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Loneliness and Contemplation of Death in Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsni
Dağlarca's Poems

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Abstract

The first half of the twentieth century was of great significance in the history of the world since social, economic and political circumstances influenced every field of life deeply all over the world. Literature also took its share from those developments and many changes from themes to new narration techniques appeared in the field of literature. Experiencing the period in which new aesthetic understandings emerged in literature clashing with the former established ones, the literary figures of the era were divided into groups. While some insisted on praising and advocating the established norms, some were inclined to the modernist attitude supporting the significance of it to be able to reflect the feelings of those experiencing the era. However, there appeared some poets, like Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca, who tended to form a hybrid structure combining the old with the new. In this regard, this study offers a comparative examination of Frost and Dağlarca's selected poems, analysing how they reflect the pessimism of the twentieth century through loneliness and contemplation of death.

Keywords: Comparative Literature; Robert Frost; Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca; Loneliness; Mortality.

Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca as Twentieth Century Poets

Robert Frost was a distinctive place in American poetry since he achieved great success with his style. He "stands apart from other poets in the modern era in that his sentences are clear, his verse form traditional and language similar to everyday speech" (Lynen 2). The grammatical structures in his poems are not complex, but they are easily understandable. His style of writing is very simplistic in colloquial diction. By using natural speech patterns, he produced dialogues in his works. (Lynen 2). His poems also seem to be natural since he always chooses words from everyday speeches. The structure of his poems is never complicated so his poems seem to be mere transitions or reflections of daily events into poetry. In addition to his understandable language, what makes Frost a timeless poet is clarified by Gerber:

Frost's poetry retains its freshness even today because it doesn't depend upon the topic of the day but rather explores aspects of humanity that are timeless and universal. In dealing with the individual, Frost emphasizes that man remains single, alone with his fate. (117)

Even though his poetry is associated with simplicity because of uncomplicated grammatical structures and colloquial language, this simplicity disappears when it is about meter because he generally combined free verse and meter in his poetry (Alçar 20). To clarify, most of his poems start with an attitude strict to meter and then through the end of the poem, he goes on with free verse. He is aware of the traditional rhyme scheme and strict verse forms, but it is also clear that, as other modernists do, he has also a tendency to write poems ignoring verses. Dana Gioia clarifies his attitude that he seems to be "a retrograde figure, a poet glancing backwards at tradition rather than advancing boldly with his young contemporaries such as Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot" (73). Although his poems are labelled with simplicity, one can also suggest that it is not always easy to understand his poems at first reading because of the meanings he launches on the word from everyday speech. To clarify, the words he uses which seem to describe nature do not always describe nature, but they are there to imply Frost's messages to human beings.

One of the most frequent and noteworthy message that he is inclined to reflect in his poems is loneliness and isolation of man in the modern world, which also appears as one of the most basic themes of his poetry. John Xiros Cooper clarifies his tendency to loneliness as follows:

Frost makes great poetry out of the plain tonalities of rural voices. There is nothing sentimental and mawkish about his country speakers; they are confronted by the dilemmas all persons face in our time – the passing years, a sense of isolation and loneliness, and death." (90)

Moreover, to be able to understand his inclination to these themes, one also had better have knowledge about his troubled life. He was born in America in 1874 and lost his father when he was eleven years old. His mother also died of cancer when he was struggling with economical problems in his thirties. Besides, Frost put his younger sister Jeanie to a mental hospital where she died after long treatments. He could not escape from the destiny of death after he got married because four of his six children died when he was alive. He also lost his wife in his early sixties, which can be suggested to clarify his tendency to the theme of loneliness well (Al- Zubaydai and M. Sultan 23).

Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca is one of the most noteworthy and prolific Turkish poets who produced many poems having variety of themes. He deliberately keeps his distance for any foreign or Turkish movements or groups, and he tries to produce poems in his own understanding. His style can be explained with the combination of the classic and contemporary forming his authenticity. What builds similarity between Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca is that he also uses colloquial language in his poems and his works also shuttle between meter and free verse. He explains his style in one of his interviews with Zeynep Oral that he does not pay regard to the strict rules while writing poems; however, he also reveals that he determined five hundred rules related to versification. However, he also clarifies that even though he evaluates the quality of both his and other poems within the lights of these rules, these rules are trivial while composing a poem because poem is the product of versification which can improve through experience (3). In addition to the similarity between their style, another factor facilitating this similarity is Dağlarca's sensitivity to people's loneliness in the world, which appears as one of the most basic themes in both poets' poetry.

Loneliness

One of Frost's poems reflecting the theme of loneliness is "Acquainted with the Night" which was written in 1928 and it clearly refers to the loneliness of the poet because he had lost half of his family when he wrote the poem. Briefly, in the poem, the persona reflects his loneliness as he marches towards the deserted streets at a rainy night. He advances beyond the borders of the town visiting each

street but does not see anything to relax him when he feels depressed. Even though he encounters with somebody (such as the watchman), he does not want to be seen by him since he knows he cannot establish empathy with him. During the poem, he overhears a cry, but notices that even that cry is not for him because he knows he has nobody waiting for him. Through the end of the poem, he likens the moon to a clock failing to show the right time to die, which underlines that the themes of loneliness and contemplation of death are in vicious circle in the poem.

Reading the title of the poem "Acquainted with the Night" (Frost 324), one can suggest that the tone of the poem is dark because the persona states that he knows 'the night' which is always associated with negative feelings and loneliness. To be able to understand what night signifies in the poem, Maxson benefits from John Robert Doyle who makes a detailed analysis of the poem insisting on the symbolic meaning of night and who remarks that "one line of the poem indicates that night represents the sadness the life has to offer, but much more important are the lines pointing to the fact that that night symbolizes the basic isolation of man from other men and from nature" (72). Besides, after reading the first stanza, "I have been acquainted with the night. / I have walked out in rain – and back in rain. / I have outwalked the furthest city light." (Frost 324), as Maxson clarifies above, the reader perceives that the persona is lonely and walking through darkness at a dark and rainy night. By means of the tense that the poet prefers to mention these lone nights, the reader becomes aware of the fact that these lone walks at nights are repeated actions for the persona. Here, one also can suggest that these nights are just metaphors standing for his dark life and his walk refers to his quest in his gloomy life. Even though it can be arguable whether these nights may be the physical nights when the persona goes for a walk or may refer to the darkness in his life such as depression or loneliness, what is clear in the first stanza is that his life is gloomy, and he is alone. Moreover, the persona benefits from another metaphor for darkness; rain which makes the night darker and lonelier. In addition to rain's contribution to the darkness of the night, it also increases the loneliness of nights that the persona is acquainted with because it is not difficult to imagine rainy nights when loneliness dominates the streets. In the last line of the first stanza, the persona tells the reader that he has walked past the furthest city light (324). The reader is not sure whether he is walking outside of the city and into the country, or into a part of the city where there are no lights. However, what is clear in the first stanza that his walking, probably referring to his life, is as dark and lonely as a rainy night.

In the second stanza, "I have looked down the saddest city lane. / I have passed by the watchman on his beat / And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain." (324), the dark tone of the poem goes on because the persona states that he has looked down the saddest city lane. Here, it is not clear why the city lane is sad. However, one can also suggest that the persona implies the emptiness of streets. To clarify, like the persona, the city lane which is supposed to be used by crowds of people has also been left alone. Thus, here, empty streets are associated with the persona who does not have anybody in his life and his unhappiness is also implied through the sadness of city lanes. Then, the persona states that he passes by the watchman, but drops his eyes since he does not want to make an explanation about his loneliness in such a rainy and dark night. Here, one can express that the persona prefers to walk at nights because he does not want anybody around him and even when he encounters with a watchman, he does not want to speak to him and turns his eyes away. Or, since he is ashamed of his loneliness, he cannot dare to look at the watchman. Thus, in either way, the second stanza contributes much to the theme of loneliness laying emphasis on his fragility about his solitude depicting his reaction when he encounters the only person on his way.

In the third stanza, "I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet / When far away an interrupted cry / Came over houses from another street." (324), the persona states that he hears a sound of cry coming from another street and he stops to be able to hear it properly. After the presence of the watchman, this sound also mentions that there are some people around him. That is, he is not the only man in the city and because he encounters with a watchman and hears people's voices; however, he

feels alone himself among people as many people do. Briefly, the poet, in this stanza, underlines the solitude of the persona with the help of existence of other people in the city.

In the first line of the fourth stanza, "But not to call me back or say good-bye;" (324) the persona clarifies that even that cry is not for him because he is so alone that there is nobody to call him back or say good-by. Thus, the reader perceives that the persona is not contented with his solitude because he becomes sad since there is no one in his life. Here, even though the poet highlights the loneliness of the persona, it can also be inferred from the first line of the fourth stanza, "But not to call me back or say good-bye;" (324), that the persona contemplates the idea of death because he wishes for somebody who can help him give up the idea of death or at least say farewell to him. By means of this line, it becomes clear that the persona has the idea of death in his mind and mourns for his loneliness referring to death. Even though he may be claimed to consider committing suicide, his hesitation is also mentioned in the final stanza when the moon is likened to a "luminary clock". It looks like a clock especially when it is full; however, the persona suggests that it does not show him the correct time expressing that "Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right" (324). Here appears a question: Why does the persona consult the watch? When the effect of loneliness over him and contemplation of death because of his solitude in his mind are taken into consideration, the answer to this question may be that he is checking the clock of nature, the moon, in his lone walks during gloomy nights if it signals the right time to commit suicide. Then, the poet ends his poem by using repetition: "I have been one acquainted with the night" which highlights, again, the theme of loneliness dominating the whole poem. Briefly, in "Acquainted with the Night," Robert Frost benefits from the imagery of the night to be able to describe the persona's lonely and gloomy life. Like the rainy night that he has walked out, his life has also been dark, and he has been alone on his way to the deepest darkness. In addition to loneliness, one can also infer from the end of the poem that the poet also depicts the contemplation of death the persona experiences because of loneliness he suffers from.

In "Acquainted with the Night," Robert Frost lays emphasis on the loneliness of the persona describing a dark and rainy night that the persona has walked out to be able to indicate destructive effect of loneliness on him. Similarly, Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca also wrote several poems in which he tries to depict the feeling of loneliness referring to nature. To clarify, both poets benefit from the imagery of natural phenomena to be able to lay emphasis on their loneliness and it becomes clear in their poetry that these natural phenomena remind them of their loneliness. Within this context, his "Yalnızlığım" meets on a common ground with Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" since both poems mirrors the feeling of loneliness that their personas experience with the help of references to the nature. The title of Dağlarca's poem, "Yalnızlığım," means 'my loneliness' in English and after reading the poem, one can remark that the persona embraces his loneliness because he describes his loneliness with metaphors related to nature throughout the poem, which can be regarded as the first similarity between "Acquainted with the Night's" persona who repeats throughout the poem that he is acquainted with the night emphasizing his loneliness. Dağlarca starts the poem stating that his loneliness is similar to warm water and it is like a remote voice in his soul (Tandoğan 56). By means of the definition of loneliness in the first and second line of the first stanza, it becomes obvious that the persona seems to be at peace with his loneliness. However, then, the persona, in the third and fourth stanzas, changes his tone about loneliness expressing that he becomes aware of his loneliness with "blue songs" coming every morning and he feels a shiver down his spine because of loneliness (56). Like Robert Frost who reflects the theme of loneliness with natural phenomena such as night, rain or darkness, Dağlarca also benefits from nature using metaphors reflecting his persona's loneliness. On the other hand, unlike Frost who uses dark metaphors to illustrate what his persona feels, Dağlarca's persona states that mornings with "blue songs" remind him of his loneliness. Here, it is clear that "blue songs" is a metaphor indicating the beauty of mornings; however, what blue songs mean can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, one can suggest the poet depicts the beauty of array of bright colour in the mornings with "blue songs" highlighting the harmony of colours in the sky. Secondly, it can be remarked that the

poet not only lays emphasis on the visual beauty of mornings, but also audible pulchritude such as songs of birds by combining the colours and voices of mornings. In either way, the beauty of mornings awakens the feeling of loneliness in the persona because instead of enjoying the life, he is, now, an alone man at home.

The second stanza starts and finishes with conditional sentences which clarify that the poet reconciles with the result of his elderliness and loneliness and implies the contemplation of death in his mind. The persona utters that if the sun is yellower than the moon and tomorrow is harder than yesterday, he accepts staying in a dark room which has become sooty because of bronze candles used before electricity (56). To explain, because of elderliness, his sun is not as bright as the sun, but yellower than the moon, and his tomorrow will be harder than yesterday. Thus, the poet accepts to wait for his death in a dark room. In the third and fourth lines of the second stanza, the poet clearly reveals his elderliness stating that even though my eyes cannot see properly anymore, there should be someone to hold his hands which are cold (56). At this point, it becomes clear that both Frost's persona in "Acquainted with the Night" and Dağlarca's persona in "Yalnızlığım" desire for somebody around them to save them from the pains of loneliness. While Frost's persona needs someone to call him back or say farewell, Dağlarca's needs someone to support him in his elderliness holding his cold hands.

In the third stanza, the persona goes on with descriptions of his loneliness uttering that his roses blossom behind a window (56). To clarify, the persona implies that he is now locked in the house because of elderliness and his roses, a metaphor for his feelings, are behind a window anymore. In the rest of the stanza, the persona goes on describing his loneliness with the image of the old man who is in his house and looking at the pool by daydreaming. In the final stanza, the persona goes back to imagery of nature again and likens his loneliness to a leaf flapping around in dream winds (56). He also states that this thought makes him feel a shiver up in his spine as a ray flute does and finishes the poem expressing that even though this poem will stay at the hearts of the readers, his loneliness will become distanced forever (56). As seen, the poet benefits from nature to underline his loneliness with the leaf metaphor at the end of the poem and ends the poem with a reference to the eternal loneliness; death. Thus, it is not wrong to remark that Frost and Dağlarca not only attempt to reflect the theme of loneliness benefiting from the imagery of nature, but also hints for the idea of death which remains close to loneliness in both poems.

The theme of loneliness can be suggested to draw both Frost and Dağlarca's attention since they produced several poems focusing on the loneliness of man in the modern world. However, one can also notice that their tones are different. While Frost deals with loneliness with dark metaphors, which can be claimed to be the reflection of his sorrowful life, Dağlarca, in this poem, seems to be reconciled with his loneliness which is reflected with soft metaphors reminding the persona of loneliness. Besides, solitude of man also brings the idea of death to both personas' minds, and while Dağlarca's persona needs someone to help him enjoy his elderliness, Frost's persona's loneliness is more painful, and he craves for somebody to dissuade him from committing suicide or to say farewell to him.

Contemplation of Death

Furthermore, what meets Frost and Dağlarca on a common ground is not only their tendency to reflect the feeling of loneliness which conjures up the idea of death, but they also they handle death wish in their poetry obviously. To exemplify, even though "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Night" seems to be a poem about nature, one can also suggest that the poem underlines the discomfort of a man who goes to the hearth of nature and perceives that life at nature without responsibilities of modern world is preferable than city life. Having witnessed the peace at nature, the persona contemplates the idea of death through the end of the poem, but he gives up expressing that he has some responsibilities.

The poet begins the poem with an introduction of the woods and clarifies that he thinks he knows the owner. He also states that the owner of the woods will not see the persona watching it since the owner lives in the village. In the second stanza, it becomes clear the persona is not alone, but on his horse. He starts to interpret the feelings of the horse and expresses that the horse finds it queer to stop between the woods and a frozen lake. The persona also reveals that it is the longest night which signals the New Year when people are supposed to be happy and celebrate the coming of the New Year. In the third stanza, the persona remarks that their stop in the middle of nowhere makes his horse uncomfortable because it is too silent and the only sound that they hear is wind. The poet finishes the poem stating that the woods which are expected to be frightening and dangerous in winters are lovely, dark and deep, which enables the reader to connote different meanings. To clarify, in the last stanza, the poet states that "The woods are lovely, dark and deep" (Frost 275) and goes on with "But I have promises to keep" (275) which shows his willingness to reach the woods because the woods mean comfort and peace for the persona who is fed up with his life and seeking for peace. Then, he finishes the poem with "And miles to go before I sleep" (275) which signals that he has a lot to do before sleeping that signals death in this interpretation. At this point, the whole interpretation of the poem changes and the reader becomes suspicious about the woods because it becomes obvious that the woods refer to death and the persona visits the idea of death stopping by the woods and considering its peace. That is to say, the persona contemplates the idea of death but delays or gives up this idea because he has promises related to his life in modern life. Even though "Frost denied that he meant for the poem to evoke thoughts of suicide, yet many people interpret the poem that way, and they can do so without stretching the limits of logic and sense" (Little 189). Thus, if the woods symbolize death, the first stanza, then, describes how the persona visits the idea of death at dark nights. Besides, he also knows that the woods belong to death which will provide him with the comfort and peace that he seeks for. However, although the persona considers the comfort of death, he is not ready for the idea of death and he gives up the idea stating that he has a lot of responsibilities to be carried out before death. Hence, it will not be an overstatement to assert that the poem mirrors the condition of modern man who seeks for peace, but who also has to delay his convergence because of earthly rush and the responsibilities that modern life launches on his shoulders. Briefly, in spite of the fact that the poem superficially seems to be a nature poem, it is beyond the suspicion that it also reflects the contemplation of death in the persona's mind even though he is not ready or courageous enough to kill himself.

Like Frost, Dağlarca also deals with the contemplation of death or suicide in his poetry and wrote a poem named "Gönlümün İntihar Arzusu" which reflects his tendency to commit suicide. However, as seen from the title which means "my heart's desire to commit suicide" in English, Dağlarca's poem clearly and directly refers to suicide while Frost's poem requires a deep analysis and detailed interpretation (Dağlarca 37). As Frost does, Dağlarca also uses nature in his poetry as a mediator to reflect a feeling and similarly, he refers to natural phenomena to reflect his contemplation of death or suicide. After declaring the tendency to commit suicide in the title, the persona reveals that he feels the upcoming night from the smell of the leaves. Here, it becomes clear that night is a metaphor for death and the persona knows his death is coming closer because he also suggests that the smell of the leaves reminds him of the night when his dying day will come (Dağlarca 37). In Dağlarca's poetry, death is not calamitous because he reflects all anthropic phenomena such as death or mirth softly (Soner 67) and this differentiates Dağlarca from Frost who lays the persona's dilemma bare since Dağlarca's poetry does not consist of internal tensions (Soysal 33). In the second line, the poet also explains what he expects from death: nothingness when the persona states that death will take him to nothingness (Dağlarca 37). Thus, Dağlarca's expectation from death is different from Frost's because while Dağlarca regards death as the beginning of nothingness, Frost considers death as eternal peace. Besides, one can also comment that in Dağlarca's poem, the nature functions as a mediator reminding the persona of death with leaves that have been fallen and that have been waiting for death on the ground. That is, as the persona is waiting for the night, which means dark nothingness for him, the leaves are also waiting

for their destiny to become nothing, and this reminds the persona of death. Similarly, Frost also benefits from nature to be able to evoke the contemplation of death and he uses the woods as a metaphor reflecting the peace of death.

In the second stanza, the persona describes the mental process in which he contemplates to commit suicide and he likens his silence when he gets lost in thoughts to a ship which sails at dark nights. In the third line of the second stanza, it is also revealed that he has some regrets about his youth and this remorseful past pushes the ship like sails (37). Here, it becomes obvious that the persona is regretful about his past and these regrets motivate him to commit suicide as sails push a ship. Briefly, this stanza clarifies the motivation behind the contemplation of death with regrets of the persona who is highly likely an old man waiting for death.

In the final stanza, the persona goes back to the imagery of leaves as he does in the first stanza and likens his dreams or aims in life to leaves of rose. Then, he begs for strong wind that will snatch them from the branches and bring them down (37). Thus, it becomes clear that the persona has some dreams or aims in his life, and they are those which enable them to clutch on life so he begs for wind which will help him forget about them. Here, it is not wrong to state that like Frost's persona, Dağlarca's persona is also hesitant to commit suicide because even though both contemplate the idea of death or suicide, they give up it since they have some reasons clinging them to life. Furthermore, both poets cry for help from nature; while Frost wishes the moon to signal the right time to die, Dağlarca waits for a strong wind that can snatch him away from life. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to state that Dağlarca's persona is more motivated to die since he repeats his wish again in the last line of the poem while Frost's persona expresses that he has a lot to do in life until death uttering "And miles to go before I sleep" (275).

Conclusion

As the representatives of modern poetry, both Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca handle with the themes of modern literary tradition such as loneliness and contemplation of death. In his "Acquainted with the Night," Robert Frost underlines the loneliness of the persona describing his walk, his life, at a dark and rainy night. Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca also focuses on the theme of loneliness in his "Yalnızlığım". However, it can be suggested that the way how they reflect this theme is a bit different because while Frost's persona is a lonely man who walks through dark streets at a rainy night which reinforces the idea of loneliness in his mind and who is in need of someone to help him give up the idea of death or at least, to say farewell, Dağlarca's persona is the one who remembers his loneliness through the beauty of nature and who waits for inevitable end needing someone to hold his cold hands. Even though the strategies to reflect loneliness are different, what meets both poets on a common ground is that they reflect loneliness of man through nature.

Another common theme that these poets reflect in their poetry is the contemplation of death or suicide. Having dealt with the problems of modern man such as loneliness, alienation, and isolation in their poetry, they also move a step forward and depict the tendency of modern man to death. In addition to the poems, "Acquainted with the Night" and "Yalnızlığım" in which they imply the idea of death coming from the feeling of loneliness, Both Frost and Dağlarca produced poems which reflect the personas' contemplation of death. Even though Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Night" can be labelled as a nature poem at first reading, a close reading can reveal that the persona investigates the idea of death which is defined as eternal peace. However, the persona gives up committing suicide expressing that he has a lot of responsibilities in life, which portrays the uneasiness of modern man who experiences existential problems but cannot dare to stop both his existence and uneasiness. On the other hand, Dağlarca, in his "Gönlümün İntihar Arzusu," clearly reveals that the persona is inclined to commit suicide. Yet, similarly, his persona is also not courageous enough to end his life, but waits for help from nature, strong wind, to end his life as Frost's persona wishes help from the moon to show

the correct time to die. Obviously, these poets tend to reflect the contemplation of death referring to nature as they also refer to nature to mirror loneliness of modern men. Finally, it may not be wrong to assert that both Robert Frost and Fazıl Hüsü Dağlarca benefit from the imagery of nature and use it skilfully as a mediator to reflect emotions related to human beings.

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