

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: A Lonely Woman Against the Society: Yerma

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PAGES: 92-97

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/345836>

A Lonely Woman against the Society: Yerma

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* This study has been presented as a proceeding in III. International Language Education and Teaching Symposium, L'Università degli Studi Roma Tre, 20-23 April, 2017 - ROMA.

Abstract

Federico García Lorca is one of the most important authors of Spanish Literature who best describe the woman trapped between the life dictated by traditions and human instincts in Spanish society of the 20th century. Growing up in the lands graced with Andalusian cultures, Lorca observes the most natural state of man and its place in the rules of society and carries the theme of "woman". In Lorca's works, women -as an individual in a traditional society- remain between the desires of their instincts and human nature, and the patriarchy of the Andalusian lands. The young woman Yerma in Lorca's work named "Yerma" -as an individual- remains in this dilemma. Young woman is married to Juan for four years, and their marriage needs a fresh life; a child is missing. Juan, who devotes himself to the business and his field, is indifferent to Yerma and the idea of having a child. There is no sexual attraction between them, marriage has been done in a traditional way, not through sexual attraction and love, but with the right of families. As to Yerma, it is necessary to be a mother culturally under the traditional understanding dictated by the society, and it also needs sexual saturation with the gap that the husband cannot see. It's a lonely woman. The society alienates her as a childless woman, and her husband, Juan, turns back, not providing her a warm home. Thus, the young woman is pushed to loneliness both socially and familial. With all these gaps, the young woman becomes a desolated individual in society. In this work, Yerma -as a feminine individual- is studied as a lonely woman against the Spanish society.

Keywords: Spanish Literature, Lorca, Woman, Society.

Toplum Karşısında Yalnız Bir Kadın: Yerma

Öz

Federico García Lorca, İspanyol Edebiyatının en önemli yazarlarından biridir. Eserlerinde 20. yüzyılın İspanyol toplumunda gelenekler ve insan içgüdüleri tarafından dikte edilen hayat arasında sıkışıp kalmış kadını ustaca ele alır. Endülüs kültürüyle bezenmiş topraklarda büyüyen Lorca, insanın en doğal halini ve toplum kurallarında sıkışıp kalmış "kadın" temasını işler.

Makale Bilgileri /
Article Info:

Gönderim / Received:
28.06.2017
Kabul / Accepted:
21.09.2017

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Atıf için / To cite this article:

İlker, N. G. (2017). A lonely woman against the society: Yerma. *Curr Res Soc Sci*, 3(3), 92-97.

Lorca'nın eserlerinde, kadın -geleneksel toplumda bir birey olarak - kendi içgüdüleri ve insan doğasının getirdiği arzularla Endülüs topraklarının ataerkilliği arasında kalırlar. Lorca'nın "Yerma" adlı eserindeki Yerma adlı genç kadın -bir birey olarak- bu ikilemde kalmaktadır. Genç kadın dört yıldır Juan'la evlidir fakat evliliklerinin bir şey eksiktir; Bir çocuk. Kendini işine ve tarlasına adanmış Juan, Yerma'ya ve bir çocuk sahibi olma fikrine kayıtsızdır. Aralarında hiçbir cinsel çekim yoktur. Evlilik; cinsel çekim ve sevgiyle değil, ailelerin kararı ile geleneksel bir şekilde yapılmıştır. Yerma'ya gelince, toplum tarafından dikte edilen geleneksel anlayışın altında sosyal açıdan da anne olması dikte edilir. Kocasından göremediği cinsel doyuma da ihtiyacı vardır. Yalnız bir kadındır Yerma. Toplum onu çocuğu olmayan bir kadın olarak ötekileştirir ve kocası Juan ona sırt dönerek sıcak bir yuva sunmaz. Böylece, genç kadın hem toplumsal hem de ailevi yalnızlığa itilir. Toplum içerisinde yalnızlığa mahkûm edilmiş bir bireye dönüşür. Çalışmada, Yerma, İspanyol toplumu içerisinde yalnız bir kadın olarak ele alınacaktır ve de toplumun dikte ettiği yaşantının kadın üzerindeki etkisi irdelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İspanyol Edebiyatı, Lorca, Kadın, Toplum, Yerma.

Introduction

Federico García Lorca is one of the authors who depict "woman", getting stuck between life and human instinct dictated by traditions in the 20th century Spanish society, in the finest way. He exhibits a thorough knowledge not only of his art but of his people and the traditions (Devi, 2016, p. 6). Having grown up in the territories which are embellished by Andalusian culture, Lorca deals with the theme of "woman" in his works by observing the most natural state of humans and their positions within social rules. In Lorca's works a lively and imaginative manner, a traditional and suffocating realism and heavy-handedness can be seen reflecting the life of Spanish women (Edward, 1985, p. 104). As an individual in traditional society, woman gets stuck between her instincts and desires arising out of human nature and traditions in Andalusian territories dating back to the past in the works of Lorca. L. Stainton expresses -when it comes to

Lorca's literary talent and vision- that his literary power and originality cannot be denied in the way of treating the woman in society (Stainton, 1998, p. 434).

Yerma, a young woman in author's work titled "Yerma", is an individual getting stuck in this dilemma. She is married to her husband Juan for four years and has no children, which is the lacking part of their marriage. Dedicated to his work and farm, Juan is always indifferent to his wife and does not take kindly to the idea of having a child. He is interested only in earning money and does not care about Yerma's desire of having a child. Although Juan and Yerma are married to each other, regarded as the first step of social order, their marriage turns out to be a cold house with no children or affection. There is no sexual attraction between these two young people, either. Their marriage is based on the approval of their families traditionally instead of sexual attraction and love. In this regard, the role actually dictated to the Yerma is basically to be a mother, and to continue marriage in the traditional way (Shekari, 2015, p. 2388). Two separate individuals try to maintain their marriage with no love or desire.

Yerma feels sexually attracted by Shepherd Victor which she cannot feel for her husband and we understand how much she is deprived of this kind of feelings which are unique to human nature. While she is in need of being a mother both biologically as a result of being young and married woman and culturally as a result of traditional perceptions dictated by the society, she needs to be sexually satisfied as a result of her emotional emptiness because of the lack of love. Yerma is a lonely woman. The position of Yerma is considerably clear as a result of the conflict of the social rules and the nature rules which is the main problem of Lorca (Önalp, 1986, p. 232). Society others her as an infertile woman having no children while her husband turns his back by not giving her a warm home. Therefore, she is isolated in both socially and familial terms. In this regard, this young woman turns out to be an isolated individual in the society because of the emptiness which is brought by lack of love, satisfaction and children.

1. Yerma against Traditional Society's Perception of Woman and Marriage

In accordance with Spanish society in the 20th century, a woman is married off to an appropriate candidate who is approved by the family elders at a suitable age. Marriage is one of the keystones which shape moral structure and order of the society. On the other hand, woman is to comply with the directions of family elders in the issue of marriage by ignoring her own desires and feelings. Woman is the person who will start the family and she is obliged to maintain this order by accepting the man who is approved by family elders to get married. According to Koğacıoğlu importance and existence of the woman is her family (Koğacıoğlu, 2009, p. 363).

In accordance with traditional perceptions of the society, woman cannot choose whom to get married while she is also deprived of such feelings as love, desire and sexual urge arising out of human nature as dictated by the society. These natural feelings of the human are ignored by the society. With the roles dictated by society, Yerma's own thoughts, character, and desires are of no importance (Fusco, 2001, p. 2). When Yerma is given by her father to Juan, she accepts it by adapting herself to customary traditional orders. There is no need for any love, liking or affection to get married. Juan is a rich farmer having lots of animals and a house. So, he is regarded as an adequate man and deemed as an approved man for Yerma.

Yerma: My father gave me to him and I accepted. I accepted with pleasure. That's the reality (Lorca, 2006, p. 89).

It is understood from Yerma's words that she naturally accepts the man who is approved for herself without going beyond traditional patterns. Unfortunately, there is no chemical attraction, love or sexual desire between these two young people who are deemed as appropriate for each other. Traditions established and adapted by people are not in parallel with the instincts.

Old woman: Listen to me. Do you love your husband?

Yerma: What do you mean?

Old woman: I ask you whether you love him or not. Do you have desire for him?

Yerma: I don't know.

Old woman: Do you shiver when he gets closer to you? Do you lose your consciousness when he approaches his lips? Tell me.

Yerma: No. I have never felt like that (Lorca, 2006, p. 89).

Basis of this marriage which is ethically approved by the society and regarded as the keystone of traditional order is open to questioning. Questioning it through Yerma is actually the basis of Lorca's feminine concern and social criticism that continued throughout his life (Polydrou, 2011, pp. 106-107). There is no love, desire or ambition in this marriage. Approval of two people for each other in the basis of femininity and masculinity by ignoring their feelings leads to a kind of mechanized robotic union. However; Yerma is a woman who is deprived of love and interest from her husband.

Yerma: I would love to see you that you would take care of me when I feel ill one day saying "my wife is ill, I will slaughter this sheep and cook a meat dish for her", "my wife is ill, I will keep that chicken's fat for her to drink, it would may be good for her", "I will take this sheep skin to my wife to protect her feet from snow". I'm just that person. I take care of you in the best way (Lorca, 2006, p. 80).

2. Yerma against Maternity Fact

There is an established marriage, the first step which is ethically and traditionally deemed by the society as a duty, between Yerma and Juan although it does not include any love, affection or sexual desire. However, in the work, the woman is established as having deep desires and passion that are to be satisfied by the man, and the importance of sexual attraction is emphasized at this point (Sherwin, 2005, p. 51). They have fulfilled a divine mission by getting married and it has been approved by the society. However; there is a

second step after marriage: having a child. Patriarchal order and traditional rules have taken love and sexual pleasure away from the hands of the woman, and have forced her to only be mother as a social duty (Zecchi, 2005, p. 152). By getting married, a woman is expected to give birth to a child and bring up new individuals for the society. Woman's duty in the society is not limited to getting married. It is regarded as inadequate solely and giving birth becomes an obligation, which increases the load on the shoulders of the woman.

“Only we, as the women having incurred the wrath of destiny, beat ourselves up for everything.” (Lorca, 2006, p. 88)

Woman longs for giving birth after a specific age by her nature. However; she cannot have a child because of either biological problems or lack of sexual attraction between woman and man. Yerma aches for giving birth to a child but she cannot do this because of lack of sexual appetite and lovelessness arising out of indifference of her husband, Juan, as well as his keen interest in his works. In addition to lack of the feeling of having a child, the young woman also feels herself incompetent and socially deprived. Because, society perception orders that a married woman must give birth to a child and devote herself to bringing up her children. Deprived of all this foregoing, she is othered by the society with an inconsiderate point of view. This social pressure is added into biological thirst of her body. As the desire of being a mother biologically increases, it starts being perceived as an obligation because of social pressure (Paris, 1989, p. 364). As she sees women and families with children around, she becomes a low spirited woman which she cannot deal with. She first thought about their common children in the future before she started questioning her feelings towards Juan prior to their marriage.

“The first day we got engaged, I started thinking about our common children who I will give birth to.” (Lorca, 2006, p. 89)

Traditional society perceives maternity as the most important fact which a married woman will perform (Ledasma, 2007, p. 6). Deprived of being

a mother, Yerma experiences a great loneliness and emotional destruction. She feels lonely as a woman and finds herself in a conflict with the rules which are established by the society. According to Sievering-Lorenzo rules which are established by the society both keep the woman away from sexual life and cause a great thirst for the woman; a great thirst for freedom, sexual desire and maternity (Sievering-Lorenzo, 2003, p. 310).

There is a kind of maternity which is coded in the society prior to marriage (Öner, 2015, p. 147). Yerma always dreamt about it before she got married. However; her destiny keeps her away from the privilege of being a mother. Deprived of the motherhood status which is coded and dictated by the society, young woman is parched in her body's infertility and emotional emptiness.

Both childbirth and maternity are within the flow of routine works which are coded as female labor (Direk, 2015, p. 163). Yerma stays out of this normal and accepted perception and routine. One of the reasons which push her to desperation is biological: Everybody has psychotherapy energy for sustaining its kind (Abreyava, 2015, p. 205). Woman is the most appropriate kind for giving birth to and raising a child with the help of her gender which is garnished with the ability of giving birth and breast feeding as well as desire of taking care instinctively. This point of view is also reinforced by other points of view regarding maternity (Koçkar, 2015, p. 210). Another reason is social pressure. If the young woman had not been othered and her lack of giving birth to a child has been tolerated, she might have not fallen into a deep desperation and loneliness. However; society tends to isolate abnormal and eccentric one (Şener, 1997, pp. 149-150). The facts of giving birth and being a mother are dictated to the young woman within the framework of social rules which are not explicitly defined. As conscious individuals, Yerma and Juan might have had the ability of overcoming the problems in their marriage. However; infertility is deemed as a problem and problems of the woman body are regarded as the objects which are about family and social order, not about personalities of the women

(Koğacıoğlu, 2009, p. 360). This brings the relationship of Yerma and Juan to a deadlock. She delivers the following speech because of the problem of infertility:

“Country woman who does not give birth is useless, even dangerous, like a bunch of thorn. She is like a hazardous waste abandoned by the God..” (Lorca, 2006, p. 108)

As a rational person and individual who can think and have feelings and emotions, Yerma behaves unfair to herself just because of her infertility. She is not aware of the fact that a woman does not need a child in order to be valuable as an individual on her own. She is unfortunately affected by the social perception and gets the wrong idea that a woman without a child is just a useless object. Yerma is not physically sterile. Her sterility is imposed upon her from outside sources, chiefly her husband, Juan, and her observance of the strict code of honor which guides the woman's life (Volk, 1968, p. 47). Isolated by the society, this young woman would have not been deprived of this feeling if she had been loved and supported by her husband, Juan. However; Juan's conservative and indifferent personality makes the woman feel lonely within her family. Moreover; when Yerma starts going out of the house and visits veteran seniors in the village in order to find the means of giving birth to a child, Juan finds this situation inappropriate and brings his two sisters to their house in order to keep an eye on the young woman. Now, she is completely alone and isolated in her house with an indifferent husband and two sisters-in-law who try to catch her mistakes any time. Having realized abundance, fruitfulness and existence in the nature, this young woman finds something even in this nature to humiliate herself.

“As I see wheats coming into ears, fountains continuously giving water and sheep giving birth to hundreds of lambs, I feel myself humiliated and despised.” (Lorca, 2006, p. 108)

Deprived of abundance and fruitfulness, young woman cannot make an organic link with the impositions of her time. She is an infertile and

worthless woman having no child, so she is lonely.

“See how lonely I am. I'm as lonely as the Moon looking for itself at the sky.” (Lorca, 2006, p. 119)

Conclusion

Isolated in this society which is loyal to traditions and cares about ethical codes, this young woman is advised to give birth to a child through illegal methods and learns that there is a sepulcher where secret meetings are held for this purpose. When she realizes all this, she discovers the hypocrisy between moral discourses of the society and immorality. As an honorable and virtuous woman caring about family values, she sternly rejects this idea of giving birth to a child through illegal methods. So, she is lonely again. Society insults on values which are dignified through immoral relationships under obscure affairs while it advocates to moral matters by condemning natural and sexual urges of people. Having witnessed this hypocrisy, Yerma is aware of the fact that she is lonely in all terms. She runs the risk of being lonely but withstands against unvirtuousness. She is a lonely but honorable woman. Society is a liar advocating to moral matters and tradition in a hypocritical manner while Juan is a rich but selfish and infertile man who cannot give a child to a young woman.

Human instincts, love, desire and sexual appetites which are ignored, depreciated and deemed as immoral are overwhelmed by social rules. However; Yerma does not surrender it. She chokes and kills her husband, Juan, as a result of a battle of nerves. Now, she has concretely lost everything. She is aware of the fact that she has shaped her destiny. She has committed a crime which will make her lonely forever in order not to surrender dishonorable aspect of the society.

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