el cuidado de la cría" (II, 708). As the spokesman and defender of tradition, Juan resorts to a proverb to make the same point: "Las ovejas en el redil y las mujeres en su casa" (II, 706). Even Víctor, the only man to arouse in her a sensual response, however slight, uses the same metaphor to voice a similar homage to conformity: "Es todo lo mismo. Las mismas ovejas tienen la misma lana" (II, 716). Yerma's retort is a plea for respect, a demand to be treated not as houseware kept in the place assigned by convention and custom, but as an individual to be cared for, considered, and cherished. "The same ewes have the same wool," states Víctor; "Para los hombres, sí," replies Yerma; "pero las mujeres somos otra cosa. Nunca oí decir a un hombre comiendo: qué buenas son estas manzanas. Vais a lo vuestro sin reparar en las delicadezas" (II, 716).

Juan's kiss, essayed without finesse and bereft of affection or delicacy, constitutes a direct assault on Yerma's sensibility—and on her morality. She refuses to be an *hembra* when Juan, who had earlier warned her that "Las calles están llenas de machos" (II, 726), wants to live up to the image of the *macho* and observe the rule of the pilgrimage that "el varón siempre manda" (II, 736). Had she responded to Juan's kiss, she would have been in his eyes and in her own estimation one of the *mujeres calientes* she so despises. In telling Juan with hostility that he looks at her and pursues her "como cuando te quieres comer una paloma" (II, 743), she makes the time-honored equation of passion and hunger. In refusing—with the terse words "Eso nunca"—to accept Juan's tongue

in her mouth, she recognizes instinctively the threat posed by the kiss to consume her; as Parker Tyler has aptly pointed out, "Because the kiss does involve the same mechanics as chewing and swallowing, even similar responses in the nerves and muscles, it becomes a symbolic form of eating."²⁰

During her first conversation with the Vieja Yerma asks a rhetorical question bristling with indignation: "¿Es preciso buscar en el hombre al hombre nada más?" (II, 684); by refusing to contemplate any answer other than 'no,' Yerma rigidly separates husband and male, *marido* and *macho*, and cannot understand why Juan lies in bed staring sadly at the ceiling:

¿Es preciso buscar en el hombre al hombre nada más? Entonces, ¿qué vas a pensar cuando te deja en la cama con los ojos tristes mirando al techo y se da media vuelta y se duerme? ¿He de quedarme pensando en él o en lo que puede salir relumbrando de mi pecho? (II, 684)

This haunting picture of a husband clearly unsatisfied acquires even greater poignancy as a symptom of sexual incompatibility when it is paralleled—in the house of Dolores—by Juan's accusing evocation of his wife in bed: "Mirándome con dos agujas, pasando las noches en vela con los ojos abiertos al lado mío y llenando de malos suspiros mis almohadas" (II, 726). A similar parallel of disharmony is provided by two kisses; at the very beginning of the play, in the opening scene between husband and wife, Yerma kisses Juan "tomando ella la iniciativa," according to the stage-direction. That kiss elicits from him no response other than disapproval of her restlessness: "Si necesitas algo me lo dices y lo traeré. Ya sabes que no me gusta que salgas" (II, 671). At the very end of the play, Juan's attempt to kiss his wife in a particularly passionate way is one that she repudiates because the disgust it inspires in her is as strong as the disgust she feels for *mujeres calientes*, who celebrate sexual arousal and responsiveness while she curses her body's numbed incapacity to feel. Her rejection of Juan's kiss is simply the enactment of her diagnosis of herself after Juan has discovered her in Dolores's house: "Una cosa es querer con la cabeza y otra cosa es que el cuerpo, ¡maldito sea el cuerpo!, no nos responda" (II, 729).

Yerma's inability to respond sexually makes her stand out from the inner logic of the play, from the premises on which other characters base their lives, and from the atmosphere they create. And Yerma is even more isolated if we look beyond the play towards the growing fascination exercised by sexuality during the 1920s and 1930s on writers, filmmakers, and doctors. Recalling what for him were the defects of the Second Republic, the Conde de Foxá stated disapprovingly in 1938 that "Pululaban carritos con libros usados a la mitad del precio. Volúmenes sexuales, anticoncepcionistas, pornografía pseudo-científica, revuelta con los folletos marxistas."²¹ Between 1932 and 1934 no less than sixty volumes

appeared in Madrid of a series called *Biblioteca de divulgación sexual*, whose titles included *Deleites sensuales* and *La ciencia de las caricias*. Some writers described those caresses in lingering detail, for example, Juan-José Domenchina in his novel *La túnica de Neso* (1929). Yet Lorca makes Yerma so revolted by one kiss that she instantaneously murders her husband. To miss the significance of this kiss—potentially *sabroso* to Juan but sinful to her—is not to see the way she has been moulded—and deadened—by a morality so straitlaced that she cannot function as a woman. In removing this kiss from his production, Víctor García overlooked its importance in a work where Lorca consistently and systematically exalts sensuality. At the end of the play Yerma has triumphed over the basic instincts so many characters find enjoyable; she has kept intact her decency; she remains a *casada decente* but at the expense of her husband and of the child she so ardently desired. As she herself recognizes with blinding clarity, “¡yo misma he matado a mi hijo!” (II, 744).²²

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NOTES

1. See C. B. Morris, *This Loving Darkness. The Cinema and Spanish Writers 1920-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the University of Hull, 1980).

2. Herbert Blum, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), pp. 45, 254. See too Wendell S. Dysinger and Christian A. Ruckmick, *The Emotional Response of Children to the Motion Picture Situation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), particularly Chapter VII: “The Divergence of the Movies from the Mores: Kissing and Caressing.”

3. G. Martínez Sierra, *Obras completas*, VII (Madrid: Editorial Saturnino Calleja, 1922), p. 17. I am grateful to Judith Rusciollelli for this quotation.

4. R. Gómez de la Serna, *Obras completas*, I (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1956), p. 1919.

5. B. Jarnés, *Locura y muerte de nadie* (Madrid: Oriente, 1929), p. 97.

6. Doris Falberg, “Los besos cinematográficos,” *El Cine*, 16, no. 793 (23 June 1927); “El nuevo arte del beso,” *Popular Film*, 9, no. 387 (11 January 1934).

7. For a brief discussion of *The Kiss*, see Parker Tyler, *A Pictorial History of Sex in Films* (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1980), pp. 10-11.

8. Quotation from *Flesh and the Devil* © 1927 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. Renewed 1954 Loew's Incorporated.

9. James A. Parr, “La escena final de *Yerma*,” *Duquesne Hispanic Review*, 10 (1971), 27. I considered the effect of childlessness on Yerma in “Lorca's *Yerma*: Wife without an Anchor,” *Neophilologus*, 56 (1972), 285-97.

10. John Atkins, *Sex in Literature. The Erotic Impulse in Literature* (London: Panther, 1970), p. 267.

11. Marcelle Auclair, *Enfances et mort de García Lorca* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), pp. 322-3; Francisco García Lorca, *Federico y su mundo* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980), p. 356. In his *Teatro crítico universal* Padre Feijóo denounced “las innumerables relajaciones” committed during pilgrimages, declaring austerely: “Coloquios desembueltos de uno a otro sexo, rencillas, y borracheras son el principio, medio, y fin de las Romerías. . . . Todo

es fiesta en la fiesta. Todo es jovialidad en la romería. En las conversaciones, pretextando el regocijo, se pasa la raya de la decencia. . . . ¿Qué son sino estiércol, inmundicia, abominación, eso que se llama solemnidad, fiesta, romería? ¿Qué son sino torpes cultos al Idolo de Venus, en vez de devotos obsequios a Dios, y a sus Santos?" (*Teatro crítico universal*, IV [Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Francisco de Hierro, 1730], pp. 106-7.

12. García Lorca, *Obras completas*, 20th ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1977), II, p. 736. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

13. Harold Hobson, "Spanish Bravura," *The Sunday Times*, 23 April 1972.

14. Parr, "La escena final de *Yerma*," *Duquesne Hispanic Review*, 10 (1971), 27; Murray Baumgarten, "'Body's Image': *Yerma*, *The Player Queen*, and the Upright Posture," *Comparative Drama*, 8 (1974), 296, 297.

15. Pierre Alzieu, Yvan Lissorgues, Robert Jammes, *Foresta de poesías eróticas del Siglo de Oro* (Toulouse: France-Ibérie Recherche, 1975), no. 42, p. 60; no. 127, p. 247.

16. *Ibid.*, no. 108, p. 220.

17. García Lorca, "Trip to the Moon. A Filmscript," trans. Bernice G. Duncan, *New Directions*, 18 (1964), 40; the filmscript is known only in this translation.

18. Alzieu et al, *Foresta de poesías eróticas del Siglo de Oro*, no. 100, p. 209.

19. *Catecismo—Grado Tercero. Catecismo de la doctrina cristiana con nociones de liturgia y vida cristiana* (Zaragoza: Comisión Catequística Diocesana de Zaragoza, 1941), p. 60.

20. Tyler, *A Pictorial History of Sex in Films*, p. 26.

21. Agustín de Foxá, Conde de Foxá, *Madrid de corte a cheka* (Santander: Librería Internacional, 1938), p. 103.

22. The original version of this paper was a lecture I gave to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UCLA on November 17, 1980. I am grateful to the Graduate Students' Association for its invitation.