

THE MOTIF OF MYSTERY IN MALCOLM BRADBURY'S DOCTOR CRIMINALE

Öğr.Gör.Dr.Sena TULPAR
Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi
Buca Eğitim Fakültesi
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü

ÖZET

Çağdaş İngiliz Edebiyatının göze çarpan yazarlarından olan Profesör Malcolm Bradbury, *Doctor Criminale* adlı romanında İngiltere'deki ekonomik dar boğazdan yola çıkarak, aynı doğrultuda gelişen sosyal, kültürel, tarihsel farklılaşmaların insan yaşamı üzerinde ne gibi etkiler yaptığını ilginç bir olay örgüsü içinde anlatmaktadır.

Romanın akışı içinde dikkati çeken bir ögeyi oluşturan 'gizem' motifi üzerinde yoğunlaştırılan bu incelemede; özellikle demir perde ülkelerinde asırlardır hüküm sürmüş olan gizliliğin ardında yatan entrikalar ve ihanetlerin, tarihsel gelişme doğrultusunda hayli hız kazandığı ve insanların güçlerini kaybetme kaygısıyla, dürüstlük ilkesini nasıl gözardı ettikleri vurgulanmıştır. Yazarın tiplerinde kullandığı değişik ülke vatandaşları 'gizem motifinin' önemini artırmakta ayrıca, Malcolm Bradbury'e olaylara genel, gülünç ve eleştirel bir görüş açısından bakma kolaylığı sağlamaktadır.

SUMMARY

The novel entitled *Doctor Criminale*, which is written by one of the remarkable authorities of the contemporary English Literature, Professor Malcolm Bradbury, tells of the financial strait in England. This problem is introduced as a starting point of some social, cultural and historical changes, and also their effects on the lives of individuals have been told by means of an interesting plot structure.

The motif of 'enigma' which has been a pervasive and dominant feature especially in the Iron Curtain Countries for ages is examined in this particular study. It is stated that the fear of losing power causes individuals to disregard the principles of integrity. And the fact that intricacies and betrayals behind the stage gain a great deal of velocity in parallel with the historical progress has also been touched on. Through the utilization of multinational characterization, both the motif of mystery gains significance, and the writer can secure panoramic, humorous and critical angles.

"Enigma" is treated as one of the keynotes to explain the chaotic, turbulent, competitive overall social, economic and moral structures of the contemporary Europe. And the secretive, mysterious and treacherous strategies of the widely respectable intellectuals have also been introduced to add to the enigmatic aura of the novel entitled "Doctor Criminale."

Malcolm Bradbury's ironic title contributes to the surprising and unexpected revelations emerging in connection with the events that keep unbelievable, shocking secrets beneath.

Journalist Francis Jay finds it hard to make both ends meet. Moreover, the harder he tries to find some sort of material to get published in one of the trendy newspapers, the more he seems to become involved in both serious social and financial difficulties. Francis has been depicted as the victim of recession, of the decline in the field of English Literature and of the carefree bosses who dispatch him here and there without troubling themselves about making preliminary investigations and arrangements on the material or field that Francis is going to tackle. Although Francis insists on being a verbal person, he has been given the responsibility of searching for the world famous philosopher, Doctor Bazlo Criminale's private life and connections.

In the first place, Malcolm Bradbury draws an atmosphere with a potential mystery, difficulties and plots to present clues to what will follow. The narrative has been designed after a fairly enigmatic fashion. At an instant, the reader feels that a probable solution has already been given, but the next moment it is acutely noticed that the land on which the reader is stepping seems to fall away fast. That's to say, one knot follows another one keeping the reader in long suspense and expectation.

The novel mainly deals with the restricted lives of individuals who are the residents of now tumbled down Iron Curtain countries.

Doctor Criminale, the hidden protagonist of the novel is portrayed as a flamboyant philosopher whose love affairs and fondness for nude photos of his girl-friends and wives have been dwelt on at length on several occasions as it reads below:

".....they were Criminale's famous erotic nudes. 'Are all these his wives too?' I asked 'Well, some I don't recognize,' said Ildiko, 'May be with clothes on I would. But yes, look, there is Gertla, see.' There is Irini, said Hallo, 'Very nice, ja?' 'And here Sepulchra, there and there and again, said Ildiko. I looked along the row, at the sequence of amazing, oily looking bodies, angled and shaped. Some looked plainly at the camera, some hid their faces, some had no faces in view at all. Criminale's tastes were certainly frank, and much of a kind; there were many models, but most were young and blonde."¹

Throughout the novel, the British journalist Francis Jay seems to be entangled with the hard task of finding about Criminale's private pursuits chasing him from one literary conference to another like a secret agent, but the mystery is ever present and crops up whenever it is least expected. The enigma that envelops the whole Iron Curtain way of life spreads far beyond the boundaries of Hungary and affects seriously even the life of the contemporary jerno, Francis Jay.

1. Malcolm, Bradbury, *Doctor Criminale* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1992), p.113.

Apparently, literary gatherings happen to host persons with totally different purposes to achieve, for example Cosima Brucknes, who works for the European Community, spies on the individuals from Iron Curtain countries to protect and promote the financial interests of European Countries. And she writes out reports on these particular issues. Malcolm Brodbery introduces Cosima onto the scene with the purpose of indicating the fact that there are numbers of people appointed to hold various missions for the European Community, but strange to admit, he satirically points out the funny reality that their only concern seems to sit leisurely and dine in restaurants of the most luxurious hotels enjoying the privilege given to them without thinking seriously of whether they are able to meet the functions they are expected to perform, as it is presented in the following quotation:

"As Cosima, leaning forward, and revealing a stunningly fine cleavage I had not even known was there before, quietly explained to me, while we sipped at our bubbles at a table for two by the window, power and privilege, politics and pleasure, all customarily met and mingled around the tables and banquettes of the Restaurant La Rochette. As we sat, a row of silver carts passed us by, bearing large pink lobsters on their final funeral journey to stoke the meditations of a group of European Foreign Ministers, informally gathered together to put a few finishing touches to the looming of the Higher Eurocrats-Commissioners and Directors-General Chefs de Cabinet, Directors and Principal Administrators A4, certainly nothing lower nor less....."²

Francis Jay, a reviewer remains and appears like a fish out of water in this enigmatic scene where a plot lurks at every step and renders him helpless and still sympathetic. Francis is drawn as a journalist whose limited scope for journalistic pursuits as a Punk Reviewer makes him even more stunned on a plane where from the beginning he tends to proclaim a cease-fire just because of his acknowledged limited capacity, tiny budget and great apathy about television screen. Even at home he feels homeless and alone thus how do we expect him to feel secure and comfortable abroad? His encounter with materialistic-minded Ildiko, who comes from Hungary, shows a great deal of eagerness to assist Francis in quest of her countryman, Criminale. In the long process of hunting the philosopher, Francis seems to become strongly attached to Ildiko who at present is able to cover her real purpose and identity. As it is noticed, Ildiko's presence and activities throw another mysterious shade upon the stage. Ildiko faithfully accompanies Francis in every literary conference where Criminale is told to present his lecture and again she happens to be greatly fond of spending Francis's small allowance on expensive, trendy clothes without having any scruples. The following quotation serves as a good example to point out on which Ildiko enjoyed spending Francis's small grant:

"All right, I said, 'What did you spend? How much did you buy?' 'Ah, you want to see all these?' she asked, opening up an Armani leather suitcase I had never seen before, and unpacking from it plastic shop bag after plastic shop bag. 'All that?' I asked. 'Look', said Ildiko, 'You know I only bought it all for you.' I looked. What Ildiko had bought for me was the following three dresses in Day-Glo colours; shoes of electric blue; anoraks of outrageous purple; racing drivers' sunglasses; a baseball cap saying 'Cleveland Pitchers'; skin-tight Lycra bicycling pants with

²Ibid., pp.289-281.

startling pink flashes; stars and stripes knickers; Union Jack brass; a tee-shirt that said on it 'Spandau Ballet; and another that declared 'Up Yours, Delors.' 'Do you really like them? she asked.'³

Ildiko's disappearance for a short while is followed by her leave for good with Francis' wallet containing just enough amount for him to go unstarved for a few days more. Afterwards another shocking event awaits Francis, to his great surprise, his wallet is restored with a piece of note accompanied by a large sum a money 40.000 \$ left by Ildiko who hasn't shown her face at all. The incredible events extend so far that Francis goes and opens an account at the bank, with the help of this considerably large sum of money he manages to survive till he finds another job. The following excerpt tells us how people are influenced by financial instability prevalent in the world:

"Now Herr Stubli, the manager, was staring at me over his gold-rimmed half-spectacles. 'A special numbered account?' he enquired 'Then I am afraid I must ask first if you don't mind it just a few little questions! I thought in Swiss banks it was no questions asked,' I said. 'We are discreet, of course, but this is no longer quite true exactly,' said Herr Stubli, 'I am afraid in these difficult days when banking is so political a little more is asked even of a Swiss bank. We like to be quite careful. After all we may soon join the Europe Community. This money you mention, it is all cash?' 'Yes, it is,' I said. 'And it come by you how?' asked Herr Stubli. 'Well, it was just a wind fall,' I said. 'Bitte?' asked Stubli. 'Eine Wind falle?' 'A wind fall is when apples fall off trees,' I said 'Ah, ya, ya, said Herr Stubli, 'I was an agricultural transaction.'"⁴

As it is noted, mystery becomes the center of action pervading the recesses of the narrative. Ildiko's disappearance gives rise to some surprising occurrences and Cosima Bruckner plays an active role in solving this particular jig-saw puzzle with the unyielding assistance of Francis who unknowingly serves as a means for Cosima to draw conclusions. It is quite clear that Francis unconsciously is used like a toy in the hands of individuals plotting against each other and during his search for Criminale, Francis gains a self-knowledge and sophisticated perspective of the world, individuals and events. That's to say, this particular chase finally enables him to reach and adopt a novel point of view through which he comes to achieve the ability to know more about the external factors shaping the private life, career and personal qualities. The following paragraph indicates the angle from which Francis begins to view the world and people:

"I felt... well, I felt strangely pure, as if I had suddenly grown up, emerged from something, passed from deep smart youthful wisdom into a perfect adult innocence. I had been deceived, I had been betrayed: but I also had it in my power to betray others. Perhaps I had learned something, after all, from Bazlo Criminale-that thoughts and deeds never come to us plain, pure and timeless but are born in conflict and deception, shaped by history, grow from obscurity, misfortune, and evasion. They are slippery and inexact, contradictory and subject to sudden change; they are just like life itself. In fact I never felt closer to Criminale than I did at that moment."⁵

3.Ibid., p.194.

4.Ibid., p.258.

5.Ibid., p.257.

Malcolm Bradbury chooses and creates an appropriate nationality for the character Criminale. He was born in Hungary, but he is no longer a citizen of that particular country. However, he still keeps a house there. The most important fact lies under his nationality which makes it difficult for Jay to penetrate into his secret, private life where the regime calls for discreet action and obscurity. The only biographical book written about the world famous philosopher proves to be written by somebody else and this leads the reader to reconsider the matters of honesty and reliability. The unshakable image of Criminale seems to suffer seriously from Francis Jay's close investigations made in the circles of the University. Even though the professor Otto Codicil fails to meet his academic duties properly, he makes Francis sure that he is not allowed to stir without his permission. When Codicil finds out that Francis gathers as much information as to write an article on Criminale, he uses his authority to get both Francis and Ildiko dismissed from the Barolo literature conference. This particular conspiracy again holds some grains of suspense because however hard Francis tries to find out why Codicil has dictated their dismissal, he comes out of this inquiry without a plausible result. The paragraph inserted below tells how Francis and Ildiko lose the chance of staying at the Villa Barolo:

"Okay, prof. just let me handle it," said Mrs. Magno, looking me over, "Is it true you lied your way into here?" "All right," I said, I said, "admit my paper folded. It went bankrupt a couple of weeks ago. I still thought I could publish an article." "And the T.V.?"

.....

Meanwhile may I ask what you intend 'o do with our arrant door-step-hopper here?" demanded Codicil. "On, him", said Mrs. Magno, turning to me with the managerial decisiveness for which she was famous, "You punk, you're out, pronto: And just don't let me see you ever again anywhere near Barolo, okay?"⁶

In this thoroughly enigmatic setting and of all these mysterious characters there is Gertla who can be classified as a heroine with a great deal of transparency. Her revelations sound quite courageous because she daringly speaks about her background and relationship with Criminale, and the most important of all she assumes the ownership of Criminale's biography. Francis tries hard to find out the reasons for her speaking freely and openly about some events that might either give rise to a scandal or make her heap a hoard of fortune. Francis Jay has been stupefied by what he has already heard from Gertla and he tries to find out why she is acting in such an outspoken way as it is given in the excerpt below:

"There was only one problem with all this. If the mask was there above all to protect Gertla, why would she now want to take it off? Why say something different and opposite now-and now just to me, but through me, a known and convicted journalist, to the world beyond? Why, if she was the secret police agent who had, in effect, corrupted Criminale, would she want that known-especially at a time like this, when the files were opening everywhere, the scores were being settled and everyone was claiming virtue?"⁷

6.Ibid., pp.191-192.

7.Ibid., P.291.

The mystery is never ending in *Doctor Criminale* as it occurs in Malcolm Bradbury's previous works for example in *History Man*; *Why come to Slaka*, *Stepping Westward*. The writer focuses on the element of enigma in any sort of relations ranging from human beings to social, political and economic arenas. The motif of mystery has been handled as a kind of life style which enables some individuals to carry out their plans accordingly. Ildiko is an apparently innocent Hungarian beauty whose only purpose seems to own fashionable European clothes using any possible means she can find an access to. Towards the end of the story, the mask of her innocence falls off and she is exposed to the stark light of reality. Now, she is not an innocent young woman with a great number of aspirations about the West, but a fake and treacherous conspirator who collects the royalties of *Criminale* from Swiss banks and disappears without leaving any trace behind her. As we have pointed out, such individuals are the natural products of strict police regimes where sincerity, integrity and reliability seem to be proclaimed as the forsaken concepts. The dialogue between Cosima and Francis makes clear the purpose of Ildiko, as it is seen in the following:

"so you didn't know her quite so well?" asked Cosima. 'Not really.' And yet when you left Lausanne so suddenly, we found you had stayed in that brothel hotel with this Hungarian agent: 'We didn't have the same room.' I said. 'And then we discovered that she was one who drew the Criminale Money from the Bruger Zugerbank,' said Cosima, looking at me. 'You have been busy.' I said, drinking my Sauvignon uncomfortably. 'So you didn't know this?' asked Cosima. 'I just thought she'd gone but for another day's heavy shopping, I said' ⁸

In the novel the reader notices the corruption of an individual in every aspect of life. *Criminale* has been portrayed as someone who just for the academic purposes and interests travels hundreds of miles to enlighten the audience. This is the picture depicted. To what extent does it reflect the reality? Actually, the fact is far beyond the grasp of an ordinary individual because what we see is not the real facet of matters. Even a world-famous scholar-thinker, *Criminale*, seems to fail to understand the reality lying far beneath the lacquered surface. *Criminale* honestly puts the fact that in a human society betrayal, lies, corruption and the effects of history seem to be unavoidable components of life:

"For a journalist to succeed, in here must be a bit the dishonest person." "And for the philosopher?" "I asked Criminale looked at the lake and then said. 'This is an interesting question. Yes, I think so. Remember, the philosopher is only the clown of thought. It is granted the role of wisdom, he must appear wise. Every age, every idea comes along and demands him, give us a describable portrait of reality. He tries, he considers, he picks up the tools of thought. But he is no different from anyone else. Dirty with history, a man after all. Perhaps against his intention, the thought betrays.'" ⁹

Criminale attempts to put all the blame on history and parents for the failure of an individual considering the interaction of the individual with history and his family. He would not absolutely be considered in the wrong, but the bombardment of accusations do not take an individual to anywhere. The following statements give us an idea of *Criminale*'s stand point:

8. Ibid, p.297.

9. Ibid., p.328.

"We all betray each other. Sometimes from malice, or fear. Sometimes from indifference, sometimes love. Sometimes an idea, sometimes from political need. Sometimes because we cannot think of a good ethical reason why not to. Are you different?" 'I hope so,' I said 'But don't you think betrayal is all round us now?' asked Criminale, 'Isn't this also a time of 'I accuse, I'm accused?' 'I'm said. 'I accuse, my father abused me, my mother failed me,' said Criminale, 'I accuse, he invaded my sexual space, he made me an innuendo. I accuse, I am his lover, he owes me a fortune.'" 10

The world in which individuals resort to practicing secretive ways to achieve their purposes yields both to humorous and satirical examinations of the text. A mysterious way of living has been assumed as a normal life style of the protagonist, Doctor Criminale, who seems to survive all right camouflaging his intents, plans, mistresses and next destination, leaves the place of event first without being noticed. Malcolm Bradbury tells a story woven with a great variety of secrets and when the reader thinks that he seized a clue to a mysterious happening, another mystery has intentionally been introduced onto the stage to reduce the effects of previous mysteries. Even though the book renders smooth reading, the writer's attempts to display efficiently the intertwined human relations accompanied by a vast array of betrayals, of disloyalties, of blackmails, of slanderous activities add to the plot structure. Finally, Malcolm Bradbury tries to portray modern individuals who cannot avoid being either slaves or victims of rapidly changing social, economic, cultural arenas of Europe and that of some dinosaur-like Iron-Curtain Countries.

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10. Ibid., pp.329-330.