

In the Brightness and Darkness of Knowledge: Pío Baroja's "Tree of Knowledge"

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Abstract

Pío Baroja, one of the leading writers of the generation of 98 in Spanish Literature, presents valuable subjects to be studied in his novels and on the characters he creates. He creates silent, lonely, rebellious and delicate characters by setting out from his own inner world. These characters emphasize the corruption and tension that the country is in. In his novel "The Tree of Knowledge", he creates Andrés Hurtado by reference to himself. This character studied medicine like himself. He tries to explain the spiritual structure of human being from a scientific point of view. He wants to know the world from Kant, Nietzsche and Shopenhauer. Along with all these, he is an individual who is constantly lonely because of family problems. In this sense Baroja finds a way to discover himself as he depicts his character Hurtado. On the other hand, within the patriarchal system of the period, a new and progressive perspective is adopted beyond the usual thinking towards women. A woman named Lulu is created against the social norms. This character again presents pieces from original ideas of the writer. Andrés Hurtado comes to mind as a character who questions and experiences loneliness with a sensitive but rebellious character and a mental and philosophical structure. Thus, he presents important data to question the different dimensions of loneliness. What kind of loneliness is experiencing Andrés Hurtado? In the study, the loneliness in which the science and the philosophy are involved will be discussed. Psychological loneliness to be dealt with in the social sense will be brought against it.

Keywords: Pío Baroja, Spanish Literature, Loneliness, Generation of 98.

Bilginin Işığında ve Karanlığında: Pío Baroja'nın "Bilgi Ağacı"

Öz

İspanyol Edebiyatı'nda 98 Kuşağının önde gelen yazarlarından biri olan Pío Baroja, romanlarında ele aldığı konular ve yarattığı karakterler itibarıyla incelenecek değerli veriler sunar. Kendi içsel dünyasından yola çıkarak yarattığı yalnız, sessiz; öte yandan isyankâr, hassas ve duyarlı karakterlerle ülkesinin içinde bulunduğu yozlaşmayı ve gerilemeyi vurgular. "Bilgi Ağacı" adlı eserinde, kendisinden referansla yarattığı Andrés Hurtado karakteri, yine kendisi

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gibi tıp okumuş, insanın ruhsal yapısını bilimsel verilerle açıklamaya çalışan, etkilendiği Kant, Nietzsche ve Schopenhauer gibi düşünürlerin izinden dünyayı anlamaya çalışan, bütün bunlarla birlikte ailevi problemlerden dolayı sürekli yalnızlık çeken bir bireydir. Bu anlamda Baroja, Hurtado karakterini çizerken kendisini de keşfedecek bir yol bulmuş olur. Öte yandan dönemin ataerkil sistemi içerisinde kadınlara yönelik alışagelmış düşüncenin ötesinde yeni ve ilerici bir perspektifle Lulu adlı kadın karakterini yaratırken, yine özgün karakterinden parçalar sunmuş olur. Andrés Hurtado, hassas, duyarlı karakteri; bilime ve felsefeye ilgili zihinsel yapısıyla yalnızlığı sorgulayan ve tecrübe eden bir karakter olarak karşımıza çıkar. Böylece yalnızlığın farklı boyutlarını sorgulayacak veriler sunar. Ne tür bir yalnızlık yaşamaktadır Andrés Hurtado? Bu çalışmada; Pío Baroja'nın büyük ölçüde kendisinden yola çıkarak yarattığı Andrés Hurtado karakteri üzerinden bilimin ve felsefenin dâhil olduğu bir yalnızlık karşısında, sosyal anlamda ele alınacak psikolojik yalnızlık çıkarılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pío Baroja, İspanyol Edebiyatı, Yalnızlık, 98 Kuşağı.

Introduction

One of the reasons why Pío Baroja was referred as an invaluable author and philosopher of Spanish Literature in the XXth Century named as the Generation of 1898 or Generation of '98 is that his sensitive and refined character and thinking ability are reflected on his point of view on life, and thus on human nature. Pío Baroja is certainly a very important author to be examined and mentioned in the Spanish Literature but he must be considered as a philosopher as well. Baroja, who values many philosophers' disciplines and frames of mind such as Schopenhauer, Alireza and Kant with the desire for learning and scrutinizing brought by the infinite curiosity, was greatly impressed by them and might have traced them by finding common aspects with his inner world as well as psychological and intellectual structure. As a person who has accepted and resigned his own loneliness coming from family issues, going out of his way, he observes the inner world of the individuals (Baroja, 1978, p. 71). In the works of

the author, we perceive an opinion which is dominated by criticism, ideas and wisdom which are embedded into smartly-built scenarios.

Like the concerns of other authors and philosophers of the Generation of '98 in which he is also included, Baroja tried to raise awareness by committing himself to write about painful and dark aspects of his country and left a precious collection full of his original ideas and thoughts.

His life question lies in the fact that religion and other religious beliefs cannot offer solutions to the public which he cannot accept. But he himself cannot show a solution. For this reason, the personalities that he created carry over the mood of Baroja, who drives his experience through an attitude without finding any way out (Uriarte, 1990, p. 274).

Suggesting that there are some valid methods in the life of every nation, Baroja associates these methods with useful pragmatism. As a result of the pragmatism's inability to function, a nation is said to be out of order (Göknar, 1991, p. 129). Valuing scientific basis as an open-minded person, thinking that traditions constrain the humanity, and thus the societies, from logic and set them back off the development needed and emphasizing that an intellectual accumulation is indispensably important for his country, Baroja appears as a figure who is hurt to a certain extent with his sensitive and melancholic mood as well as his memory which is worn out because of struggling and scrutinizing. "Night is dark; my house's door is half open. Anyone is allowed to enter; there is whether life or death." (Baroja, 2017, pp. 430-440).

Expressing in his works and writings that knowing, learning, knowledge and science are extremely valuable, the writer bases his novel titled "Tree of Knowledge" on knowledge and blames - between the lines - his country, universities, society and government with hypocrisy, illiteracy, ignorance and unawareness of respect and boundaries. In "Tree of Knowledge", we see a scenario built by Baroja based on his own life. He himself will also say

later, "I wrote for those who are anxious and excited like me" (Granjel, 1973, p. 13). Receiving medical education, valuing scientific knowledge, being closely acquainted with academic platforms with his students and lecturers and observing the society closely thanks to his experience of working in different regions of Spain, the author presents a unique work to the readers by also touching upon these autobiographical data in his novel. He emphasizes that although his philosophical and scientific background is strong in his works, he does not have any purpose of love that he wants to achieve even if he presents tangible values (Nallim, 1962, p. 375). Turning into a sensitive and desolate, but at the same time a rebellious individual because of familial problems in his own life and the wounds they caused, the author creates Andrés Hurtado who is the protagonist of his work in this direction and smartly sheds light upon the state of the country and society at that time by delicately writing about his medical education and the events developing afterwards. Thus, what we will write about Andrés Hurtado, the protagonist, will also be related to the author himself. As it has been stated, in doing so, Baroja's intention is not to aim for a certain purpose but to orient himself to his internal complexity (González Quirós, 2004, p. 2).

In his work, Andrés who receives medical education is a young doctor who comprehends the importance of information and scientific attitude. This young doctor who tends to think, scrutinize, inquire, observe and understand the human being and his inner world will lapse into a melancholic mood by feeling the burden of the act of "knowing". Andrés, who possesses knowledge, will be overwhelmed by the astonishment and frustration of the reality of "being human" with his ability of reasoning and observation. So, it will also shed light on the fact of "being human" to handle Andrés, the protagonist of "Tree of Knowledge", in the brightness and darkness of knowledge. In the following parts, different aspects of the main character of the novel are going to be discussed.

1. Inner Sensitiveness and Accompanying Loneliness

The young doctor is unfortunately a lonely individual. He is generally a deserted young man in his family. While deep loneliness is a condition accompanied by depression, social or relational loneliness is defined as the condition in which the individual feels isolated in a society without being able to have the feeling of belonging to a group (Yaşar, 2007, p. 238). From this point of view, the young doctor's loneliness is caused by "the failure of belonging" arising out of the fact that his intellectual structure cannot assort with the established sense of society. Andrés lives with a rough and cold-hearted father and siblings in different characters who lead different lives though in the same house (for him, the only important person at home is his younger brother, Luisito, because he is the only one that is pure and clean, away from evil and hypocrisy according to Andrés). The young doctor's first inner discomfort and sensitivity begin in this house. As he gets to know the first feelings and experiences related to social and family relationships here, this house is one of the first places and things that construct his inner world.

He had bitterness, insensitiveness and rigidity in his soul on one hand; depression and sadness on the other (Baroja, 1983, p. 179).

He is already experiencing a sense of isolation with his father, who has never been able to tolerate people with different characters and ideas. Earthly and materialistic aspects of students and lecturers in college as well as their spoiled and immoral attitudes push him to loneliness.

Loneliness made him introverted and sad. He did not like wandering around in crowded places like his brother, Pedro. He used to prefer being closeted and reading novels (Baroja, 1983, p. 14).

But we will also have to question how negative this loneliness is. Because Andrés will tend to read more, and therefore to think and question more by having a deep relationship with himself in his inner world as a result of the isolation brought by this loneliness. Loneliness is a part of life, though

this is troublesome. On the other hand, we cannot ignore its deep meaning as well as the ones which enable us to confront the secrets of our inner self. [...] Thus; loneliness is fed on childhood and memories, light and shadows, desires and graces on the horizons going down to dizzying depths of our own inner self (Borgna, 2013, pp. 122, 123). Although it brings a heavy spiritual and social burden, he will have the chance to discover the source of knowledge primarily through the potential in his inner world. Loneliness, indifference to people whom he does not appreciate and staying out of the conventional social norms consist of perhaps a blessing for him. Andrés who believes in the honesty and dignity of liberal ideas never displays a passive attitude, even though he lives in solitude.

Andrés never comes to heel regarding the subjects in which he believes that he is right; he stands against his father and brother taking an attitude of harsh and aggressive persistence (Baroja, 1983, p. 15).

The young doctor finds a solution to his loneliness while he controls his passion for reading and his screaming hunger.

Dumas Pere, Eugene Sue, Montepin, Gaboriau, Miss Baddon fed his hunger for reading (Baroja, 1983, p. 27).

Hence; for Andrés, the concept of loneliness, although it has dark aspects, turns into an opportunity in which he will discover and recognize himself, lean to read, investigate and inquire to have an idea about the universe, the world, the mankind and the existence while realizing the individuals' behaviour and state of mind within the society as well. "We need loneliness, a big inner loneliness. Having a journey down to one's inner world but being unable to come across himself for hours" (Rilke, 2001, p. 16). Of course; the most important thing brought by loneliness, for the young doctor, is his journey down to his inner world. In the following part, the relation between intellectual activity and spiritual structure will be discussed.

2. Feeling, Philosophy and Holding on to Life

Criticizing the hypocrisy of society, "mistrust, ill-will and impudence of people" (Baroja, 1983, p. 174), the young doctor, as a high-minded person, also pleads for mercy for people who are oppressed by the cruel aspects of the society.

In spite of the most restraining influences, Andrés was influenced by the words of some workers at the rally of Rius High School's anarchists for days. Ernesto Alvarez, a gray-bearded and dark-eyed man among these workers, spoke fluently and enthusiastically in the rally; he talked about the children who had been left on the streets as well as the beggars and the fallen women. Andrés perhaps had an emotionality that was quite unhealthy. As he revealed his thoughts regarding social injustice, Julio Arachel opposed him with his unique common sense. [...] Certainly, any correction having a humanitarian agreement had to be done jointly and performed through political methods (Baroja, 1983, pp. 64, 65).

Feeling merciful probably because of having a sensitive state of mind, the young doctor supports the idea that there must be an absolute way for the humanity. He considers a group of people who had a joyful life in abundance, without caring about their country and people, surrounded by lies in luxurious platforms on the one hand; and a group of people who try to survive by fighting against diseases and poverty in the narrow and dark streets of Spain on the other. However, all of these can be overcome by reasoning and making efforts. It may be possible to offer an ideal life with good management, a rational attitude and common sense that is far from traditional reaction.

There was no concept of society in the public; the families used to be retreated to their homes as if cavemen were retreated into their cavities. There was no solidarity. No one knew or could take advantage of the collaboration's power. The men used to go to work, and sometimes to the casino. The women used to go out just on Sundays for religious ceremonies. [...] The people welcomed going down by bowing to the inevitable. [...] The poor were not involved in

anything and they used to live in their own shell while the wealthy were full of beans and the usury was sweeping the whole town (Baroja, 1983, pp. 137-139).

This aspect of humanity -both in individual and social dimension- is the phenomenon that makes Andrés miserable in his inner world and pushes him to think through rebellious feelings. The liberal, revolutionary and judicious feelings of the young doctor, of course, face a greater dimension accompanied by mercy and wisdom in the presence of the public leading their lives helplessly and bourgeois people living recklessly and selfishly.

According to Andrés, wealthy people in Madrid who were getting better, stronger and breaking their connections with the public headed forward while the public were getting weaker and degenerated day by day. [...] Wit and physical strength of the public were also lower than those of the rich. The urban class was slowly preparing to slaughter the poor class (Baroja, 1983, p. 81).

A person who does not hesitate to tell the truth, criticizes the non-logical attitudes of the traditional norms of the society for centuries, emphasizes the value of science and knowledge under the circumstances of the country at that period, and suggests that the people should not be restricted to one single thought, will be isolated in many aspects, for sure. Those who accompany him will only be people having similar ideas and lifestyles. The young doctor frequently has philosophical conversations with Iturrio, his uncle, who is intellectually in the same direction with him.

Lulu, who is also far beyond the traditional female concept, is one of the characters making him peaceful. Normally “the representation of women in realist novel [...] is inevitably mediated by the dominant theories of gender of the bourgeoisie” (Jagoe, 1994, p. 8). But in Baroja’s work the woman character Lulu is drawn very differently. This poor young girl, who is rebellious against life but at the same time showing a calm attitude, steals Andrés’s heart as both a friend and a lover

thanks to her thoughts and ideas indicating that the person should be left alone. Iturrio and Lulu, whose intellectual overflows find their way out, establish a deep friendship with the young doctor while they also make a reference to the fact that there are few open-minded and wise people in the Spanish society.

She had very humane and very noble thoughts although she was deprived of showoff and sense of morality, at least the sense of morality in use. [...] It was the insincerity, hypocrisy and malevolence that disturbed her. She was committed to frankness by heart. [...] Lulu adopted neither prohibitions nor traditions and customs (Baroja, 1983, pp. 64, 65).

It would be appropriate to mention the following: The author’s glorifying attitude towards the woman is disclosed through Andrés’s view of Lulu as an individual having her own ideas, thoughts, wise and character, beyond just a woman, - and as a friend to talk about in all matters forever - in the early XXth Century of the Spanish society when women were underestimated, not regarded as individuals in society, imprisoned by traditional norms and “it was commonly accepted that their social position was just their home” (Jagoe, 1994, p. 8).

In the continuation of the novel, he has philosophical conversations with his wise uncle and seeks answers for the questions in his mind by being influenced by the disciplines of Schopenhauer and Kant. He is mentally raised as he develops perspectives in different dimensions towards the life. This depth will spiritually take him to the darker within time. Because although he finds an explanation regarding the hypocrisy of the humanity through scientific data, he will not find a way out. Understating the fact of human to a great extent, Andrés experiences intimidation when he witnesses the same negative thing every time he witnesses it in practice.

He was asking himself in worry ‘how do I shape my life?’ And people, objects and the sun seemed unreal to him in the presence of the questions stuck in his head (Baroja, 1983, p. 81).

We witness the struggle for survival in the young doctor spreading for a long time because of similar situations. However, let's think how easy it is to live. Even just breathing is enough to live. A roof, water and bread are biologically enough while we also need a neighbour, a friend and a conversation in social context. So, what is the object of surviving? How can this young person, who does not have any physical problems or illnesses, have difficulty in surviving? The problem is that human beings definitely survive on many circumstances biologically on their animal aspect.

However, it is difficult to witness and endure the evil in this world which is full of cruelty through the intellect and soul brought about by being a human; to have the failure of explaining and making the others accept the ideas and thoughts; to have the failure of being understood; to be isolated and deserted. These are phenomena that make life difficult for people who are thinking, questioning and having a feeling an ideal as well as complicating many things about surviving. This is exactly what the young doctor experiences.

The person is in despair of not knowing what to do with life, not having an idea, not knowing where to go and disappearing without compass or light. What is done with life? How is it shaped? [...] Life is, at least here, something safe, absurd and deprived of enthusiasm; I believe that everywhere is like this; thoughts overflow with fear by compromising the enormous infertility of existing (Baroja, 1983, p. 103).

In the following part, different types of loneliness will be discussed together.

3. Brightness and Darkness

Information is burden. Mankind is obliged to know, but he is also condemned to be crushed under the burden of knowledge. Andrés, educated in Medicine as an intelligent individual with a high level of reasoning ability, knows the world, nature, laws of physics, skeletal systems of living things, human cells, biological systems, microscopic organisms, reactions of sunlight on

these creatures, diseases, symptoms, treatments, various data on the mental and spiritual health of the human, brain structure and chemical aspect of the brain together with the hormones as well as possessing the practices that will make his life easier. Besides all this knowledge, he also knows - naturally - dark corridors of the human soul, its uncertainties, wild instincts, selfishness, problem of self-respect; and therefore, its hypocrisy in the social dimension, which is far away from virtue.

Humans is faced with problems as from the point of consciousness of their existence. The biggest one of these problems is that they feel a deep uncertainty. As their knowledge and experience increase, they try to clear this fog of uncertainty. However; on the contrary, this uncertainty gradually grows and the increase of knowledge enables them to notice better this dark fog surrounding them (Ceylan, 1999, p. 103).

Here, the brightness and darkness of knowledge will manifest itself at this stage. Which of these two aspects brought by the act of knowing will be superior for the young doctor? Will Andrés be able to provide the balance of these two pole points? Or will he dominate one of them? Which one is exclusive? Brightness or darkness? Of course, Andrés will be withdrawn to a changing mood because of having a sensitive structure since these questions will take on different answers for each person.

He started to have a deep anger for everything. [...] He would give all his spiritual independence in exchange for one aspect of the life [...] Those were the things that drive him crazy (Baroja, 1983, pp. 150-151).

In fact, this changing mood is prominently felt in the young doctor until he gets married to Lulu. Being able to recognize how important morals, virtue and freedom are for the human being, Andrés turns into a desperate person questioning life whenever he witnesses corruption in society. However; his marriage with Lulu is not only a reunion with the beloved one but also a friendship which is established in harmony with the structures of mentality and character. So, every

moment he spent with her strengthened his standing against the life. Unfortunately; his delicate soul manifesting itself since his childhood suffers a great deal of trauma because of Lulu's death and his depressive character that has been covered for so long comes to existence. "The depressed part reacts to external stimuli like all other neurotic responses and returns as distress, anxiety or violence" (Çeler, 2011, p. 243). Andrés has partly been able to silence many of the problems in his mind. However, his wife's death liberated his depressed part and caused him to do uncontrolled acts as a striking external factor. The young doctor cannot find a way out and commits suicide realizing that he will not be able to endure the burden brought by the world and knowledge.

Conclusion

The young Doctor, Andrés Hurtado, who cannot comply with his family and the society and is buried under the hypocrisy and rustic estimations of interest of the people far from ethics as well as underdevelopment and disbelief of society and overwhelming burden of traditions owing to his unique character and state of mind emerges as a character created from Pío Baroja's own mental and emotional side. The young doctor, who has a strong link with loneliness because of the abovementioned reasons, uses it as a blessing and succeeds in knowing himself, discovering, understanding the deep darkness of the human being and having a broad view of the world's functioning. So, we can express that - as we think that it is a reflection of the author - he is a philosopher. Appreciating knowledge and learning, Andres struggles with the loneliness and burden of knowledge while he also discovers the valuable potential in his inner world. Therefore; Baroja expresses the brightness and the darkness of the knowledge in literary terms with a masterful and wise attitude in his novel "Tree of Knowledge". Therefore, he writes the fact of "human" in a style that will always preserve its currency in a universal dimension.

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