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MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO: THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG WOMEN, HIS LIFE, SPANISH SOCIETY AND EL MARQUÉS DE LUMBRÍA

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Twentieth century Spain was characterized by social change with respect to the role of women in society. The feminist movement during this period attempted to obtain for women a role outside of the home, and one more involved in matters of public life. One author whose works were published in this environment of social change was Miguel de Unamuno. His ideology, which was influenced by the women in his own life, criticized the change, although it was not against all aspects of the movement. Unamuno's complicated philosophy can be seen in his writings, for example in *El Marqués de Lumbría*. In this work, the author uses the three main characters, Carolina, Luisa, and Tristán, and their distinct characteristics, which are divided according to gender, to demonstrate his opinion that women could have more power, but at the expense of the men in Spanish society.

One factor that influenced Unamuno's beliefs about women in society was his relationship with the women in his life. From a young age, his world was dominated by women, since his father died before Unamuno was six years old. The death of Unamuno's father during the author's childhood meant that he grew up in a household headed by his mother (Pérez 622). Unamuno himself described his mother as “una señora tan severa en el cuerpo como en el espíritu, alta, seca, de ternura envuelta en dureza, y la ausencia de manifestaciones efusivas de amor maternal es posible que contribuyese a mantenerme de niño en cierto modo ausente y alejado de la feminidad” (Sandoval Ullán 29). Despite this coldness, he was very attached to his mother (Pérez 622) and his relationship with her influenced both his beliefs about how women in society should be, and later his portrayal of them in his work *El Marqués de Lumbría*.

Another woman who influenced his works, and perhaps whose influence was even more important in Unamuno's life, was his wife, Concepcion “Concha” Lizárraga. The couple met during the writer's adolescence and later married. Unamuno saw Concha as “a serene, healthy, warm spirit in a world of stupidity, selfishness, and routine,” and also someone who was able to “provide a refuge from

the nonsense all around him and refreshment from the arduous tasks that lay ahead” (Nozick 23). For example, Concha provided refuge for her husband when the author suffered existential crises. During one of his episodes, while he was crying intensely, Concha embraced him and cried out, “¡Hijo mío!” (Pérez 622). Despite her influential presence in Unamuno’s life, however, Concha always remained in the background, although Unamuno did call her “Concha, mi costumbre” (Nozick 23). In this way, the author showed his great admiration for her.

The relationships Unamuno had with the two principal women in his life are what formed his philosophy that woman equates to mother, a fairly traditional role. When one has a strong maternal figure in life, many times it causes the love of every other woman to be seen as maternal as well (Pérez 622). For this reason, the feminine identity is replaced with maternal identity. This inability to distinguish between the feminine and the maternal typifies Unamuno’s relationship with his wife. Unamuno glorified her, and along with calling her “su costumbre,” he also called her his “esposa-madre” (Pérez 622). Through this nickname, it can be seen that, to Unamuno, the two types of love were the same. It can also be seen that he could not differentiate the role of Concha as a wife and only a mother in relation to their children. Unamuno himself was one of her children, which Concha recognized and highlighted by what she called him during the author’s existential crisis.

Unamuno’s personal belief that women are mothers converted itself into his opinion about women in Spanish society: that they should also have traditional roles and stay “in the background,” the same as his wife Concha. He wrote: “Una mujer puede ser fiel, y amante esposa, muy ama de casa, muy señora de su hogar, muy devota de sus hijos y ser, sin embargo, una muy imperfecta ciudadana y un elemento de estancación social” (qtd. in Sandoval Ullán 43). These words show that the author believed being a woman and being a mother were equivalent, as well his belief that all the things a woman should do were to be based on her antiquated role. He also offered something that women should not do because of their traditional role: involve themselves in public life, because in his view, their qualities did not allow them to contribute to life outside of the home.

According to Unamuno’s ideology, a woman also should not vocalize her opinion. In fact, “la mujer debe estar callada, debe hacer lo que el *hombre* de la casa diga y hará lo que él le mandé. Además, habrá tantos hijos como el semental, es decir, el hombre, quiera, porque la mujer es un simple recipiente” (Sandoval Ullán 45). From this, it can be clearly seen that the domestic work of women was not valued as much as men’s work. Because their work was not valued, women

were not afforded the same right as men to make decisions. From this philosophy, it is evident that male dominance was part of Unamuno's ideology, one which prescribed a submissive role for women.

Additionally, Unamuno once wrote, “Lo femenino tiene más su campo de acción en la esfera privada y doméstica – en la domesticidad –, pero no en la civilización, que es la civilidad, la vida civil. Esta vida civil tiene orígenes militares y una constitución política, y la milicia es masculina y masculina es la política. La mujer no ha sido ni guerrera ni ciudadana” (qtd. in Sandoval Ullán 47). Again, the author writes about his idea that women should remain in their homes and retain their traditional functions, not functions outside of the home. He affirms that the domestic role of women is rooted in the fact that women's characteristics make them more suitable for a life dedicated to housework and the family instead of participation in the social sphere of Spain during this period.

Between 1898 and 1936, Spanish society was characterized by a feeling of uncertainty because of the perception that the nation was at a turning point with regard to the definition of the people's identity. There was a lack of cohesiveness in the public's concept of what the nation should be, which caused the various conceptualizations of what Spain should be like to clash. These at-odds ideals included conservatism versus liberalism and traditional values versus modern thinking, as well as ideas surrounding urbanization and governance. Additionally, the Basque, Catalanian, and Galician regions were looking to change their relationship with the central government of Spain, vying for increased independence. Due to the presence of the ideologies, agendas, and movements associated with these concepts, Spanish society was divided and tense (Paredes Méndez 467). But these concepts were not the only ones that had Spanish society in disagreement.

Another point of contention during this period, dubbed the “Second Spanish Golden Age,” had to do with the traditional beliefs about the role of women in society, which according to Antonio Sandoval Ullán “estaban en contra del progreso de la mujer, de su desarrollo” (44). Despite the established societal norm, women were fighting for their rights to contribute to society outside of their homes. The feminist movement in Spain during the beginning of the twentieth century focused on gaining more civil and social rights for women, specifically with respect to education (Leggott 36). During this time, various organizations fought for those rights, for example la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas. This organization worked to obtain the right to vote for women; to improve their economic and social situations by increasing educational and professional

opportunities; and to end the discrimination against married women in the workforce. Additionally, there were the organizations headed by writer and feminist Carmen de Burgos, the Liga Internacional de Mujeres Ibéricas e Hispanoamericanas and the Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas (Leggott 37). With organizations and people like these present at the same time Unamuno was writing and spreading his beliefs about women, obviously there was tension over which ideas would prevail.

Unamuno's philosophy was in line with the norms of society during this period. The ideology in the beginning of the twentieth century was that a woman had to be *la perfecta casada* and *un ángel del hogar*. These ideals, as well as the ideology of Unamuno, held that women were destined to be domestic beings and mothers, and that marriage and motherhood were key to their cultural identities. The role of *la perfecta casada* was to maintain the home, but the status that this role carried did not have as much importance during this century as it had had before. The ideal of the *ángel del hogar* is characterized by the idea that women belong within the home by nature, and additionally, that a woman who dares to cross the boundary between domestic life and the public sphere would be dishonored. The archetype of a woman who represents the *ángel del hogar* is described in this way: “The ideal woman is ultimately defined... by the space which she occupies. The frontier of her existence as a virtuous woman begins and ends at her doorstep” (Leggott 31). This portrayal of how a Spanish woman should have been during the twentieth century was represented in the beliefs of Unamuno, who thought that the traditional roles of women should be retained.

However, that Unamuno had this philosophy about women in society did not mean he was against the feminist movement. What the author did not agree with was that “las mujeres luchan con las mismas armas que los hombres” (Sandoval Ullán 47). He showed his disdain for the use of masculine tools by women when he wrote, “Lo peor que encuentro en ese movimiento que se llama femenino es que las mujeres que se dejan arrastrar por él protestan de los hombres en hombre y no mujer y pretenden oponerse a sus evidentes abusos y brutalidades con armas masculinas, hechas por hombres y para hombres” (qtd. Sandoval Ullán 47). For Unamuno, women had to find their own ways of obtaining change instead of using the same methods as men, since their movement had the goal of liberating women from the control of men. Although Unamuno had this opinion, he gave lectures at the Lyceum Club, an organization for women that aimed to “defend the moral and material interests of women” (Leggott 39). His participation in the

organization demonstrates that his doubts were about how women were fighting for their rights, not with the feminist movement itself.

One work that Unamuno wrote in the midst of the growing fight for women's rights was *El Marqués de Lumbría*, published in 1920. Its main characters are sisters Carolina and Luisa, who dominate the main male character, Tristán. Throughout the book's plot, both sisters demonstrate their power over the man. Luisa, Tristán's first wife, shows her power directly in a conversation she has with her husband after their child is born. Tristán says, "Si volviésemos a poner flores en tu balcón, Luisa," to which she replies, "Aquí no hay más flor que el marqués" (Paredes Méndez 478). Luisa has the last word in this short conversation because she refuses to listen to her husband. Her reaction to Tristán's suggestion is an example of how she is the one with the power to decide what will happen in her house, and that what she says is more important.

Additionally, the conversation the two have before Luisa dies is also an example of how she dominates him. First, Luisa gives Tristán orders about what to do following her death. She says that he must take care of and sacrifice for the marqués (Paredes Méndez 478). Then, Tristán asks her a question: whether she forgives him. It is inferred that this question is in reference to the relationship he has with her older sister before marrying Luisa. That he asks her this question also demonstrates how Luisa has the power in the relationship. Questions are only posed to those who have the power to answer, and whose answers are respected and viewed as legitimate. For those reasons, the conversation on Luisa's death bed is another example of her power over Tristán.

Another woman who dominates Tristán is Carolina. First, she imposes her will when she returns home as Tristán's wife and demands that the house's coat of arms be uncovered, which was against what her husband, as well as her father, wanted. Although her husband does not want her to uncover it and protests a bit, Carolina does not listen to him and does what she wants, because his desires are not important, and the person who makes the decisions in the relationship is the woman, this time Carolina. Then, when she insists that the child she has with Tristán is the real marqués, Tristán does not agree, but she does not care and her child becomes the marqués. Additionally, she initiates their relationship, and she tells her husband that she is the one who seduced him, that it was not the reverse, which shows that Carolina also controls the relationship sexually as well.

In contrast to the strong and dominating roles of the female characters in the work, the main male character, Tristán, is portrayed as very weak. During the entire story, he never affirms himself as a husband or a man. He allows his wives to do

whatever they want without debate. He only cries and begs them not to do a certain thing. Also, he is referred to as “el pobre hombre,” and the irony of his name in itself is another example of his weakness (Nozick 153). The tone of the work with regard to him is one of lament, especially the last sentence: “Tristán inclinó la cabeza bajo un peso de siglos” (Paredes Méndez 482). Tristán’s self-esteem is also portrayed as low; in one part of the story, he says to himself, “Soy como una dependencia de la casa, casi un mueble” (Paredes Méndez 478). At one point, he even expresses his desire to cease living: “Sólo me queda prepararme a bien morir” (Paredes Méndez 477).

Tristán is also portrayed as a child in the work. One strong example of this is when Carolina is by his side playing tresillo and says that her husband cannot play by himself, and then gives him little slaps on the cheek (Horowitz 57). Other childlike instances can be seen with how Tristán’s wives (mothers) do not allow him to make decisions or pay attention to his wishes, along with his cries and pleas mimicking those of an upset child.

The difficulty that Tristán has with separating himself from the influence of the women in his life mirrors what happened in Unamuno’s own life with respect to his wife-mother, Concha. Both men were incapable of reaching what is called the “process of masculine individuation” by the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (Pérez 622). This process involves the male freeing himself from subordination to the maternal archetype. Being unable to separate themselves, both men remain in an infantile state of psychological dependence on their wife-mothers (Pérez 622). In Tristán’s case, he does not even try to carry out this process. With neither wife is there an attempt to affirm himself as a separate being; both are therefore more like mothers to Tristán because of his inability to distinguish mother from wife, which are subconsciously conflated if the process of masculine individuation is not completed.

Moreover, the power dynamic between the characters has to do with the psychology of the maternal archetype, which forms the base of the mother complex. According to Jung, when this complex causes an exaggeration of the feminine side of a daughter, this exaggeration causes an intensification of all feminine instincts, above all the maternal instinct. This hypertrophy can produce a woman whose only goal is to have children. For this woman, her husband is secondary in importance. He is only an instrument of procreation, and the woman sees him as an object to take care of, the same as the children, the pets, and the furniture of the house (336, 339). This description fits Carolina exactly in the story. Besides using Tristán as an instrument, which according to Jung demonstrates a negative consequence of her

strong motherly instinct, she is also able to use her maternal power over her husband because she reduces him to the role of object, thing, instead of human being or man.

These examples of the weakness and dependence of Tristán, juxtaposed with the power and dominance of the women in the story, show how he, the main male character, “es limitado al papel de instrumento biológico y voluntad” (Spires 201). First, Carolina and Luisa only use Tristán to try to win the competition between themselves – the competition to give birth to the marqués. Being used only for procreation creates a subordinate role for Tristán. Furthermore, during the rest of the story, Tristán is controlled by these dominating women. His inability to liberate himself from their influence, along with his inability to play the part of a strong man and husband, causes Tristán not to have the right to exercise his free will. From his inability to do these two things comes a possible message of the story: that if women leave their traditional roles within the home and begin to have more power, such as being able to make important decisions, men will end up like Tristán, a desperate man without control of his life, reduced to allowing the women in his life to always walk all over him.

Unamuno’s experience with women in his own life had a great impact on how he portrayed the protagonists of his works. Additionally, his own beliefs about women, determined by the women in his personal life, influenced the portrayals of women in his works, as well as his opinions about their role in society. Unamuno wrote amid a social context where the role of women was changing, and the feminist movement also influenced the portrayal of female characters in his works. In *El Marqués de Lumbría*, the author reversed the traditional gender roles of twentieth century Spanish society. In this story, it is the women, Carolina and Luisa, who have the power, and the male, Tristán, who is submissive. From this complicated dynamic comes the portrayal of Carolina and Luisa as dominant wife-mothers and Tristán as childlike and weak. The message of the story seems to be that, just like Tristán, the men of Spanish society would not have a happy ending if they allowed women to have more power than they already did.