

A Fictional Analysis Of Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* and Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Ölmeye Yatmak*

Ayfer ONAN*

ÖZET

Geçmiş kavramını ilgi odağı olarak ele alıp işleyen Penelope Lively **Moon Tiger** adlı eseriyle 1987 yılında İngiltere'nin en gözde ödüllü **Booker Prize**'ı kazandı. Bu eserde ana karakter hasta yatağında tüm yaşamını geçmişinden ve bugününden tanıdıkları aracılığıyla yeniden değerlendiren profesyonel bir tarihçidir. Penelope Lively'nin **Moon Tiger** adlı eseri gibi Adalet Ağaoğlu'nun **Ölmeye Yatmak** adlı romanı da hikaye edilen yaşamların kişisel deneyim ve ortak geçmiş bilinciyle yoğrulduğu güçlü, akıcı ve güzel kaleme alınmış bir eserdir. Her iki yazar da okuyucularını ana karakterlerinin bilincine yerleştirmektedir. Geçmişten gelen sesler her iki romanda da ana karakterlerin anılarının akışına girmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geçmiş, bugün, tarih, çok değişen.

ABSTRACT

Penelope Lively, to whom the past is the ideal object of contemplation, won England's prestigious Booker Prize in 1987 with *Moon Tiger*. In this novel the central character is a professional historian. Lying in hospital she reviews her life in kaleidoscopic fashion-voices from her own past and present. *The voice of history...is composite. Many voices: all the voices that have managed to get themselves heard. Some louder than others, naturally* (MT, p.5) says Claudia Hampton, the central character, having been surrounded by the voices. Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Ölmeye Yatmak* (1992) like *Moon Tiger* of Penelope Lively is a powerful, moving and beautifully written novel about the ways in which lives are molded by personal memory and the collective past. Both authors place the readers in their central characters' consciousness: The voices from the past slip into the kaleidoscope of the recollections of the protagonists in both novels.

Keywords: Past, present, history, kaleidoscopic.

In **Moon Tiger** of Penelope Lively, such matters as the relation between past and present and other phases of culture; psychological questions concerning the way in which her historian protagonist Claudia operates; sociological questions concerning the way in which the place of Claudia affects her way of thinking; semantic questions about what happens to language when it is employed in a certain way; historical questions about the effect of time are all considerably judged.

After all, the work itself justifying all our interest leads us to be able to revive the life experience of the central character in the novel. The *Moon Tiger* of Penelope Lively's title, which is a *green coil slowly burns at night, repelling mosquitoes, dropping away into lengths of grey ash, its glowing darkness*, (MT, p. 75) is allowed to shed its glow like a visual resonance on Claudia's life before and after her lover- Tom Southern. Claudia, being guided by her own perceptions, writes a history of the

* Ayfer Onan, Yrd.Doç.Dr., DEÜ Buca Eğitim Fakültesi Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü İngilizce Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı , Buca, İzmir. Ayfer.onan@deu.edu.tr

world in the process of her own, and even on the first page of the novel she announces *the history of the world as selected by Claudia is a fact and fiction, myth and evidence, images and documents* (MT, P.1).

Like Claudia of Penelope Lively in **Moon Tiger**, Aysel of Adalet Ağaoğlu in **Ölmeye Yatmak** lying in a hotel bed recalls her life in kaleidoscopic fashion, reflecting that her liberality of mind lets her wander about in many periods of her own past in accordance with the past and present of a newly established republic of her country.

History in both novels is present as a straight line and the present is simply the still point on that line. History and time are *Moon Tiger's* subjects. Claudia's "liberality of mind" allows her to rove historically in many periods in search of significances and associations; The history is revealed in *Moon Tiger* via the story of Claudia's life plus assorted observations on evolution, social history, aesthetics, European culture whereas in *Ölmeye Yatmak* via the background of the Turkish Republic, mainly.

Both Claudia and Aysel-the former as a popular historian, the latter as an academic try to treat their own lives as they have treated others: Claudia treats it as a fragment of world history whereas Aysel is concerned with the recent history of the Turkish Republic. They both allow other voices to have their own commentary: Claudia, making the reader see the history of mankind in the text, says: *The collective past is public property, but it is also deeply private. We all look differently at it* (MT, p. 2). The fossils-of past loves, past sorrows, past failings, past disappointments are driven before the reader in both novels and the perceptions of two protagonists and the nonchronological, episodic structure of the two novels make us see the boundaries between past and present, too. Thus, the image that lingers in the reader's mind is a photograph of life which is referred as a *necklace of moments* by Claudia in **Moon Tiger**. The two protagonists having a lot of experience in which the past and present

appear simultaneous travel historically in many periods in search of significances and associations: The history of the world as selected by Claudia and the history of the foundation of the Turkish Republic through Aysel's life story are more substantial accounts in both novels rather than the notion of life of both protagonists.

Claudia, settling that history does not exist apart from the individual contemplating it, states: *The bit of the twentieth century to which I've been shackled, will-nilly, like it or not. Let me contemplate myself within my context...* (MT, p.1). That same approach to history is asserted by Aysel who, being led by her own perceptions also, says: *The hand that rebuilds the history is recreating you, too* (ÖY, p. 335).¹

Moon Tiger and **Ölmeye Yatmak** are both like quilts made of patchwork put together in an artful and satisfying manner. The story of Claudia's and Aysel's lives is told through a complex layering of flashbacks and multiple points of view. The two novels do not stay entirely in Claudia's and Aysel's heads. We have exchanges between their visitors and the hospital staff; we sometimes have alternative memories of the same incident. Lively has given us a radically different kind of history of the world, one that challenges established assumptions about reality, time and personal identity. Her protagonist, Claudia selecting specific scenes, images and even ideas that can tell her story in the best manner believes that time and universe lie around in our minds, making us *sleeping histories of the world* (MT, p.65). Like the dreaming pub keeper named Porter in "Finnegans Wake", Claudia embodies not only her personal experience but the past of all humanity, from the Viking raids on Europe to the massacres of the present century.

Actually what Lively gives the reader is the idea that we are all so tied to a particular moment in history that we can not escape. Claudia thinks:

I cannot shed my skin and put on yours, cannot skip my mind of its knowledge and its prejudices, cannot look cleanly at the world with the eyes of a child, am as imprisoned by my time as you were yours (MT, p.3).

Claudia, equating her “beginnings” with the “universal beginning”, invokes the tone

of Genesis to describe her own creation:

In the beginning there was myself; my own body set the frontiers, physical and emotional there was simply me and not me... And when I became a child there was Claudia, who was the centre of all things and there was what pertained to Claudia, out at which I looked, the world of others, observed but not apprehended, as a Berkeleyan landscape which existed only at my whim (MT, p. 187).

Claudia also draws parallels between her own development and geological development. She links mollusks and ammonites, fossils and shards, which are her childhood interests, with the earliest stages of

evolution. A pathologist could discover Claudia’s physical history by means of an autopsy, just as a geologist can discover the earth’s physical history by excavating. She develops this idea as follows:

My body records certain events; an autopsy would show that I have had a child, broken some ribs, lost my appendix. My body records also a more impersonal history; it remembers Java Man and Australopithecus and the first mammals and strange creatures that flapped and crawled and swam. Its ancestries account, perhaps, for my passion for climbing trees when I was ten and my predilection for floating in warm seas. It has memories I share but cannot apprehend. It links me to the earthworm, to the lobster, to dogs and horses and lemurs and gibbons and the chimpanzee (MT, p. 166).

Aysel’s personal history like Claudia’s is no mere listing of chronological events. Yet, in *Ölmeye Yatmak*, Aysel-moving between present and the past, and being aware that there is an undeniable connection between her

progress and historical public events-charts her progress from her childhood in context of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Drifting in and out of consciousness she resolves the memories of her personal experience as follows:

I was as a pool keeping the water for the most rainless day. On that day, when I thought that my roots were about to be dead, I opened the stopper of my pool. I am making myself flow with a gurgling sound, Or I am trying to make it: I will flow with a gurgling sound. I will irrigate everything (ÖY, p.147).²

In total of 343 pages, Adalet Ağaoğlu carries us through Aysel’s fruitful life as well as a good-size chunk of the history of the establishment of a new republic and the birth of a new nation. All this takes place only in Aysel’s mind, a fascinating machine well-equipped for the long journey backward that she

is constructing. Who better construct a history of a nation than a woman who was audacious enough to help shape it? There, Aysel, a highly educated academic tackling life according to her own recollections lies on her bed in a hotel room reviewing her life, looking at her mistakes unflinchingly, and at what she has and, what she

has lost with what that exists in her own head, points out the link between her personal history

and the public history with the following words:

What is death? The death requires to know that one has led a life. Oh, my teacher Dünder! My newspapers, my highschools, my "kaimakams",³ my fathers, my brothers, my soldiers sometimes dressed in American or German clothes, my "halkevlerim"⁴ with a child's face, my national songs, the saying which claims that "A Turk equals to the world, m statues, my German aunts and "Tout va tres bien Madame la Marquise" songs! A bit of everything which flies in the sky. Oh, you friend, the war is over. Let's sing pleasantly for the day of the great victory... (ÖY, p. 248).⁵

In the final evaluation of both novels it can be added that the two protagonists-Aysel in **Ölmeye Yatmak** and Claudia in **Moon Tiger** are not the sole main characters of the novels. There is one another-as vividly drawn and as essential to the action, as they-and that is the past. Page by page, the past is with us throughout their stories. At the start the two protagonists-their heads full of memories of their pasts, their ambitions never to be fulfilled are to reflect upon the history of their small words that is their own existence from childhood to the present moment. Claudia of **Moon Tiger**, after reflecting on the past on her deathbed comes to the conclusion that *a lifetime is not linear but instant. That, inside the head, everything happens at once* (MT, p. 68). On the other hand, Aysel in **Ölmeye Yatmak** deciding *not to listen to anything from the records any longer* and determined to struggle for some more time instead of expecting to die in a hotel bed becomes also full aware like Cladua of **Moon Tiger** that *everybody knows about inside the head* (ÖY, p.334).⁶

The sun sinks, the sickroom darkens. The "Moon Tiger" of life and therefore of memory burns itself out. But like Claudia herself, the reader experiences, at this moment of farewell, *surge of joy, of well-being, of order* (MT, p.207).

Aysel gets dressed, turns the *Do not distrust* signboard upside down, picks the key up, locks the door and goes out of the room. And the reader is made aware, at this moment of the very new start by that statement of Aysel. She remarks that it is herself *whom she wants to*

bring up and who that has split up her vase (ÖY, p.343).

NOTES

Excerpts of **Ölmeye Yatmak** were translated for this paper by the present author.

¹ "Tarihi yeniden yapan el seni de yapıyor."

² "Suyu en kurak güne saklamış, ağzına dek dolu bir havuzdum sanki. O, artık en kurak gün, artık neredeyse bütün köklerin kuruyuverceğini sandığım gün, havuzumun tıpasını açtım. Gürül gürül akıtıyorum kendimi. Ya da akıtmaya çalışıyorum: Gürül gürül akacağım. Herşeyleri sulayacağım..."

³ Appointed vice governor in a province.

⁴ Building set up for the public meetings.

⁵ "Ölmek nedir? Ölmek, yaşamış olduğunu bilmeyi gerektiriyor. Ah benim Dünder Öğretmenim! Ah benim gazetelerim, liselerim, kaymakamlarım, babalarım, abilerim, kah Alman, kah Amerikan kılıklı askerlerim, çocuk yüzlü halkevlerim, 'Bir Türk bir dünyaya bedel'lerim, marşlarım, heykellerim, Alman yengelerim ve 'Tout va tres bien Madame la Marquise' şarkılarım! Havada uçuşan her şeyden biraz. Ve savaş bitmiştir ey sen arkadaş! Büyük zaferin gününü terennüm edelim..."

⁶ "Herkes kendi kabının içini tanır..."

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