

Moorish Character in Lorca's Plays "The Blood Wedding", "The House of Bernarda Alba" and "Yerma"

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Abstract:

The word Moors is derived from the Latin mauri, a name for the Berber tribes living in Roman Mauretania (modern day Algeria and Morocco). It has no ethnographic meaning but can be used to refer to all Muslims, Berber or Arab, who conquered the Iberian Peninsula. These Moors, who were considered religious fanatics, arrived in Spain in the year 711 and thus began a period of history which would shape Iberia differently than the rest of Europe as the land adapted to a new religion, language and culture. Hispania became a part of the caliph of Damascus which was the capital of the Muslim world.

This Moorish land was known as Al-Andalus and included all of the Iberian Peninsula except for the extreme north-west from where the Christian Reconquest would originate.

Many writers refer to Moorish rule over Spain spanning the 800 years from 711 to 1492 yet this is a misconception. The reality is that the Berber-Hispanic Muslims inhabited two-thirds of the peninsula for 375 years, about half of it for another 160 years and finally the kingdom of Granada for the remaining 244 years. 1492, the Moorish regime ended in Spain for ever.

In this article I have tried to explore the hidden traces of Moorish character in the culture of Spain. I have taken the dramas of Lorca to find out the practices that were still carried out even after the end of the Moorish regime in Spain. The Muslims in the Spain were forced to embrace Christianity by the ruthless conquerors but still certain norms of the Muslims culture remained a part of their lives. I

have focused on three plays of Lorca, The blood Wedding, The House of Bernarda Alba and Yerma. All of these plays show the rustic life of Spain and the links to the Moorish character were traced conveniently. A comparative study is carried out in order to find out the influence of the Muslims in the Spain and over those who were made to embrace Christianity by force. The representation of the Moorish character is evident in the affairs of the lives of the people but this is a fact that certain practices seem only to be followed, but not in spirit. They follow the structures but not the essence. This gap might be taken as the hybrid nature of their heredity. Anyhow, all the plays of Lorca reveal the Moorish character and invite one to unleash the realities hidden in the texture of the play.

Key words: Moorish, hybrid, heredity, regime.

Introduction

Comparative literature is the study of the literature across the globe, of different cultures, it is interdisciplinary that is concerned with the patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space or it may be explained as the activity of a reader to follow up what appears to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts. Mathew Arnold in his inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1857 said:

Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to the other events, to other literatures.

Goethe comments, "It is becoming more and more obvious to me that poetry is the poetry of all mankind". He remarked the world literature as "Weltliteratur". He emphasized the world literature is a common literature with similar issues, characters and themes.

Comparative literature has become fashion, made easier by international marketing and by availability of translations.

Jost, Gayley and Mathew Arnold are of the view that comparative literature is some kind of world religion. The underlying suggestion is that all cultural differences disappear when readers take up great works; art seen as an instrument of universal harmony and the comparatist is the one who facilitates the spread of that harmony.

Literature Review

As early as 1903, Benedetto Croce argued that comparative literature was a non-subject, contemptuously dismissing the suggestion that it might be seen as a separate discipline. He concluded that 'there is no study more arid than researches of this sort'. Croce's argument was that the term 'comparative literature' was obfuscatory, disguising the obvious, that is, the fact that the true object of the study is literary history. But other scholars made grandiose claims for the comparative literature.

In the 1950s and 1960s, high-flying graduate students in the West turned to comparative literature as a radical subject, because at that time it appeared to be transgressive, moving as it claimed to do across the boundaries of single literature study. Harry Levin in 1969 complained, "We spend far too much energy on talking about the comparative literature and not enough of it comparing the literature". He urged more to the work and less agonizing about the theory. By the late 1970s, a new generation of high-graduate students in the West turned to Literary Theory, Women's Studies, Semiotics, Film and Media studies and Cultural Studies abandoning the comparative literature. Yet even as the process under went in the West, comparative literature began to gain grounds in the rest of the world. New programmes emerged in China, in Taiwan, in Japan and other Asian countries. Development in comparative literature beyond Europe and North America do indeed cut through and across all kinds of assumptions about literature

that have come increasingly to be seen as Eurocentric. Wole Soyinka and a whole range of African critics have exposed the pervasive influence of Hegel, who argued that African culture was 'weak' in contrast to what he claimed were higher, more developed cultures, and who denied Africa a history. James Snead, in an essay attacking Hegel points out, "The outstanding fact of late twentieth-century European culture is its ongoing reconciliation with black culture".

What we have today is a varied form of comparative literary studies that changes according to where it is taking place. The growth of national consciousness and awareness of the need to move beyond the colonial legacy has led significantly to the development of comparative literature in many parts of the world, even as the subject enters a period of crisis and decay in the West.

Another rapidly expanding development in the literary studies and one which has profound implications for the future of comparative literature is 'Translational Studies'. In the mid of 1970s, the subject has developed to such an extent that there are many now who consider it to be a discipline in its own right. The work of scholars such as Tory, Lefevere, Hermans, Lambert and many others has shown that translation is especially significant at the moments of great cultural change. Still comparative literature is under progress in different parts of the world with critics finding breaking new grounds for the further development in the field.

Discussion

The culture of Spain is explored by Lorca in a realistic manner. The culture along with the moral practices has been made transparent to the readers. The traces of the Moorish character are present in the texture of the text of the dramas. The culture of the Spain is made to be exposed and the practices of the Muslims in the early age were also carried out in the same

fashion. The adultery is condemned in the play at the end of the second act when the villagers are dragging Librada's daughter, who is not married, had a baby. She killed the baby and the people are prepared to kill her as well. Bernarda shouts, "Finish her off before the police get here! Set burning coals in the place of her sins".

Apart from other evil practices, adultery is condemned in the play with hard consequences like this. Such a response to the doer of the sin is Moorish in character where a doer is to be punished with no exception. Even the daughters are not allowed to go outside the house and meet anyone. They are restricted in their home under the strict vigilance of Bernarda, the mother. Bernarda says, "I must make them feel the weight of my hand".

The daughters have not yet married because Bernarda is looking for a perfect match. This liability lies in the Muslims to search for the perfect match in every aspect and get the daughters married. Perfect match claims overall traits and characteristics of the person going to be married to her daughter.

Ponica serves them in the best possible manner and also acts as a confidant to Bernarda. She declares the Moorish supremacy of a man over the woman. She says, "She (Bernarda) doesn't know the power a man has over a house full of women".

This supremacy of a man in the affairs of the domestic life and other spheres of life is purely Moorish. The other cultures of the West do not claim such supremacy in either the domestic life or any other sphere of life. It is particularly Moorish character that the male of the family is in every respect the head of the family and he is responsible for the bread and butter also. He holds the responsibility of his siblings and the think tank of the family. He always is superior to the woman of the family and the patron for all the members.

As far as some social norms of the society is concerned, Lorca's plays display a tendency of the Moorish character in

their texture. In *The Blood Wedding*, the mother advises the bridegroom, "You are far too big for the kisses. Give them to your wife..... When she is your wife".

This reservation is purely Moorish in character. The Muslims do not enjoy such relationship before getting married even with their to-be wives. They have to maintain the distances before the final exchange of oaths and the same morals are taught by the parents, as Bernarda does in the drama. In the next moment, when the neighbour appears, she says, "I never liked her. She didn't love her husband"

This reproach by a lady about another lady and her hatred for her for not being sincere to her husband and not showing the true feelings of love her husband shows the Moorish nature. The utmost responsibility of a wife is to engage herself in the best possible manner in the service of her husband. She has to be loyal and sincere to her husband and must give priority to her husband in every respect.

The way in which the bride enters the room has also tinges of Moorish character. When she enters, her hands at her sides in a modest pose, her head bowed. This gesture shows the ultimate shyness in the character of the bride at the occasion of her marriage. The mother declares about the fate of the bride that she will be having, "A man, children, and as for the rest a wall that's two feet thick", the bride answers, "Who needs anything else".

Such a humble concept of a house wife is Moorish where a wife needs the company of her husband and children and she keeps herself save and confine to the four walls of her house. Nothing more is ever desired and thought of by a bride than a family. Furthermore, the bride claims to Leonardo,

I have got my pride. Which is why I am getting married. And I'll get shut myself with my husband and I'll love him above everything.

The conception about getting married and the supreme responsibility of the wife in the Muslims is to love her husband

above anything else. Nothing is more important than the obligation towards a husband. Such inclination towards husband and extreme loyalty towards husband shows the character of a Muslim wife.

The mother tells the father of the bride that the girls never go into the streets. This confinement of the girls in the houses with having the idea of roaming into the street has a tinge of Muslim character. Girls are respected and they are to stay in the walls of their houses until it is necessary to go out for a purpose. They are not allowed to wander in the streets aimlessly in order to kill the time. They are the pride of their family and they ought to be confined to the standards of the culture they live in.

In *Yerma*, Lorca again gives the color of Moorish character in the making of the drama. In *Yerma*, Yerma is longing for a child but she is declared as "Barren" and infertile. She desperately longs for a child but till the very end she is kept alone. Yerma is advised by the Pagan Woman that she still is pretty and clues her to be unfaithful to her husband. Time and again she is tempted towards the path of disloyalty and the very odds also push her to become unfaithful to her husband. She says,

Do you think I could just go and live with another man? What about my pride? My self-respect? I couldn't do a thing like that any more than water can flow uphill or the full moon shine at midday....No, I have to go my own way.

The 'way' she is on is Moorish, where the ultimate responsibility of a wife is only to serve her husband and to love him more than anyone else. Nothing more than her love and sincerity can be instigating for a wife to betray her husband till the last breath of her life. Yerma remains and confirms herself to the level of purity and loyalty. It shows the Moorish tendency and attitude.

In Act One, scene two, the pilgrimage to the Old Saint also confirms to the practices of the Muslims of Spain.

Whenever they faced some catastrophe or they needed some divine blessings, they turned to their Saints in order to attain proximity and kindness of God. The same practice of going for the pilgrimage to the Old Saint is a link to the practices of the Muslims of the Spain. Yerma is told by the old women to go on a pilgrimage in order to seek blessings. Such traces and practices were carried out in Moorish Spain and were still practiced in Spain after the decline of the Moorish regime. There is much more what we can label as Moorish. Lorca has clearly and artistically fabricated the Moorish character in the texture of his plays and contrapuntal reading can unleash the characteristics from the texture. All the plays in one way or the other portray the Moorish character. The traces are hidden in the texture but they can be unleashed. Lorca displays the characters in a multi dimensional manner and paints the culture of the Spain in a realistic manner.

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