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Research Article

A THEMATOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF THE DOMINANT FEMALE FIGURES IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH* AND ÖZEN YULA'S *UNOFFICIAL ROXELANA*

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Abstract

This paper presents a thematological comparison to the portrayal of powerful woman characters in Euripides' *Medea* (431 B.C.E. / 1963), William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623 / 2003), and Özen Yula's *Unofficial Roxelana* (2017). The feminist analysis of the three plays indicates that women are portrayed as always seeking power, control, and recognition. Their desire for power is tested by patriarchy on several trials and tribulations. Even though the three female characters belong to different cultures and times, the selected works featuring these characters share the common themes like patriarchal oppression, desperate desires for power and recognition. The three women are observed to deviate from expected gender roles by exhibiting unconventional manlike behaviours according to the patriarchal framework. The feminist criticism reveals the motivations behind their deviation from their culturally constructed gender roles. Through the thematological analysis, as a subfield of comparative literature, the selected texts are compared in their relation to each other in terms of their unique themes in the light of feminist criticism.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Thematology, feminism, dominant females, patriarchy.

EURIPIDES'İN *MEDEA*'Sİ, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'İN *MACBETH*'İ VE ÖZEN YULA'NIN *GAYRİRESMÎ ROXELANA*'SINDAKİ BASKIN KADIN FİGÜRLERİNİN TEMATOLOJİK KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

Öz

Bu makale, Euripides'in *Medea*'sı, William Shakespeare'in *Macbeth*'i ve Özen Yula'nın *Gayriresmî Roxelana*'sındaki güçlü kadın karakterlerin tasviriyle tematolojik bir karşılaştırma sunmaktadır. Üç oyunun feminist analizi, kadınların her zaman güç, kontrol ve tanınma arayışında olarak tasvir edildiğini göstermektedir. İktidara olan arzuları ataerkil yapılar tarafından çeşitli denemeler ve sıkıntılarla sınanır. Üç kadın karakter farklı kültürlere ve zamanlara ait olsalar da, bu karakterlerin yer aldığı eserler ataerkil baskı, güç ve tanınmaya yönelik çaresiz arzular gibi ortak temaları paylaşıyorlar. Üç kadının ataerkil çerçeveye göre alışılmadık erkeksi davranışlar sergileyerek

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beklenen cinsiyet rollerinden saptıkları gözlemlenmektedir. Feminist eleştiri, onların kültürel olarak inşa edilmiş toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinden sapmalarının ardındaki motivasyonları açığa çıkarmaktadır. Karşılaştırmalı edebiyatın bir alt alanı olan tematolojik analizde, feminist eleştiri kapsamında seçilen metinler, kendilerine özgü temaları açısından karşılaştırılmalı olarak ele alınacaktır.

Keywords: Tematoloji, feminizm, baskın kadınlar, ataerkillik.

Introduction

The literary works, influenced by the dominant patriarchal ideology, portray women as sinners or silent sufferers. Some deviate from those norms by depicting women as power hungry creatures who fight relentlessly to gain their desires. Cultural, regional, or personal differences do not alter this universally established truth. They may live in patriarchal societies; however, they do not accept their subservient roles. Secretly or openly, they always wish to be powerful, and they are determined to gain influence over their male counterparts. They can be deceitful to reach their purposes, as Christa Stevens (1999) scrutinizes:

[T]he nature of woman has been described through the wearing of a series of representational masks meant to cover a blankness beneath, too numerous and foreign to avoid chafing, yet too impositional and protective to remove. “Femininity is frequently associated with the masquerade, with false representation, with simulation and seduction.” (p. 203)

The female representations are mostly influenced by the expectations and norms of patriarchal framework. It is difficult to be free from the masculine influence to create a unique female voice as emphasized by many feminist critiques, like Hélène Cixous, which comes out as the dilemma of “how women can create and leave a feminine history without also harnessing or impeding it with the fixed quality of a masculine discourse” (Stevens, 1999, p. 201). In her provoking essay, *The Laugh of Medusa*, Cixous (1976) urges women to be confident to raise their voices as they are much more superior than they are depicted by the masculine culture, their stories and laughter must be heard without any fear or censorship. She uses the mythological figure Medusa, who is depicted as a symbolic embodiment of evil woman by the patriarchal culture as a punishment for her disobedience, and she tries to deconstruct the fearful female image by revealing the power behind that figure: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (Cixous, 1976, p. 885). Cixous highlights the fact that women cannot speak up as they have been oppressed by the masculine language which reflects the false images that women are not in reality. Women have been feared, marginalized, accused of being a monster, thought to be sick and ignored, however, Cixous claims that all comes from their strength, their being alive in spite of everything: “Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble” (p. 876). Therefore, the unheard songs of women must be heard.

Virginia Woolf (1943) states that: “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (p. 197). Woolf’s statement has double implications: firstly, women have no specific country or time as they have universal features as examined in this study. Secondly, as women generally live under patriarchal domination, their freedom is restricted, they are marginalized and rejected, they are thought to be outcast within the conventional structure of the society, and therefore, there is no country for women. This study handles the three women who have no country at all, they are feared,

rejected, patronized, and treated as inferior by the phallogocentric socio-cultural mechanisms. In Euripides' *Medea* (431 B.C.E. / 1963), William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623 / 2003) and Özen Yula's *Unofficial Roxelana* (2017), there are strong, rebellious, and deceitful women characters, Medea, Lady Macbeth and Hurrem, who act in ways that bring them power although one can witness the vulnerability and delicacy in their stories. Each part of this article is devoted to a play which analyses powerful female characters' progression either from a miserable woman to a victorious ruler or from an ambitious position to an eventual downfall. Medea sacrifices her most beloved ones for her revenge against the injustice towards her, but she rises to victory from misery. Lady Macbeth is the driving force behind Macbeth's ambition for power which brings her tragic outcome. Hurrem Sultan, who happens to be the most powerful women in Ottoman dynasty is also analysed along with a brief Ottoman history. Her gradual transformation from a concubine slave girl to an authoritarian Ottoman Sultan is studied in detail. This article analyses these three plays and female characters from a feminist perspective by making use of thematology, which reveals their fragility, desire for power, and unfortunate fates in the patriarchal cultures they live in.

1. Medea: From Mourning to Victory

Euripides' *Medea* involves the themes which can be analysed by the feminist discourse such as women's suffering under patriarchal domination, supernatural powers of a woman, revengeful nature of womanhood and a woman's victory over patriarchy. A distinctive perspective of motherhood and female power are discussed in the play within the framework of feminist analysis. Edith Hall (1999) states: "Medea shared with the burgeoning genre of suffrage drama a serious examination of the issue of motherhood, now seen as both the principal element in the regulation of female sexuality and as a source of feminine power" (p. 46). She has been tested from various aspects as a woman and mother, her feminine power is both despised, ignored and feared.

At the beginning of the play, Medea appears as a weak and suffering woman who mourns for her unfortunate fate. Medea's strong love for her husband Jason has caused her to make several sacrifices. To make the matter worse, she is exiled because of manslaughter and regicide. She lacks her father's support or protection as she deviates from traditionally constructed gender roles by disobeying her father as she falls in love with Jason. Father disowns her as a disobedient daughter and Jason does not keep his promise to his dedicated wife and betrays her. Betrayed by all the male figures in her life, she is left destitute and lonely.

Medea's suffering begins when her husband betrays her with a new bride. She has no place to return to as she betrayed her family before for the sake of Jason, she cries in agony: "I am alone; I have no city; now my husband insults me. I was taken as plunder from a land at the earth's edge. I have no mother, brother, nor any of my own blood to turn to in this extremity." (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 25). She is in despair as Woolf describes, as a woman she has no country, nowhere else to go to live freely. She has been abandoned by her husband and she once more faces a life of exile. These sufferings cause her anger for Jason who does not keep his marriage vow and abandons her: "Medea's anger is a just anger brought on by her husband's broken oaths" (Rickert, 1987, p. 108). She is victimized in a patriarchal society and has no right to avenge on her husband's actions according to the rules of Corinthia. In her long speech to Corinthian women, Medea cites the miserable condition of women after marriage. They are no different than servants to their husbands without any rights, but they have to obey their

husband's decisions. Moreover, no matter how terrible situation a wife lives in, divorce is out of the question:

Surely, of all creatures that have life and will, we women are the most wretched. When, for an extravagant sum, we have bought a husband, we must then accept him as possessor of our body. This is to aggravate wrong with worse wrong. Then the great question: will the man we get be bad or good? For women, divorce is not respectable, to repel the man, not possible. (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 24)

Women's fates are sealed by their husbands. The possibility of a peaceful life is a matter of chance for them depending on their husband's character and decisions. If they are not lucky, they have to suffer quietly, dutifully and obediently. Medea indicates in the play that she would rather fight in the wars like men than give birth, because even if all the miseries belong to women in child raising, it is men who have the whole credit and right over them. Besides marriage, children are also men's possession in this patriarchal culture and escaping from these rules are almost impossible for women:

Along with the absence of a divorce law, fathers had uncontested rights to custody of children of a marriage under all circumstances, regardless of which spouse was at fault and regardless of the age of the children. Fathers could also ban all contact between children and their mothers. Euripides' Medea would have made much more unpalatable viewing in such an ideological environment than in fifth-century Athens, where divorce was practiced, even if, as Medea complained, it was not "respectable" for women. (Hall, 1999, p. 52)

Considering the misery of women, men's attitudes towards them are extremely misogynist. Jason projects his thoughts about women as such: "If only children could be got some other way, without the female sex! If women didn't exist, human life would be rid of all its miseries" (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 34). Without women, the world would be a better place without complications and sacrifices according to this masculine thinking.

On the other hand, Medea possesses some supernatural powers of which the Corinthian society is verily aware, and she is feared for that reason. She promises Aegeus to help him to have children in return for an oath to take her to an asylum. Her powers of healing and bringing death to enemies force Creon to send her to exile. However, Medea is fixated on one desire, to get her revenge from her husband with a painful death. She states: "So, I make one request. If I can find a way to work revenge on Jason for his wrongs to me, say nothing" (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 25). Indisputable in her words, Medea's primary objective is to take revenge on Jason. Indeed, she is so protective for her beloved ones, she can even be murderer for them as it is obvious in her sacrifices for Jason. Likewise, she can be dreadfully revengeful if she is hurt. She turns into the most ruthless person towards her enemies to do everything she can. This is most evident at the very beginning of the play in Nurse's speech about Medea: "I am afraid some dreadful purpose is forming in her mind. She is a frightening woman; no one who makes an enemy of her will carry off an easy victory" (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 18). Thus, she wants to demonstrate that she is neither weak nor miserable but a strong woman who gets what she wants: "Let no one think of me as humble or weak or passive; let them understand I am of a different kind: dangerous to my enemies, loyal to my friends. To such a life glory belongs" (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 42). Medea is a great symbol of a strong woman who defies the patriarchal authority.

Furthermore, she has the ability to deceive her husband easily with a few good words, which is indicated as the deceitful nature of women in the play: “Jason I ask you to forgive the things I said. You must bear with my violent temper; you and I share many memories of love. I have been taking myself to task. ‘You are a fool,’ I have told to myself,” (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 43). She decides to kill the new bride to revenge on Jason. However, killing her husband’s new bride is not enough for her and she wants him to have an unendurable pain, so she kills their sons although she knows that she would suffer as well. She is willing to sacrifice everything including her children to restore her reputation and to take a matchless revenge on Jason: “Why should I hurt them, to make their father suffer, when I shall suffer twice as much myself. I won’t do it. I won’t think of again” (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 49). She tries to repress her feelings of mercy and she commands herself not to think of it but to focus on her mission. Her anger and hatred towards Jason overcome her own suffering. After all the moral dilemmas, she eventually decides to take her vengeance: “Medea may take vengeance and think it best to take vengeance... We can grant that vengeance is a proper and necessary response for Medea as a heroic figure without granting that she actually thought it best to murder her own children.” (Rickert, 1987, p. 104). She recognizes the terrible consequences of her action, but she accepts this fate: “I understand the horror of what I am going to do; but anger, the spring of all life’s horror, masters my resolve” (p. 50). Even though she is aware of the horrendous plan she is about to do, her anger controls her. Medea’s these lines are interpreted by GailAnn Rickert (1987) as:

There is a further issue connected with not exaggerating “recognition of what is the best course of action” which is being emphasized in current discussions. This is the insistence that the final lines are not about Medea’s coming to a decision to kill her children, but her recognition of the pain she brings on herself through the vengeance she must take on Jason. (Rickert, 1987, p. 97)

Medea desires Jason’s ultimate suffering and this seems to be the best way to accomplish this task. As a member of a tyrannical society, Jason has plans on his sons that are very precious for a father. Jason gives so much importance to his reputation and his sons are a big part of this reputation:

From Jason’s discussions with Medea we learn of his perspective on children: they are a fundamental part of his plan to establish his house and his reputation in Corinth. The implication of his question to Medea, what need has she of children, is that he does have need of them for these purposes. Jason’s children by Medea, with their brothers from his new marriage, will one day be the leading men of Corinth. (Rickert, 1987, p. 105)

The significance of reputation for Jason is observed in his addressing to Medea. Jason claims that Medea has gained a reputation of being “wise” by the help of him and as Rickert (1987) states “without reputation, Jason says that he would not want gold or the voice of Orpheus” (p. 105). As a contrast to the common interpretations on Medea’s motivation for killing her sons, there is another perspective as well, as Edith Hall (1999) argues: “She kills them, but her motive is changed to an altruistic motherly desire to prevent the Corinthians from subjecting them to a crueller death when they discover that she has murdered Jason’s new wife” (p. 56). According to Hall, Medea’s motivation is not just for her anger towards Jason but for protecting her sons from a worse fate. She actually endeavours to save them from a worse life in torture and crueller death as the sons of a murderer.

In the end, Medea is triumphant to get her revenge against Jason, and moreover, she is not punished for her crimes. It is now Jason's turn to suffer like Medea at the beginning of the play. Medea's cleverness enables her to switch the roles of misery and victory with Jason. Jason cries in agony in the end: "My children; now, out of sexual jealousy, you murder them! In all Hellas there is not one woman who could have done it; yet in preference to them I married you, chose hatred and murder for my wife. No woman but a tiger; a Tuscan Scylla- but more savage" (Euripides, 431 B.C.E. / 1963, p. 58). Jason damns himself on realizing that how fearless and cold-blooded woman he got married to. Her passion destroys Jason, her sons, Glauce, Creon and anyone she declares as enemy. Her love and hatred controlled by her anger trigger this tragic ending for the others except for herself. She is an extremist in her desire of revenge, which results in catastrophe for the others but victory for her. Jason's cursing Medea as a wild beast comes from the androcentric custom of resembling rebellious women to monsters, as Elizabeth Fallaize (2007) explains: "a long tradition of misogyny which identifies Woman with weakness and the flesh, and converts her into a monstrous praying mantis" (p. 91). When they defy the conventional gender roles as women, they are denounced as being evil or monster.

2. Lady Macbeth: From Ambition to A Tragic Downfall

Lady Macbeth is one of the most powerful and influential female figures of literary history. As Stephanie Chamberlain (2005) notes, "Perhaps no other Shakespearean character better represents the threat of maternal agency than does Lady Macbeth, one whose studied cruelty nurtures social and political chaos." (p. 79). At the beginning of Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is depicted as a deceitful figure plotting to convince her husband for the crime. The moment she receives Macbeth's letter, she reveals her ambition to become the future queen, as she states: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be what thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature; it is too full o'th' milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way; Thou wouldst be great, art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it" (Shakespeare, 1623 / 2003, p. 31). Lady Macbeth confesses that her husband is successful, but he is defiant of the required ambition and cruelty as his merciful nature might prevent his committing the deed she is planning. She is partially responsible for her husband's killing the king and for his downfall in the end because from the very beginning of the play, she struggles for finding ways to change her soft nature and for convincing him to be the future king: "Towering over Macbeth, she appeared as "a domineering, murderous harridan", who, after the murder, 'drags him off by the scruff of his neck'." (Rosenberg, 1978, as cited in Bernstein, p. 34). Lady Macbeth is observed to be a dominant character at first, encouraging her husband's committing regicide by directing her hesitant husband with swift and clever moves, which reveals her brutal personality for such a crime. Indeed, she demands her husband to be king because she wishes to be the queen, which is an indication of her desire for power and rank.

Lady Macbeth deviates from her culturally constructed gender roles by exhibiting aggressive and masculine behaviours. In the patriarchal English society of that time, masculinity was judged by the ability to kill his enemy. There were many arguments and battles, which resulted in bloodshed. As Chamberlain (2005) observes, "In the world of *Macbeth*, for example, masculine power is expressed through the use of physical force. Indeed, Macbeth's strength as well as his valour is directly linked to the battlefield, is, in fact, based upon his ability to carve his enemy (p. 79). Lady Macbeth, with her intention of killing the king, aligns herself with the male principle as Jane A. Bernstein (2002) states: "Her headstrong attempt to unsex herself and

her ‘masculine indifference to blood and death make her a terrifying presence, who is and is not a woman. She becomes what Verdi calls ‘il demonio dominatore’ – ‘the dominating demon ... [who] controls everything’ (p. 31). Her desire to control and manipulate results in her turning into a “dominating demon” commands with an evil force. Challenging the constructed female identity, which requires obedience and innocence, Lady Macbeth calls the spirits to unsex her to be vicious with a male power:

Come, you spirit that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood. Stop up th’ access and passage to remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between th’ effect and it. Come to my woman’s breasts and take my milk for gall. (Shakespeare, 1623 / 2003, p. 33)

As Chamberlain (2005) observes, “Critics have traditionally read this scene as an attempt by Lady Macbeth to seize a masculine authority perceived necessary to the achievement of her political goals” (p. 79). It reflects the desire for an authority at once both powerful and ambiguous in early modern England (p. 80). Lady Macbeth uses different ways to deceive her husband as he is neither ready for such a deed nor eager to kill the king. First, she tries to insult him by claiming that he has no courage. Then she tries to use his love for her. She claims if he loved her, he would do whatever she wanted. She accuses him of being a coward and she undermines his masculinity. As they live in a heroic culture, men fight in the wars and killing people is a sign of valor and courage. If Macbeth is unable to kill the King, it translates that he is not a real man according to this male-oriented culture. Thus, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a woman with high ambitions and strong skills to deceive men like Medea. She is deceitful and she makes others believe that they do not murder the king. At some point, she pretends to faint and seems not being aware of anything. However, through the end, Lady Macbeth is observed to lose her power and to go insane. She becomes hysteric and she is no longer the strong woman she used to be. Therefore, Lady Macbeth is depicted as an evil woman responsible for the murder fearlessly, on the other hand, a miserable woman suffering from hysteria in the end. Like Medea, Lady Macbeth deviates from the female roles assigned by the society and she is observed like a monster or witch by crossing these borders of her gender identity as a woman and as a mother. As Joanna Levin (2002) indicates:

Lady Macbeth occupies this intermediary space throughout the play. She resists a splitting of the demonic matriarch and the secular mother, and her narrative development figures the many continuities between the witch and the hysteric. Whether she transforms into a witch or exits as a hysterical somnambulist, she continues to represent the vicissitudes of the wanton will and the desiring womb. (p. 38)

Lady Macbeth is punished for her rebellious deeds as a woman. She begins sleepwalking and she fears from everything because of the moral burden of the murder they committed together with her husband. She loses her mind, and she starts behaving unconsciously. She questions herself silently and she gives up talking to other people except herself, which are projected to be the symptoms of female hysteria: “Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic ... their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks” (Cixous, 1981, p. 49). As Cixous marks, Lady Macbeth’s disturbed soul and body began to talk instead of her tongue triggered by her psychological discomfort and her void ambitions. From the feminist analysis, this hysteric situation is mostly attributed to women who are observed as dangerous or desired to be pacified.

Lady Macbeth constantly washes her hands as her tragic ending approaches because she feels herself dirty and guilty of the bloody murder. She wants to be pure, therefore she attempts to clean herself from blood she touched. Day and night, her obsession of the crime grows, and this fearless woman turns into a weak silhouette scared of everything. Her mental disintegration is observed gradually: “She displays the symptoms of a possessed figure: her body becomes constrained, her eyes see nothing, her voice is muted, and her hands take on a preternatural life of their own” (Bernstein, 2002, p. 36). Her madness is again another feminine definition by the male norm that “determines the concepts of normality and deviance that women perforce must accept” (Showalter, 1985, p. 20). No matter how hard a woman fights for freedom to control her fortune by liberating them from the male oppression, their adventures are restricted with limitations and despair. Elaine Showalter (1985) analyses that hysteria is a classical female malady created by the male figures: “Changes in cultural fashion, psychiatric theory, and public policy have not transformed the imbalance of gender and power that has kept madness a female malady” (p. 19). Regardless of time and culture, the domination and misery of women are peculiar as defined by the patriarchal customs.

In the end, Lady Macbeth have changed completely like Medea but hers is in a tragic way. She is punished for her misdeeds unlike Medea. Before killing the king, she does not feel any hesitation or remorse, on the contrary, she motivates her husband from doubts and hesitation. As an embodiment of strong and brutal characteristic associated with men at the beginning, Lady Macbeth cannot carry the moral burden of her deeds later. She eventually commits suicide which is another stereotypical female characteristic of weakness. Being apathetic and cruel while planning the murder is observed as the violation of her female ethic, which leads to her eventual downfall caused by the moral corruption. Marilyn French (1992) states that:

But Lady Macbeth is not so judged, she is seen as supernaturally evil. Her crime is heinous because it violates social role, which has been erected into a principle of experience: she fails to uphold the feminine principle. For her, this failure plunges her more deeply into a pit of evil than any man can ever fall. (p. 17)

Lady Macbeth’s transgression of the social norms is correlated to witchcraft which is observed as the ruling devil in the Medieval era. Her rebellious nature intentionally “invoked scheming spirits to unsex her” to have the masculine attributes for power, however, her attempts to strip off the feminine values function as “the source of social dissidence, rebel, anarchy, and dissolution” (Biderci Dinç, 2019, p. 911). Her declaration of individual freedom faces with the eradication of rebellious nature.

3. Roxelana: From a Poor Concubine to the Most Powerful Women in the Palace

The women in the Ottoman Harem had a unique position. As Isom-Verhaaren (2006) notes, “Although they themselves remained in the harem, the harem also became the residence of the sultan and thus the center of the empire” (p. 174). Hurrem Sultan comes this harem as a young concubine; however, she is a strong-minded woman who is ambitious to be the queen and the most powerful woman in the Ottoman Palace. When she first arrives at the palace, her original name is Roxelana but she is renamed as Hurrem, she is a poor concubine among hundreds of women like her. She promises herself to be the most powerful women in that palace by catching the Sultan’s attention. Her intelligence is always emphasized to be the reason of her

success by catching Sultan Suleyman's growing attention for her regardless of the other women in the harem:

At first glance, it seems strange that a personality such as that of Kanuni Sultan should be under the influence of Hurrem. But Hurrem had not achieved her purpose overnight. For this purpose she had struggled for years. We know that Sultan Süleyman was interested in no woman other than Hurrem. Hurrem was not excessively beautiful, but she was exceedingly charming and clever. She acted with great deliberation and would not take a step without laying the ground work well. (Barzilai-Lumbroso, 2009, p. 69)

Hurrem is famous for her intelligence which brought her the power she always desires. In Özen Yula's (2017) play, *Unofficial Roxelana*, The Sultan Suleiman's mother Hafsa Sultan speaks to Hurrem: "Power is the right of not those who want it, but of those who know how to handle it. Since you wanted to have power and managed to get it then stop complaining Hurrem. Savor your power. Know where to stop!" (p. 28). It is true that she has gained most of the power she desires, however she is never contented as Hafsa Sultan suggests, she has an endless craving. She describes power as "a double-edged knife" as she could not let go of it once she gets it. Her power struggle is not an easy one, but she is determined. Hurrem achieves her dreams gradually: after being the favourite of the Sultan Suleiman, she intends to get rid of his wife Gulbahar and their son, Mustafa, who is the first heir to the throne. Hurrem plans her own son to be the future Sultan so that she can be the queen mother. During the implementation of her plans, comes across many obstacles; however, she manages to deal with them all regardless of the consequences. She is so decisive, cunning, and fearless to do anything that requires to reach her goals. A rumour spreads in the palace that she has a lover who is a worker there and she could elope with him by risking losing everything. Nevertheless, she sacrifices her love and heart for the sake of her ambitions to have power in the palace, she states:

History records women with label of "greedy". Yet if history itself is built upon greed, how is this women's fault? It is not enough to create to exist...When necessary, one should also know to destroy. One should destroy in order not to be destroyed. For instance, a love... If a love is going to destroy you, you should destroy your heart. Only thus can you escape all its perils. You should set the seal on the matter. (Yula, 2017, p. 7)

Her motto of success is to "destroy in order not to be destroyed", which grants her victorious position although she suffers in the process. As another obstacle to destroy, Hurrem must get rid of The Sultan Suleiman's wife, Gulbahar. She sends her into exile by convincing Suleiman that she is plotting against him. After that moment, she turns out to be a unique woman in the palace, but she never stops. She deceives Suleiman about Gulbahar's son Mustafa with a letter showing his treason against his father. Mustafa is eventually executed as she desires, which is the only way to ensure her own son as the future sultan. She reveals her sacrifices:

These is so much you have to sacrifice for your position. I had told you. You are a dot among the stars in the heavens in this world. But if that dot wants to become a star, it must risk everything...Each growth hurts one, and the pain one suffers makes one grow. (Yula, 2017, pp. 14-15)

She is also responsible for the death of the grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha who is loyal to his sovereign but does not obey Hurrem's wishes. He stays in conflict with Hurrem Sultan; therefore, she gets rid of him through some machinations as well. Hurrem, who yielded the

Great World Conqueror to her beauty, gradually realizes her desire to be the ruler of the empire and makes the sultan fulfill her wishes with her schemes and coquettishness. She could not endure other influences over the sultan, and she is even jealous of men of state (Barzilai-Lumbroso, 2009, pp. 69-70). She deviates from her gender roles defined by her society like Medea and Lady Macbeth. She even destroys one of her sons to guarantee her other son's position on the throne who will help her to reach her ultimate aim. According to her observations, her son Bayezid has not got the enough ability to govern, and her other son Selim is the most appropriate for the throne. Hurrem is so clever that she intentionally seems to support Bayezid, and Sultan Suleiman gets suspicious about it therefore he turns his face to Selim. Otherwise, if she supports Selim openly, she will jeopardize his being the sultan. This will be the end of Bayezid, but she admits what she must to do: "They are both my sons, but one of them has to be destroyed. The state can only live by eating up its sons. Only as such does the supremacy grow stronger..." (Yula, 2017, p. 19). Hurrem can easily manipulate men around her as she knows very well how to rule and deceive them. For instance, on a mutiny, she is capable of suppressing the voices of janissaries who are about to rebel. Her oratory power is evident in the following scene:

Once you've seized the power, you must silence the brave in time. Otherwise, one brave man can change the entire course of history come one day... You have to be stronger than they are to make them listen to you. Intellect is not enough. You only gain power if you get them to love you. Then you can punish them. It is imperative to take a few lives every now and then, so that they fear you. (Yula, 2017, pp. 9-10)

Her strategy is not just using her intelligence but love as well to let men obey her. She also uses punishment as a tool of scaring them to listen to her words. With her great talent, she succeeds where a man fails and takes her steps very carefully in order not to show any weakness. She makes men listen her orders:

In order to safeguard your position, you must place your men around you. You must feed them well. You must be careful when they play into your hand. You must record these well in your memory, as to be able to use their weaknesses when they work against you... You must take away any weapon they might use against you. And for this you must watch them and have them watch each other for years. (Yula, 2017, p. 15)

She is quite similar to Medea in using her talent to control and easily deceive men with her eloquent words. By stroking their egos, she manages to get what she wants from the men around her. Her influence on The Sultan with her sweet speech and love letters is always noted. M. Çağatay Uluçay (1954) commends on the eloquent writing style in Hurrem's love letters:

Hurrem Sultan, who was at least as sensitive as her husband, decorated the letters she wrote with sweet language and attractive expressions and with poems that she sprinkled throughout, gradually gaining stature in the eyes of her husband; in this way she simply became a second Ottoman emperor. (p. 768)

Hurrem Sultan uses a poetic language to express her love and passion for her Sultan, which is the key to influence even the strictest heart of a man who is at war and away from his country. She knows the needs of a man in The Sultan's position, and she manages to soften his heart with her lovely words, which creates the effect of how perfect wife she is. The Sultan Suleiman surely believes in her and his passion for her grows day by day, because she is like a

tender remedy full of love and care when he is in most need to get rid of the horrible images of blood and deaths during the war time:

In the letters that she wrote to Kanuni Sultan Suleiman, Hurrem Sultan discusses especially their separation and the pain that she suffered because of it. Hurrem Sultan knew very well that her husband, who was surrounded by blood, death, and the smell of war, and whose ears and mind were buzzing with the ringing of swords and the beating of drums, was in need of love, poetry, tenderness. Because of this she strove to adorn her letters with expressions that would soft en his soldier's and emperor's heart which was as hard as steel. (Uluçay, 1954, p. 769)

In the end, interestingly, it is uncertain to ensure her happiness in her position. She tries every method that may help her to reach a powerful position, but still she is observed not to be in comfort. She gets used to living as a power-seeking woman and she ends her life in the same way without having the full satisfaction: "Mine is a belated effort...All this time, whatever I did, I did for myself. I said it was now time to do something for others, but this does not mean to live for others. I failed to live...I gave my life for power" (Yula, 2017, p. 21). She reveals her weakness when she is alone, and her loneliness grows in that palace through the end of her plans. Her search of power changes her life in an unsatisfactory way. She could not witness her son's ascending the throne as she died earlier. However, she worked for this mission throughout her whole life. Hafsa Sultan illustrates this point:

Your ambition, your thirst for power, turned out to be something else. That is the reason why you suffer more. What's more, not only do you want to be of influence in Ottoman history, but also in its future. You are playing dangerous game Hurrem. (Yula, 2017, p. 27)

Hurrem's thirst for power drives her to intrigue in a precarious way. Her ambition not only harms the people challenging her as obstacles standing in her way to success but also destroys her peace. Even though her soul does not rest, she is in a victorious position in the end.

Conclusion

This study has compared the three influential female characters from three different cultures, Greek, English and Turkish, from thematological and feminist perspectives. In Euripides' *Medea*, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Ozen Yula's *Unofficial Roxelana*, three strong, rebellious and deceitful female characters, Medea, Lady Macbeth and Hurrem, seek for power although they have fragile moments caused by their excessive ambition. It is observed in the study that the behaviours and desires of the women are almost identical; Medea, Lady Macbeth and Hurrem strive for power and authority in the patriarchal societies they live in. Even though the three female characters belong to particular cultures shaped by the unique eras they live in, they share common features like struggling under patriarchal oppression, being ambitious for power and desiring desperately for recognition. Triggered by these factors, they all deviate from their expected gender roles defined by the patriarchal order and reflect some behaviours attributed to masculinity. They could not officially rule the male-oriented countries they belong to, however, they find other ways to control men and to achieve their goals. The issues of rebellion, deceit and suffering as well are inescapable for these women no matter how distinct their eras, cultures and positions are. The study has tried to present a thematological comparison concerning the portrayal of powerful woman characters in the selected texts. The women in those works are portrayed as always seeking for power, control, and recognition. Their desire for more power is tested by patriarchy on several trials and tribulations. The paper

revealed the motivations behind this deviation from their gender roles. The ambitious female characters rise to power and their eventual downfall or victory are analysed in detail. The analysis has employed thematology and analysed the selected texts in their relation to other literary works in terms of their unique themes focusing on the demystification of identical female figures.

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Geniş Özet

Bu çalışma, Yunan, İngiliz ve Türk olmak üzere üç farklı kültürden gelen üç etkili kadın karakteri tematik ve feminist perspektiflerden karşılaştırmaktadır. Bu araştırma, ataerkil ideolojiden etkilenen edebi eserlerde kadınların nasıl günahkâr ve sessizce acı çeken ya da arzularını elde etmek için amansızca mücadele eden ve güce aç yaratıklar olarak tasvir edildiğini incelemektedir. Kültürel, bölgesel veya kişisel farklılıkların evrensel olarak yerleşmiş bu gerçeği değiştirmedeği belirlenmiştir. Bu kadınlar ataerkil toplumlarda yaşayabilirler; ancak itaatkâr rollerini kabul etmemektedirler. Gizli ya da açık her zaman güçlü olmak isterler ve çevrelerindeki erkekler üzerinde nüfuz sahibi olmaya kararlıdırlar. Bundan yola çıkılarak, bu makale, üç farklı oyunda yer alan üç kadın karakteri, yaşadıkları ataerkil kültürlerdeki kırılmalıklarını, güç arzularını ve talihsiz kaderlerini ortaya koyan tematolojiden yararlanarak feminist bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmektedir.

Euripides'in *Medea*'sında, ataerkil tahakküm altında kadınların çektiği acılar, kadının doğaüstü güçleri, kadınlığın intikamcı doğası ve kadının ataerkilliğe karşı kazandığı zafer gibi feminist eleştirinin incelediği temalar işlenmektedir. Medea, bir kadın ve bir anne olarak farklı yönlerden sınanır, kadınsı gücü hem küçümsenir hem görmezden gelinir hem de korkulur. Oyunun başında Medea, talihsiz kaderinin yasını tutan zayıf ve acı çeken bir kadındır. Babası onu itaatsiz bir kız olarak reddeder ve uğruna her şeyini feda ettiği kocası Jason, sadık karısına verdiği sözü tutmaz ve ona ihanet eder. Öte yandan Medea, Korint toplumunun çok iyi bildiği bazı doğaüstü güçlere sahiptir ve bu nedenle kendisinden korkulur. Medea'nın tek arzusu kocasından en acı şekilde intikamını almaktır. Jason'dan intikam almak için yeni gelini öldürmeye karar verir. Ancak kocasının dayanılmaz bir acı çekmesini istediği için gelinini öldürmek ona yetmez ve kendisinin de acı çekeceğini bildiği halde oğullarını da öldürür. Ataerkil topluma göre Jason'ın itibarı için oğulları çok değerlidir ve bu plan Jason'ı nihai acıya kavuşturmanın en iyi yoludur. Öte yandan, Medea aslında oğullarını bir katilin çocukları olarak daha kötü bir gelecekte kurtarmak için çabalamaktadır. Sonunda Medea, Jason'dan intikamını alarak zaferini elde eder ve üstelik işlediği suçlardan dolayı cezalandırılmaz. Medea, ataerkil otoriteye meydan okuyan güçlü bir kadın sembolüdür.

Lady Macbeth edebiyat tarihinin en güçlü ve etkili kadın figürlerinden biridir. Shakespeare'in trajedisi *Macbeth*'in başlangıcında Lady Macbeth, kocasını suça ikna etmek için komplo kuran aldatici bir figür olarak tasvir edilir. Lady Macbeth, kocasının başarılı olduğunu itiraf eder, ancak merhametli doğası onun planladığı eylemi gerçekleştirmesine engel olabileceği için gerekli hırs ve zalimliğe meydan okur. Kocasının kralı öldürmesinden ve trajik sonundan kısmen kendisi sorumludur çünkü oyunun en başından itibaren kocasının yumuşak doğasını değiştirmenin yollarını bulmak ve onu geleceğin kralı olduğuna ikna etmek için çabalar. Lady Macbeth'in ilk başta baskın bir karakter olduğu, kararsız kocasını hızlı ve zekice hareketlerle yönlendirerek kocasının kral cinayeti işlemesini teşvik ettiği gözlemlenir, bu da onun böyle bir suça karşı acımasız kişiliğini ortaya koyar. Hatta kraliçe olmayı arzuladığı için kocasının kral olmasını talep etmektedir ki bu da onun güç ve mevki arzusunun bir göstergesidir. Lady Macbeth, saldırgan ve erkeksi davranışlar sergileyerek kültürel olarak kodlanmış cinsiyet rollerinden sapmaktadır. Böylece Lady Macbeth, Medea gibi erkekleri kandırma konusunda hırslı ve becerikli bir kadın olarak tasvir edilir. Aldatıcıdır ve başkalarını kralı öldürmediklerine inandırır. Ancak oyunun sonuna doğru Lady Macbeth'in gücünü kaybettiği ve delirdiği görülür. Histerik hale gelir ve artık eskisi kadar güçlü bir kadın değildir. Bu nedenle Lady Macbeth, bir yandan cinayeti korkusuzca işleyen bir cani, diğer yandan sonunda histeriye kapılan perişan bir kadın olarak tasvir edilir. Medea gibi Lady Macbeth de toplumun kendisine biçtiği kadın rollerinden sapar ve hem kadın hem de anne olarak cinsiyet kimliğinin bu sınırlarını aşarak bir canavar ya da cadı gibi gözlemlenir. Lady Macbeth bir kadın olarak isyankâr davranışlarından dolayı cezalandırılır. Kocasıyla birlikte işledikleri cinayetin manevi yükü nedeniyle uyurgezerliğe başlar ve her şeyden korkar. Feminist analize göre bu histerik durum çoğunlukla tehlikeli olarak görülen veya bastırılmak istenen kadınlara atfedilmektedir. Sonunda, kadının zayıflığının bir başka basmakalıp örneği olarak intihar eder. Ataerkil zihniyete göre, cinayeti planlarken kayıtsız ve zalim davranması kadın doğasının ihlali olarak görülür ve bu da kadındaki ahlaki yozlaşmanın yol açtığı çöküşe götürür. Lady Macbeth'in özgürlüğünü ilanı, isyankâr doğanın yok edilmesi gerektiği gerçeğiyle karşılaşır.

Özen Yula'nın oyunu, *Gayriresmî Roxelana'da*, Hürrem hareme genç bir cariyeye olarak gelir; ancak Osmanlı Sarayı'nın kraliçesi ve en güçlü kadını olma hırsına sahip, azimli bir kadındır. Hürrem, kendisine her zaman arzuladığı gücü kazandıran zekasıyla ünlüdür. Hürrem'in güç mücadelesi kolay değildir ama kararlıdır ve yavaş yavaş hayallerine ulaşır. Sultan Süleyman'ın gözdesi olduktan sonra eşi Gülbahar'dan ve tahtın ilk varisi olan oğulları Mustafa'dan kurtulur. Kraliçe anne olabilmek için kendi oğlunun geleceğin padişahı olmasını planlar. Planlarını hayata geçirirken birçok engelle karşılaşır; ancak sonuçlarına bakılmaksızın hepsiyle başa çıkmayı başarır. Başarı sloganı “yok edilmemek için yok etmek”tir ve bu süreçte acı çekmesine rağmen ona muzaffer bir konum kazandırır. Hatta nihai amacına ulaşmasına yardımcı olacak diğer oğlunun tahttaki yerini garanti altına almak için oğullarından birini yok eder. Stratejisi sadece zekasını değil aynı zamanda sevgisini ve etkili sözlerini de kullanarak erkeklerin ona itaat etmesini sağlamaktır. Hürrem, Medea ve Lady Macbeth gibi toplumunun tanımladığı cinsiyet rollerinden sapmaktadır. Sonunda, güçlü bir konumdadır ama yine de rahat olmadığı gözlemlenir çünkü güç peşinde koşan bir kadın olarak yaşamaya alışmıştır ve tam doyuma ulaşması zordur. Hürrem, ruhu teskin olmasa da sonunda muzaffer bir konumdadır.

Feminist eleştiri kadın temsillerinin çoğunlukla ataerkil çerçevenin beklenti ve normlarından etkilendiğini ve kendine özgü bir kadın sesi yaratmak için eril etkiden kurtulmanın zor olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Bu çalışma, fallus merkezli sosyo-kültürel mekanizmalar tarafından korkulan, reddedilen, himaye edilen ve aşağı muamele gören, hiçbir ülkesi olmayan üç kadını ele almaktadır. Euripides'in *Medea*'sında (MÖ 431 / 1963), William Shakespeare'in *Macbeth*'inde (1623 / 2003) ve Özen Yula'nın *Unofficial Roxelana*'sında (2017); Medea, Lady Macbeth ve Hürrem gibi güçlü, asi ve hilekâr kadın karakterler yer alır. Hikayelerinde kırılma ve incelik görülse de bu onlara güç vermektedir. Bu makalenin her bölümü, bu güçlü kadın karakterlerin ya sefil bir kadından muzaffer bir hükümdara ya da hırslı bir konumdan nihai bir çöküşe doğru ilerleyişini analiz etmektedir. Medea, kendisine yapılan haksızlığın intikamını almak için en sevdiklerini feda eder ama sefaletten zafere yükselir. Lady Macbeth, kocasının ve kendisinin de trajik sonunu getiren güç hırsının arkasındaki itici güçtür. Osmanlı hanedanının en güçlü kadını olan Hürrem Sultan'ın cariyeye bir köle kızdan otoriter bir Osmanlı sultanına doğru aşamalı dönüşümü de ayrıntılı olarak incelenmektedir.