

MANKURTS OF ABISH AND AITMATOV: DESTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY OR LOSS OF SANITY?

ABİŞ KEKİLBAYULI VE CENGİZ AYTMAOV'UN MANKURTLARI: MİLLÎ KİMLİK TAHRİBATI MI AKLİSELİMİN YİTİMİ Mİ?

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Abstract

Comparative literature is a discipline that studies the interactions, similarities, and differences between different works on a comparative basis. It is important to employ this perspective for examining the works of literature written within the scope of Turkic world, to identify common trends that emerged in certain periods and to draw conclusions by associating them with the general conditions of the period. Writers from the Turkic world, who benefited from partial relaxation after the pressure of socialist realism since the 1960s, have turned to narratives transmitted by oral culture such as legends and epics and adapted them to modern genres.

The reinterpretation of oral folk narratives about mankurtization by two such authors, Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov, are noteworthy in this respect. Although both authors similarly describe the method of mankurtization, there are some differences in their positioning of this subject within the fictional integrity of the literary work and the purpose of fiction. In this study, the mankurt narratives in the povest¹ “Küy” and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* will be examined comparatively and the similarities and differences between the two works will be revealed. Thus, this paper will demonstrate how the same material has been differently constructed by different authors in terms of their intended messages.

Keywords: Comparative literature, Abish Kekilbayuli, “Küy”/Melody, Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, mankurt, Kirghiz and Kazakh literature

Öz

Karşılaştırmalı edebiyat, farklı eserler arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimleri, benzerlik ve farklılıkları mukayeseli olarak inceleyen bir disiplindir. Türk dünyası edebiyatları kapsamında incelenen eserlere bu disiplinden hareketle karşılaştırmalı olarak bakmak, belli dönemlerde ortaya çıkan ortak eğilimleri tespit

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1 The term ‘povest’ in Russian is used to indicate a different genre in literature. This genre does not exist in English or in Turkish. Therefore, in this paper, we prefer using the term ‘story’ with reference to this work. In addition, the word ‘küy’ is a special instrumental music played on ‘dombira’ by folk artists in Kazakhstan. For this reason, we use it to refer to Kekilbayev’s povest.

etmek ve bu eğilimleri dönemin şartlarıyla ilişkilendirerek sağlıklı hükümlere ulaşmak açısından önemlidir. 1960'lı yıllardan itibaren sosyalist realizm baskısındaki kısmi gevşemeden yararlanan Türk dünyası yazarları, efsane ve destan gibi sözlü kültürle aktarılan anlatılara yönelerek bunları modern türlere adapte etmiştir. Abiş Kekilbayulı ve Cengiz Aytmatov'un mankurtlaştırma ile ilgili sözlü halk anlatılarını kendi eserlerinde yeniden yorumlayarak kullanması bu açıdan dikkate değerdir. Her iki yazar da mankurtlaştırma uygulamasının yapılış biçimini birbirine benzer şekilde anlatsa da bu konunun edebî eserin estetik bütünlüğü içerisindeki konumu ve kurgulanma biçiminde bazı farklılıklar vardır. Bu durum, yazarların okuyucuya mesaj verirken farklı noktaları vurgulamak istemesinin bir sonucudur. Bu çalışmada “Küy” povesti ve *Gün Olur Asra Bedel* romanındaki mankurtluk anlatılarına karşılaştırmalı olarak bakılacak ve iki eser arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıklar ortaya konacaktır. Böylece aynı malzemenin, vurgulanmak istenen mesaja uygun olacak şekilde nasıl farklı kurgulandığı da incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karşılaştırmalı edebiyat, Abiş Kekilbayulı, “Küy”, Cengiz Aytmatov, *Gün Olur Asra Bedel*, mankurt, toplumsal bellek, milli kimlik

Introduction

Although socialist realism is a literary movement directly guided by the state, it did not always follow an oppressive pattern due to the politics of the Soviet Union and the criticisms of Soviet theorists and writers centered on the internal dynamics of the art. The political, intellectual and artistic developments in the world also contributed to the softening of the movement. Moreover, the template literature imposed by the rulers started to lose its vigor and relevance. Depending on all these factors, the works that pursued party propaganda gradually began to be replaced by human-centered literature after the death of Stalin, especially since the 1960s.

It was also during this period of partial relief that some writers from the Turkic world used national history and folklore, perceived as “reactionary remnants of the feudal era” by the Soviet ideology, to convey implicit messages and even to indirectly criticize Soviet politics. As a result, writers from different Turkic tribes used similar themes and metaphors by turning to historical epics and legends in the collective memory of Turkic peoples.² Oral narratives are used as a survival strategy in nomadic societies that do not have a settled written culture.³ In other words,

- 2 At this point, the attitudes of both Abish Kekilbayulı and Chingiz Aitmatov are remarkable. Abish marked the 1970s and 1980s of Kazakh prose and built a new understanding of prose by turning to mythology and oral folk culture. See G. Орда, “Әбіш Кекілбаев Шығармаларындағы Рухани Құндылықтар”, *Халық Жазушысы, Мемлекет Және Қоғам Қайраткері, ҚР Еңбек Ері Ә.Кекілбайұлының 80 Жылдығына Арналған Әдебиет Және Өнер Қайраткерлері Халықаралық Конгресінің Материалдары (Materials of the International Congress of Literary and Artistic Figures Dedicated to the 80th Anniversary of the People's Writer, State and Public Figure, Hero of Labor of the Republic of Kazakhstan A. Kekilbayevich Proceedings Book)*, Aktav 2019, p. 58. Chingiz Aitmatov also reproduced oral narratives and included them in the fiction, and although the starting point was local narratives, he gave universal messages about the issues of the modern world. See Nurullah Çetin, “Bozkırdan Yükselen Türk Bilgesi” (Turkish Sage Rising from the Steppe), *Aytmatov Araştırmaları (Aitmatov Studies)*, ed. Yasin Yavuz, Bengü Publication, Ankara 2020. See also Fazıl Gökçek, “Cengiz Aytmatov'un Romanlarında Din Teması ve Dişi Kurdu Rüyalari” (The Theme of Religion and the Dreams of the She-Wolf in Chingiz Aitmatov's Novels), *ibid*. Claiming that Abish Kekilbayulı's inclination towards myth and mythology increases the intellectual and aesthetic power in his works, Aytmatov has shown that he shares the same point of view. See C. Абдрахманов, *Абыз Әбіш (Wise Abish)*, Foliant Publication, Nur-Sultan 2019, p. 356.

- 3 Aisulu Baibalova, *The [Un]Making of a Mankurt: Soviet Legacy and Post-Soviet Identity*, (Unpublished Master

these oral narratives provide a rich source for authors of the Turkic Republics under the Soviet administration to carry out studies in comparative literature.

Comparative literature, which is a sub-branch of literary science, is a discipline that “examines different works in terms of subject, thought or form” and explains the similarities and differences between these works.⁴ Adopting this approach makes it possible to categorize the periods in terms of similar preferences and tendencies of theme and content in Turkic pieces of literature in the Soviet period. It also allows one to make more holistic evaluations about the literature of the period by contemplating the reasons for these preferences. Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov are two important writers whose works can be compared in terms of their common tendencies such as diverting people from crude ideological propaganda and bringing national history and culture to the agenda.

The most concrete example of this similarity can be observed in their work on the concept of ‘mankurt’,⁵ which originates from folk narratives. Twelve years after Abish Kekilbayuli⁶ dealt with the concept of mankurt in Kazakh legends and Kyrgyz Manas Epic in his povest entitled “Küy”, the same concept was fictionalized in another context by Chingiz Aitmatov in his novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*.⁷ For this reason, it will be useful to comparatively analyze how the two writers fictionalized the concept of mankurt/ism⁸ by revealing the function they ascribed to their art under Soviet pressure in different time and place. Hence, this study will evaluate the utilization of the concept of mankurt in both literary texts and discuss the perspectives of Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov in a comparative light. It will also address the impact of

(Thesis), OCAD University, Toronto 2021, p. 15.

- 4 Gürsel Aytaç, *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi (Comparative Literary Science)*, Say Publication, Istanbul 2013, p. 9.
- 5 “Mankurt is anyone who does not have knowledge of his or her native language and national traditions.” See Y. N. Ormakhanova, “Mankurtism As A Social Problem In Television Discourse Of Kazakhstan”, *Transactions Of Kazakh-American University Proceedings Book*, No: IV (42), (2021), p. 25-32.
- 6 The period between the writing of the two works as twelve years is based on the 1969 edition of the *Küy* story, published in Moscow under the name of *Forgotten Years Ballad / Folk Song*. Based on the serialization of the work in the *Kommunist Enbek* newspaper in 1967, this period will increase the interval to fourteen years, because the novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* was introduced to the reader in 1980.
- 7 Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (И дольше века длится день in Russian original version) trans. F. J. French. Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 368. This story of Abish Kekilbayuli was filmed in 2006 under the direction of Demir Manabay. The film did not strictly adhere to the story and its name was changed to “Кек”, which can be translated as “Revenge.” Қазақша фильм – Кек (2006) Режиссер Дәмір Манабай (Дамир Манабай). To watch the film in the Kazakh language, please go to: <https://ok.ru/video/952.402.0504> [Date of access: 14.09.2021].
- 8 According to Norman N. Shneidman, the concept of mankurtism refers to the suppression of people and the distortion of their history. The term refers to non-Russians who have been cut off from their ethnicity by the effects of the Soviet system. See N. N. Shneidman, *Soviet Literature in the 1980s: Decade of Transition*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1989; Orhan Söylemez-Döne Arslan, “Şiire Yansıyan “Mankurtlar” ve “Közkamanlar”: Sovyetbek Baygazyev” (Mankurts and Kozkamans Reflected in Poems: Sovietbek Baygazyev), *TURUK International Language, Literature and Folklore Researches Journal*, Issue: 24, (March 2021), p. 51-73. Mankurtism is a concept that signifies mental slavery rather than physical. See Y. N. Ormakhanova, “Mankurtism As a Social Problem in Television Discourse Of Kazakhstan”, p. 28.

this similarity on social messages about history, national identity and social memory delivered through literature.

Mankurts in the Works of Kekilbayuli and Aitmatov

The concept of mankurt, which refers to people who are “taken away from their national identity and alienated from the society they live in”,⁹ is a concept rooted in the oral memory of Turkic tribes in folk legends of Western Kazakhstan and the Epic of Kyrgyz Manas.¹⁰ Although Abish Kekilbayuli is the first known name to use this concept in modern literature, the concept attained worldwide recognition with Chingiz Aitmatov’s novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* and its translation into many languages. Soon after its publication, Aitmatov’s work also drew the attention of literary critics in the Soviet Period.

Some critics claim that Aitmatov plagiarized Abish Kekilbayuli. However, Kekilbayuli argued at the Convention of Traditional Soviet Literature held in Tbilisi that there was no plagiarism, and that the issue should not be exaggerated. According to the Kazakh writer, the concept of mankurt is a historical material embedded in the culture of the Turkic peoples, and it is possible to handle the same material from different perspectives by different authors.¹¹ As Kekilbayuli stated, discussions of plagiarism are meaningless. In fact, in world literature, mythology, legends and historical narratives constitute the main sources of literature and accordingly, the same legend can be handled from different perspectives by more than one author. The myth of Dr. Faust, who sold his soul to the devil, is one typical example, where the same topic is narrated differently in German literature by different authors such as Lessing, Goethe, and Thomas Mann.¹²

The story of mankurt as narrated in “Küy” was written about twelve years before the novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. Although this article seems to criticize or present a rivalry between the two authors and their Turkic origins, it analyzes the skirmishes between people from similar origins in the post-Stalin Turkic literary world.¹³ The aim is to explain the reasons why similar legends are used by different authors and to demonstrate how the same material can be construed differently from various perspectives. As the point of view and the way

9 Ekrem Arıkoğlu et al., *Kırgızca-Türkçe Sözlük II (Kyrgyz-Turkish Dictionary II)*, Bengü Publication, Ankara 2018, p. 1516.

10 For information on the different approaches to the origin and definition of mankurt and related oral narratives, which serve as the source for the works of Abiş Kekilbayulı and Cengiz Aytmatov, see Orhan Söylemez-Ömer Faruk Ateş, “Abiş Kekilbayulı’nın Küy Hikâyesi ve İlk Mankurtlar” (Abiş Kekilbayulı’s Küy/Melody Story and the First Mankurts), *TURUK International Language, Literature and Folklore Researches Journal*, Issue: 25, (June 2021), p. 52-66.

11 Damira İbragim, “Modern Kazak Edebiyatının Temsilcisi Abiş Kekilbayev’in Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerine” (The Life And Work Of The Modern Kazakh Novelist Abiş Kekilbayev), *Turkish Studies*, Issue: 5/2, p. 1134.

12 Gürsel Aytaç, *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi (Comparative Literary Science)*, p. 11.

13 After the death of Stalin, the pressure of socialist realism on literature eased, and Turkic peoples had the opportunity to use national legends and narratives in modern literature. The use of different variants of the same legend by Kekilbayev and Aitmatov is an indication of the tendency towards folklore.

of editing change, the emphasis in the messages conveyed by the authors also changes. Upon an examination of these two works, it will be seen that the role and function of the mankurtising ritual are shaped in the narrative structure according to the author's editing styles, imaginations, and intended messages.

"Küy" is a story of the struggle between the Aday tribe¹⁴ living in Western Kazakhstan and the Turkmens on the other side of the border with Turkmenistan. The unique and difficult living conditions of the steppe cause the brotherly Turkic tribes to fight each other from time to time. Duyımkara, the famous warrior of the Aday tribe, takes Turkmen girls as prisoners of war. However, due to the law of the steppe, the Turkmens organize a raid for revenge and impose a punishment of mankurt on the Kazakhs they capture. While four of the six captives sentenced to this punishment are made shepherds in the Turkmen village, two of them are sent to a region close to the place where the Aday tribe lives to serve as a lesson to the other Kazakhs. One of the captured prisoners is a Kazakh youth who plays the dombra¹⁵ very well. Cüneyt, who loses his son, a dutar¹⁶ artist during the raid on the Kazakhs, buries the mankurt dombra player alive in the middle of the steppe to avenge his child. On the one hand, the young prisoner awaits his death; on the other hand, even though Cüneyt regrets what he did, he cannot save the prisoner due to social pressure. When the guilt of leaving a young person to die is added to the pain of losing a child, Cüneyt's psychology is turned upside down and he begins to have dreams that reveal his subconscious.

These dreams are suitable for analysis in terms of psychoanalysis and take on the function of reflecting Cüneyt's psychology. In this process, the boy named Kurban, who takes the dutar from Cüneyt's tent and takes it home, performs the melody played by the mankurt dombra player and conveys a message of peace through the universal language of art. At the end of the story, it is revealed that this boy is the old melody man, who would be named Kurban Aksakal¹⁷ years later in the Soviet era. In other words, Kurban Aksakal told the geological engineer named Sırım, whom he had met during the Soviet period, about the events of his childhood. Thus, the story also reveals the living conditions of the recent past before the establishment of the Soviet Union through the Kazakh-Turkmen struggle.

Kekilbayuli's fiction conveys a message of unity and solidarity to the Turkic peoples by revealing the Kazakh-Turkmen conflicts and the pain caused by the punishments indicted as a result. This work emphasizes the unifying power of common culture and art and is also meaningful in terms of pointing out the problems experienced before the Soviet period. This situation creates an image of mankurt describing the problems arising from the feudal structure that dominated the region before the Soviet Union. In socialist literature driven from Moscow,

14 A clan name in Western Kazakhstan famous for its heroic warriors.

15 It is a stringed instrument that has an important place in Kazakh culture.

16 Traditional instrument of Turkmen, Uzbek and Uyghur peoples.

17 Aksakal means "respected older man or wise man" in Kazakh culture.

writers were expected to shed light on the problems of the pre-October Revolution and thus to emphasize the achievements of the Soviet period. Abish Kekilbayuli adopted a similar approach with a focus on the brotherhood of Turkic tribes, and by applying the epic common to all people of Turkic origins, he probably intended for his work to avoid the censorship of the Soviet authorities. Due to the strict conditions of the period, it was not possible to write works emphasizing the brotherhood among Turks and directly calling for unity. While sending such indirect messages, it was necessary to add some elements to the fiction that the Soviet critics would like. “Melody” can also be evaluated from this perspective.

Chingiz Aitmatov’s novel, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, recites the struggle of a group of people through the pain caused by the Soviet policies of the Stalin era, while trying to preserve their national identity. The plot of the novel involves the death of Kazangap, who lives at the Boranlı in the Sarı Özek steppe, and the effort of his friend Yedigey to bury him in the Ana Beyit cemetery. While dealing with current problems, occasional flashbacks reveal information about the lives of the protagonists.

The Soviet Union, through the ideological nature of the education it provided, rendered Kazangap’s son Sabitcan and millions of people like him unidentified and cut them off from their historical and national ties. For this reason, Yedigey’s effort to bury Kazangap in the Ana Beyit cemetery, a place of spiritual value, is meaningless for Sabitcan. But the only problem is not the destruction of the values of individuals. This cemetery, which serves as the memory of society, was taken from the Kazakh society because it was built as a space base during the Soviets. Hence Kazangap was not allowed to be buried in Ana Beyit. While the author describes an order that destroys the values of a people at both individual and social levels, he visits the past to recite the ‘Mother Nayman’ legend about the cemetery.

The fact that this legend contained the mankurt concept, which points to the destruction of identity, demonstrates that Aitmatov chose a folk narrative that would complement the messages he tried to give about the Soviet period and included it in the fiction. Considering the period in which the novel was written, it cannot be expected from him to have directed an open and harsh criticism. For this reason, when evaluating the function of the ‘Mother Nayman’ legend in Aitmatov’s fiction, it should be considered that this legend complements the criticism made over Sabitcan and the cemetery. Indirect criticisms formulated by changing the time and place are more likely performed to avoid censorship. Aitmatov, like many Turkic world writers, adopted this method and brought up the issue of identity destruction by presenting Juan-Juans as enemies. It is also significant that the person who wrote this legend in the novel was Abutalip Kuttubayev. Abutalip was arrested by Tansikbayev, one of the prosecutors of the Stalin era, on charges of being an enemy of the regime and he was never reunited with his family. Hence, the author criticizes the regime on the basis of a legend written by a man who was subjected to Soviet persecution. The part that describes what happened to Abutalip in more detail was not included in the novel due

to censorship. This part would later be included in the work published under the title *The Cloud Offended Chingiz Khan*.

According to the legend of ‘Mother Nayman’, Juan-Juans had occupied the Sarı Özek steppe in the past. During this occupation, a young man named Colaman was captured by the Juan Juans and was made mankurt. Aitmatov explains in detail how the mankurtization¹⁸ process was performed in this legend: camel skin (sire) was put on the head of the captured youth and kept under the sun. Thus losing his mind, Colaman did not even recognize his mother and killed her. A bird emerged from Mother Nayman’s white headscarf and began to fly, shouting “Remember your name! Remember who you are! Your father’s name is Dönenbay! Donenbay! Donenbay!”¹⁹ This was a call to Colaman, whose memory had been erased through the chanting, to remember his identity and values, and also served as a message about national identity. It also signified opposition to the culture and identity politics of the Soviet Union. The main purpose of the punishment of mankurt, which Aitmatov conveyed through the legend of ‘Mother Nayman’, was to deliver this message. When the stories narrated in the legend and the words uttered by the white bird are evaluated within the fictional integrity of the novel, the author’s emphasis on identity and memory becomes even more evident.

There are many similarities as well as differences in the way Kekilbayuli and Aitmatov deal with the concept of mankurt. Both authors refer to mankurtization as a form of punishment applied to prisoners of war in the historical period. In both narratives, the events take place in the steppes of Asia. Due to the social structure of steppe life, fighting, raiding, and capturing are common events among tribes. At this point, the element that distinguishes the two narratives from each other is that the people who fought and applied the punishment – Kazakhs and Turkmens – were of different origins. In the story “Küy”, Kazakhs and Turkmens, the two Turkic tribes, fight among themselves, and the punishment of mankurt is applied to Kazakhs by Turkmens. In Aitmatov’s novel, the Naymans live in the Sarı Özek steppe in the geography of Kazakhstan and the Juan Juans come to the region to invade. It is the Juan Juans who turn prisoners into the mankurt. It is a matter of debate as to which people the nomenclature ‘Juan Juan’ refers to. Some researchers say that the Juan Juans are a people of Mongolian origin, while others argue that they may be the predecessors of the Avars. In this sense, the ethnicity and the exact historical counterpart of the hostile people in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* is not fully clear.²⁰ What the author

18 Mankurtization is a concept that means destroying people’s memory and enslaving them, making mankurt. In the international literature, there are many scientific publications in which the concept of mankurtization is used in this sense.

19 Cengiz Aytmatov, *Gün Olur Asra Bedel (The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years)*, trans. Refik Özdek, Ötüken Publication, Istanbul 2014, p. 172.

20 For information, see Dursun Yılmaz and Murat Sezgin. “Siyasal ve Sosyal Bağlamda Mankurt Kavramının Türk Yazılı Basınında Metaforik Kullanımı” (Metaphorical Use of Mankurt Concept in Political and Social Context in Turkish Written Media), *MANAS Journal of Social Studies*. Vol: 9, Issue: 2, (2020); Kürşat Yıldırım, *Bozkırın Yitik Çocukları Juan Juanlar (Lost Children of the Steppe Juan Juans)*, Yeditepe Publishing House, Istanbul 2015; Haşim Özel, “Juan Juanların Etnik Oluşumları ve Siyasi Tarihlerine Dair Bir İnceleme” (A Study of the Ethnic Formation and Political History of the Juan Juans), *International of Turkish Academic Studies (TURAS)* – Vol: 1, Issue: 1, (2020), p. 127-137.

wants to emphasize is that the Juan Juans are an “other” people, who later came to the region and destroyed the identity of the prisoners of war.

The process of mankurtization is narrated similarly by both authors. In both the story “Küy” and the novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, it is told that first the captives’ hair are shaved and camel skin is put on their heads. Shrinking in the heat, this skin causes unbearable pain by squeezing the captives’ heads. One of the commonalities between the two texts is that the hair that grows back cannot rip through the skin of the camel, so it turns back and pierces the scalp and grows inward, causing the prisoners to lose their memories. In both the story and the novel, the captives, who are turned into a mankurt, lose their memory and enter the service of those who make them mankurt. In this respect, mankurtization is depicted as memory destruction in both texts.

In the story, both those who punish and who are being punished are Muslims. Before inflicting the punishment of mankurt, the Turkmen slaughter the camel, distribute meat to the people and then place the skin of the camel over the head of the Kazakh prisoner. During this ritual, the Qur’an is recited and prayers are read. The religious references, namely performing a religious ceremony while the enemy is being punished, serves to legitimize this cruel practice in the eyes of the people. The ‘Mother Nayman’ legend in the novel also contains Islamic elements. Mother Nayman prays to God to find her son and sets out with the word of the *shahada*. If it is known that she has set out to find Colaman, her relatives would not allow this journey. Hence she claims that she would visit Ahmed Yesevi.

The tradition of serving food after the dead is mentioned; for instance, Mother Nayman served food after Colaman because she thought her son was killed. In Abish’s work, religion is portrayed not only as part of culture and as an element that shapes social ceremonies but also as a force used to legitimize war and persecution. The peace between Kazakhs and Turkmens was twice disrupted; one time by the slander and provocation of a self-seeking cleric and another time during the religious ceremony of the mankurtization. The author reflects on the subject of religion from a point of view that will not disturb the Soviet critics. In Chingiz Aitmatov’s work, religion is not used as a powerful tool to legitimize evil; on the contrary, it is seen as the shelter of an oppressed and pure woman who suffers for her child. Moreover, the people who want Kazangap to be buried according to religious traditions are depicted as positive people throughout the novel, which is a choice that complements the author’s positive approach to religion.

In the story, universal messages about human values such as mercy and forgiveness are portrayed through the psychological analysis of Cüneyt, who pronounced the death sentence to the mankurt culprit, and that of the culprit who was subjected to this punishment. In particular, the inner conflict experienced by Cüneyt is very strong. His dreams reveal the remorse suppressed in his subconscious. The author conveys Cüneyt’s conflicts to the reader through the technique of internal analysis and monologue. As Kazakh literary scholar M. T. Shohaev has stated, the interior

monologue technique is quite functional in analyzing Cüneyt's inner world.²¹ The feelings and thoughts of the Kazakh youth left to die in the steppe are also described in detail. While the Kazakh youth is waiting for death in fear, he still thinks that human values will prevail and those who buried him will feel guilty and save him.

The conflict of fear and hope in his inner world also reflects the struggle of good and evil in human beings. It is the good essence that instills hope in this young person. But when the people he sees vaguely from afar in the steppe turn out to be wild animals rather than people who have come to rescue him, he encounters a different aspect of humanity. In the mankurt narrative of the novel, such in-depth psychological analyses are undertaken for neither the punisher nor the person exposed to the punishment. Here Aitmatov's aim is not to analyze the psychology of Juan Juans or Colaman but to convey a social message about the issue of collective memory and identity. Psychological analysis is directed solely to Mother Nayman; the focus is on the inner conflicts of a mother trying to find her child. Mother Nayman knows that her son either died or was made mankurt. In the brutal conditions of the steppe, there is no third possibility for Colaman. This awareness causes the mother to experience conflictual feelings. Sometimes she appears to prefer her son to die rather than becoming a mankurt, sometimes she changes her mind and asks Allah to let her son live, even if he has become a mankurt. The mother's conflicting feelings including occasional rebellions stem from her desperation.

In Abish Kekilbayuli's story, ranting is a form of punishment used to intimidate the enemy. As a result of this practice, the Kazakhs, who turned into mankurt, lose their memories, but the main reason for turning someone into a mankurt is to satisfy the sense of punishment caused by grudge and hatred, rather than erasing their memories and de-identifying them. The more severe the punishment the steppe people impose on their enemy, the more it will hurt him; as a result, he will have satisfied his sense of revenge and proved his heroism. From this perspective, the loss of the memory of prisoners emerges as a result of mankurtization rather than its purpose. The Turkmens drop off two of the Kazakh mankurts to the region where the Aday tribe live and return. This shows that the main aim is not to assimilate the Kazakh mankurts, but rather to make their enemies suffer and to demonstrate their own power by displaying their "disgraceful situation" to the other Kazakhs. In other words, Abish Kekilbayuli has utilized the theme of curse mostly to show how grudge and anger can make people cruel, how they torture other people and to remind fellow peoples of human values. The fact that Kazakhs and Turkmens are tribes of a Turkic family with the same origin excludes the possibility that the captured party will turn into the 'other' when mankurt is made, because there is no 'other' in terms of both religion and ethnicity. For this reason, it is possible to claim that the theme of de-identification is followed

21 For the place of the inner monologue technique in the psychological analyzes in the "Күй" story, see. M. T. Şohaev, "Ә. Кекілбайұлының «Күй» Повесіндегі Ішкі Монолог Қызметі", *Халық Жазушысы, Мемлекет Және Қоғам Қайраткері, ҚР Еңбек Ері Ә.Кекілбайұлының 80 Жылдығына Арналған Әдебиет Және Өнер Қайраткерлері Халықаралық Конгресінің Материалдары (Materials of the International Congress of Literary and Artistic Figures Dedicated to the 80th Anniversary of the People's Writer)*, State and Public Figure, Hero of Labor of the Republic of Kazakhstan A. Kekilbayevich Proceedings Book), Aktav 2019, p. 236-239.

in a subtle tone throughout the story. Juan Juans, chosen as enemies by the author in the novel, is the “other” for Turks, and choosing the enemy from another nation is functional in terms of emphasizing the effect of memory destruction on identity.

The legend of mankurt in Chingiz Aitmatov’s work functions more as an implicit critique of the system, and here, while pointing out the cruelty of the punishment, it is emphasized that the person who becomes mankurt is transformed by the loss of his memory and identity as well as the killing of his mother. In other words, since he cannot explicitly state it, Aitmatov criticizes the Soviet policies indirectly through a legend and tells the reader to ‘own your identity!’ This is the main message. The Soviet administration places ‘socialist ideology’ in people’s heads like camel skin by employing ideology and trying to create a uniform Soviet person or citizen. Hence Aitmatov’s emphasis on assimilation while telling the legend of mankurt turns the mankurt into a political concept in the social sciences and literature, implying de-identification or othering. On the other hand, in Abish Kekilbayuli’s story, the emphasis on identity is not as clear.

In the story “Küy”, unlike *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, the emphasis on the cruelty of human beings rather than disidentification is even more evident in the scene where the mankurt keeper comes to Cüneyt’s tent. The internal world of the mankurt, which will play the ‘küy’ or melody on dombra for the last time, is conveyed to the reader through the techniques of internal analysis and monologue. As a result, his memory does not seem to have been erased at all. On the contrary, the mankurt dombra player appears to think like a ‘wise person’ and wants to recall human values to these people, who kill and capture each other according to the laws of the steppe. According to the young man, these people repeat the same mistakes and suffer again, because they do not learn from the pain they have experienced. If humanity wants to get rid of pain, they should appreciate what they have and embrace the feeling of compassion in their conscience. Rebellion against Allah by cursing fate would not work. These wise notions running through his mind reveal that rather than a disidentified prisoner, the mankurt melodist is a conscientious person, who calls for mercy even when he is being punished very cruelly. The mankurt in Aitmatov’s narrative, by contrast, is a slave who lacks such sensitivity, has completely lost his memory, and does not hesitate to kill even his mother. This difference shows that the mankurts in the works of Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov were constructed with similar perspectives but emphasize different points. With an emphasis on identity and memory, Aitmatov focuses on a young man, who loses his memory and emotions and becomes a robot. On the contrary, Abish Kekilbayuli has fictionalized a young artist, who defends human values until his last moments, to bring values such as peace, compassion, and forgiveness to the fore. Since the destruction of identity is more subtle in Kekilbayuli’s work, there is not much emphasis in the text on a problem as the complete erasure of memory.

In Abish Kekilbayuli’s story, the plot is realistic. It is stated that the extraordinary elements in the text are dreams or imagination. Kurban Aksakal, the narrator, is an old man who lived the last years of his life in the Soviet period. It would not have been convincing for Kurban Aksakal

to tell to the Soviet youth, who grew up with materialist philosophy, about extraordinary events containing metaphysical elements. In addition, the stories do not belong to the old times when the legends were formed, but to the recent past, namely the childhood of Kurban Aksakal. The novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* contains some extraordinary elements such as the scene where Mother Nayman's cheesecloth turns into a white bird and calls out: "Remember your name! Remember who you are! Your father's name is Dönenbay! Donenbay! Donenbay!" Aitmatov's narrative is based on a more distant past and since it is a legend handed down from generation to generation, it is natural that it contains such extraordinary elements. In addition, Aitmatov consciously included this legend to counter realism while criticizing the Soviet ideology, because, according to the socialist ideology, narratives such as epics and legends are reactionary elements from the feudal period. Reading these narratives to form the basis of national identity also signifies opposition to the regime. Abutalip, who compiled the legend, was arrested by the prosecutor Tansikbayev and paid the penalty for what he did. Legends not only contradict the Soviet reality because of their inclusion of metaphysical events and basis on national memory, but they also include the traditional understanding of reality based on religion, national culture, and tradition ignored by materialist ideology. For instance, in another novel of Aitmatov, *The White Ship*, the character Mümin Dede believes in the legend of 'the horned mother deer' against the corruption of Orozkul, who sees the legends as superstitions. The representation of purity and innocence through the nameless child – who is the protagonist of the novel *The White Ship* – is also remarkable in terms of showing the author's attitude on this issue.

In Chingiz Aitmatov's "the horned mother deer" story in *White Ship*, the socio-cultural structure of a society that applies the punishment of mankurt is important. The narrative is constructed in a way that conveys this structure to the reader.²² In the novel, the state of the 20th-century Soviet society is more significant than that of the time when the legend took place, which is uncertain. For this reason, in the fiction, the social structure of the environment where Yedigey and Kazangap live, rather than that of Mother Nayman and Colaman, is emphasized. Aitmatov is content with mentioning a few traditions of the Islamic culture regarding the legend and the nomadic nature of the steppe based on animal husbandry. Abish Kekilbayuli, on the other hand, does not only aim to reflect on the culture, but also goes into detail to criticize the patriarchal steppe society and the people who established their power in this society through war and religion. As it is known, there was no industry in the steppe societies living in the Turkestan geography before the October Revolution. In addition to the nomadic social structure, the climate and vegetation are also not suitable for agriculture. For the Turkmens and Kazakhs engaged in animal husbandry, the main source of livelihood comes from the seizure of areas with abundant grass and gaining booty from the other side —Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan—by making sudden raids. This structure, based on the survival of the strongest, results in the construction of masculinity

22 "The construction of 'Küy' in a way that reflects the socio-cultural structure of the Turkmens has provided a lot of information about Turkmen folk culture in the text. For information, see Ahmet Gökçimen, "Abiş Kekilbayulı'nın Küy Anlatısında Türkmen Halk Kültürü" (Turkmen Folk Culture in Abiş Kekilbayulı's Küy Narrative), *Temrin*, Issue: 96, (2019), p. 1-6.

as a gender identity through warfare and heroism. For this reason, young people like Devlet, who are engaged in the arts, are not considered 'men' in society in the full sense. Under social pressure, Cüneyt sends his son Devlet to war with a sword visit to the cemetery, which is a kind of initiation ceremony. This war causes the death of Devlet and leaves Cüneyt with the unbearable pain of the loss of his child. The expectations of society require revenge in such situations. Otherwise, the Turkmens will appear helpless against the Kazakhs. For this reason, it is decided to kill the Kazakh mankurt, who has no crime and is an artist just like young Devlet. Although Cüneyt regrets and loses his mental health after implementing this decision, he does not dare to save the Kazakh prisoner, because he is afraid of social pressure. Abish wants to show the social pressure of society on the young man for not being interested in fighting and being interested in playing music. In this case he refers to the social status of Devlet as son of a warrior Cüneyt.

One of the common points of both works lies in the issue of evil. Kazakh melodist, who was left to die in the story, questions how human beings can be so evil and cruel. A similar situation applies to Mother Nayman, who loses her husband and son. Devlet is not only amazed that man can be so evil but also rebels against the fact that God created man in such a way as to be able to reason with these evils. Thus, based on the thoughts of Mother Nayman, Aitmatov refers to the theodicy/evil problem, which has been discussed in philosophy and theology for centuries.

In the Eyes of Critics: The “Küy” and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*

Some critics also argue that Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov discussed the subject of mankurt in different contexts. Abish Kekilbayuli was first to claim that the two writers emphasized different points through mankurt. The Kazakh writer —Kekilbayuli— states that he himself “emphasizes that unlimited hatred will result in unlimited cruelty, while Chingiz Aitmatov draws attention to the fact that unlimited cruelty will lead to spiritual mankurt.”²³ In other words, Abish Kekilbayuli wanted to draw attention to the hatred caused by a struggle that turned into a blood feud, and a cruel torture method (punishment) that emerged as a result. While doing this, the Kazakh writer also revealed the socio-cultural structure that caused this cruelty and supported the conflict between the values found in the conscience of every person and the experiences with psychological analyzes. Aitmatov, on the other hand, emphasized that the mankurt, which emerged as a result of ruthlessness, annihilates identity through spiritual destruction.

Literary scholar Pariza Mirza Ahmedov states that Aitmatov took the mankurt type from Abish Kekilbayuli, but used it differently in his work. According to Ahmedov, in Kekilbayuli's text, mankurtization is discussed in the context of one tribe's intimidation by another. In Aitmatov, on the other hand, mankurtization, as a metaphor, plays the most important role in the novel. The idea of the USA and the USSR to shield the atmosphere with a magnetic shield is similar to the

23 Damira İbragim, “Modern Kazak Edebiyatının Temsilcisi Abiş Kekilbayev’in Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerine”, p. 1134.

mankurtization process described in the legend of Mother Nayman. Two superpowers will put a magnetic shield, that is, a kind of camel skin or in original text 'shire' on the head of the earth – atmosphere – to turn all humanity into mankurt. The connection drawn by Aitmatov between the legend of mankurt and the space project of superpowers, Ahmedov argues, was his means to reach the universal based on a local legend.²⁴

In Ahmedov's interpretation, Aitmatov's self-assessment that he had captured the universal in his book *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* is correct. The work was written during the Cold War period; while the USA and the USSR, the two hostile superpowers, competed on every issue, they agreed that humanity should remain unaware of the existence of a superior civilization even beyond the atmosphere. Because if humanity learns about the living conditions on another planet called the Forest Chest, people will make similar demands from the USA and the USSR, and this will put the two states that divide the world among themselves into difficulties according to their interests. For this reason, the efforts of the two states to cut off communication between the world and the new planet with the joint space project mean the of all humanity. Aitmatov conveys the message that those in power will not hesitate to manipulate humanity and dress them with their "constructed identities" to protect their interests and legitimacy. Thus, the author touches upon an issue that goes beyond the cultural and identity policies between the Soviet Union and Turkic peoples and concerns all humanity.

According to Orhan Söylemez, the importance of Aitmatov lies in his criticism of the Soviet system through the mankurt metaphor, which depicts the continuity in the practices of enslavement and marginalization in the modern period with different methods. According to Söylemez, the cemetery represents the memory of the people. Turning the cemetery into a space base and banning public from entering it signifies the erasure of collective memory, that is, turning a nation into manslaughter. Surrounding the Ana Beyit cemetery with wire fences brings to mind the camel skin put on the head of the mankurt.²⁵ According to this approach, the resistance of Yedigey, who wants to bury his friend Kazangap in the Ana Beyit cemetery, also expresses a consciousness for the preservation of the national memory. Considering the political conditions of the Soviet era, it is this point that makes Aitmatov's work great. The association of cemetery with national memory also appears in the story. Notables of Kazakhs and Turkmens come together in the cemetery to ensure peace between the two tribes of Turkic origin. After all, the cemetery is a symbolic place where the common past of both tribes is embodied. Kekilbayuli mentions the importance of the cemetery, but does not refer to a deliberate attack on the cemetery, a place of memory, as in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. Instead, he states that Kurban Aksakal and the cemetery are similar in their loneliness, implying that elements of national culture and memory were excluded from life during the Soviet period. It is very meaningful that Kurban Aksakal and the cemetery are described as "the two elders of the steppe" in the

24 Ali İhsan Kolcu, *Bozkırdaki Bilge Cengiz Aytmatov*, Salkımsöğüt Publication, Erzurum 2015, p. 229-230.

25 Orhan Söylemez, *Cengiz Aytmatov: Tematik İncelemeler (Chingiz Aitmatov: Thematic Studies)*, Atatürk Culture Centre Publishing, Ankara 2010, p. 12-13.

work. The Soviet ideology labeled the historical and cultural elements of national memory as “rule” and “reactionary” and promised people new values and a new life in harmony with these values.²⁶ In the new life, there is no place for a cemetery, but only geological research conducted with contemporary methods. In turn, the Soviet administration dismissed the common memory space of the Turkmen people by bringing technology to the steppe through young engineers like Sirim.

Reaching Out from Local to Universal

Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov are two important writers belonging to propaganda literature, the borders of which have been determined by strict ideological barriers. By placing the “human” element in the center of the literary work, they have made the transition from the local to the universal features. Both authors adapted local narratives such as epics, tales, and legends common to the Turkic tribes. They also integrated them into the modern texts to reach out to their first interlocutors from their geographies and call them to protect certain values. However, while both Kekilbayuli and Aitmatov included these narratives in their fiction, they succeeded in reflecting the human reality in a multi-faceted way, thus reaching from the local to the universal and writing works that appeal to all humanity. Oral narratives in the collective unconscious of nations that are transmitted from generation to generation are not only a source for their history, culture, and identity but also contain psychological material from the long past of humanity that will enable us to reach the universal human reality. In this respect, through the utilization of the concept of *mankurt*, based on the oral legends of the Kazakhs and the Epic of *Manas* of the Kyrgyz, two writers from this geography discuss universal truths about the nature of human beings. They achieve this without separating the individual from his/her socio-cultural environment. This approach attests to their success as artists reflecting their inner conflicts together with their passions and psychology in a holistic way.

In a fictional text, the way of handling the material is as important as the material itself. Abish Kekilbayuli and Chingiz Aitmatov have both benefited from the legend of *mankurt* to fit their intended messages into the fiction of their works. Kekilbayuli emphasized the ruthless aspect/violence of the punishment of *mankurt*, because he wanted to show the extent to which grudge and hatred could lead a person. Aitmatov, on the other hand, wanted to draw attention to the consequences of punishment to reveal the plans of totalitarian structures on identity.

There are three levels of *mankurtization*. First level is personal *mankurtization*. In this case, only a person or a captive is at stake. People shave the captive’s hair, then place the newly slaughtered camel’s skin on the head. After this, the captive is taken away from the village and placed under the sun. When the camel skin begins to dry out, it also squeezes the skull. At the end, if the captive survives this torture, then he is ready to be used as slave. The second level is group

26 Orhan Söylemez-Ömer Faruk Ateş, “Abiş Kekilbayuli’s *Küy/Melody Story And First Mankurts*”, p. 60-61.

mankurtization. Here, the memory of a certain group of people remains within the cemetery. If this place is damaged, then they could lose their history. The third level is the mankurtization of human beings. If an action was taken to deprive the human beings of their universal rights such as their language or their right to learn, then it could be called the mankurtization of humanity.

In the novel, the ritual of mankurtization, made with camel skin placed on the head of a person with hints of memory loss, indicates the loss of national identity through the wire fences placed in the cemetery, the memory of the society and the intervention in the memory of humanity with the magnetic shield placed on the head of the world. Thus, a similarity is established between the way of mankurtizing in the legend of Mother Nayman and the identity politics applied to humanity in the modern period. This resemblance is established through the enclosure of a space that symbolizes the memory. The values and information that make up the identity coexist, and the various layers of identity have enabled the legend to open the door to universal messages. Kekilbayuli, on the other hand, conveyed his universal messages not through the criticism of modern political systems and cultural policies like Aitmatov, but through the human values awakened by the language of music. He used mankurt mostly as a tool to uncover the problems of the equestrian-nomadic society. The fact that Kekilbayuli entitled his work “Күй”, which means “melody” in Kazakh Turkic, can be interpreted as a sign that the author wanted to present his universal message through music. The story is also suitable for different readings that focus on traditional folk music and its effect on people.

In the story “Kүй”, the association of mankurt with the destruction of national identity is more indirect than in the novel. The author shows that the subject of memory is not the main emphasis. However, the author’s indirect emphasis on national identity through elements such as Kurban Aksakal, the cemetery, the cult of ancestors and the Islamic belief should also be taken into account. When the loss of memory of the captives is considered side by side with this emphasis, it can be argued that the author pointed to the importance of national identity and implicitly touched on the issue of de-identification. In other words, one of the themes of the story is national identity, but the association of mankurt with de-identification is much more indirect and it aims to criticize society and humanity on the basis of this punishment.

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