

A PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAGEDY: UNDER WESTERN EYES

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma 20. yüzyıl romancılarından Joseph Conrad'ın Under Western Eyes adlı eserini psikolojik ve trajik açıdan incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Joseph Conrad yüzyılın başlarından itibaren etkili olmaya başlayan psikoloji bilim dalından oldukça etkilenmiş ve yarattığı karakterlerin bilinçaltına inerek derinlemesine bir analiz yapmıştır. Under Western Eyes adlı eserinde modern insanın trajedisini ele alırken klasik Yunan trajedilerinden faydalanmış, ve Aristoteles'in Poetika adlı eserinde açıklamış olduğu kuralları modern döneme uyarlayarak, modern insanın içine düştüğü acıklı durumu psikolojik açıdan ele almıştır. Psikoloji ve Psikanalizi kullanarak, modern insanın trajik duygusal çalkantılarına farklı bir bakış açısı getirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Conrad, Under Western Eyes, Psikoloji, Trajedi, İhanet

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to cast light on the psychological and tragic dimensions of Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes. Joseph Conrad who is one of the outstanding writers of the twentieth century made use of psychology and psychoanalysis which began to appear at the turn of the twentieth century in revealing the modern man's tragedy based on the classical rules which were explained by Aristotle in his Poetics. While creating a psychological tragedy of the modern man in the twentieth century, Joseph Conrad penetrates his character's mind, and he also examines the effect of betrayal on his character's psychology. Following the Aristotelian tragic rules, Conrad creates a modern psychological tragedy.

Key Words: Conrad, Under Western Eyes Psychology, Tragedy, Betrayal

Introduction

This paper studies Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes as a psychological tragedy based on classical Aristotelian rules. The present study is wholly devoted to the proposition that the tragic events in Under Western Eyes have psychological significance that goes beyond the immediate consequences to the human unconscious. The tragic events in Conrad's novel have a universal validity that speaks to our whole understanding of the meaning of life. Thus, the present paper argues that Conrad has utilised psychology and psychology in constructing a modern tragedy based on classical rules.

Psychology and Psychoanalysis provided a new impetus in the development of modern literature. Novelists and critics make use of it in their novels and in their criticism. There has always been an interest in the springs of behaviour. These springs were once transparent, and one could see the bottom of them with the naked eye. However, in the twentieth century, novelists became more interested in exploring man's consciousness than narrating his deeds. Man's personality and emotion became really complex in the twentieth century. New concepts of psychology and the influence of these developments affected many novelists. The revolution that began in the late nineteenth century has affected both the interpretation and creation of literary works. With Conrad, Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Lawrence, the external realities are no longer paramount. The innerflux is emphasized through several psychological devices. It is one of the modern characteristics of the 20th century writers of imaginative literature that they succeed in capturing in their works what is of psychological depth and universal significance.

There has been a great change in character analysis in modern fiction. The simple, neat and transparent characters whom we are able to see through in the 19th century English novel are replaced with the complex characters of the twentieth century. As pointed out by Herbert Joseph Muller, "the change that has accordingly come over character in modern fiction is plain enough. In Fielding and Thackeray the patterns of characterisation are relatively simple and trim; emotions are readily recognised and defined, motives readily explained, personalities readily tagged. ...there are no shadows" (1937, 51). The characters of the modern novel carry shadows in their souls. The mind is not a simple unity but a divided unity.

The modern world is more complex than the previous forms of society, and the consciousness of the modern artist has been directed by the influence of the psychological investigation, revealing the complexity of the human personality. Conrad's deep concern and his enthusiasm for psychology led him to see the importance of a deeper self. Conrad's works have a profound bearing on some of the philosophical doctrines and political systems of the twentieth century world and on the psychological condition of the individual in modern urban societies. However, Conrad is also a great master of the tragic. In his Under Western Eyes he creates a serious and sorrowful plot involving a psychological conflict, with a disastrous conclusion. Tony Tanner argues that "Under Western Eyes is the tragedy of a man with a mind" (in Goonetilleke, 1990, 161). Conrad has entered into the innermost depths of his hero's soul in Under Western Eyes. He examines the inner struggles of a psychologically tormented person. The personality of his hero is a great enigma which is not so easy to resolve. Behind Razumov's story of betrayal, confession, punishment and psychological rehabilitation

lies Conrad's quest and exploration of his hero's state of mind. It is a psychological account of betrayal. Under Western Eyes is the presentation of the battle between good and evil that merged in Razumov's soul.

Aristotle remarks that Greek tragedy is, first of all, based on plot, which he calls "the soul of a tragedy" (1996, 16). The plot of a tragedy must proceed according to the laws of probability or necessity. The events of the plot must be related as cause to effect, each arising out of the one before. The greatness of Conrad's novel lies in the combination of a faultlessly articulated plot with the profoundest insight into human motive, unconscious and circumstance. It has a marvellous construction. We experience the novel as a psychological revelation of human soul. Conrad probably took the basic idea for Under Western Eyes from Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. Conrad's plot, his characters and dialogue correspond to Crime and Punishment. As Berth Sharon has pointed out, "Conrad's choice of Dostoevskian model is the specific psychological text of Crime and Punishment" (1993, 259).

As for the characters in tragedy, according to Aristotle, the tragic hero being a noble person, must be a "man above the average of other men" (1996, 31): not perfect, because then his misfortunes would just be satisfying. If the tragic hero is to arouse sympathy, he must be pretty good, but not completely good. Razumov is the illegitimate son of a nobleman, Prince K., who refuses to acknowledge his son publicly and sends him money privately. "Officially and in fact without a family (for the daughter of the Archpriest had long been dead), no home influences had shaped his opinions or his feelings. He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality" (Conrad, 1980, 17). Razumov is an intelligent student whose main concern is with his work, his studies and with his own future. When the action begins, his mind is preoccupied with silver medal, the prize of an essay competition. Although he is fatherless, he is a very proud and considers himself superior to the other students. In spite of his good characteristics, the tragic hero brings "his misfortunes upon himself not by vice but by some *hamartia*" (Aristotle, 1996, 26). *Hamartia*, according to Aristotle, is a flaw, defect or mistake. The tragic hero has a tragic flaw that helps to bring about his downfall. Razumov's tragic flaw is *hubris*, pride, which is the most common flaw in Greek tragic heroes.

The coming of Haldin who has just assassinated a Minister of State shatters Razumov's hopes. Haldin asks Razumov to help him escape. For Razumov, Haldin represents an extraordinary psychic danger. Haldin comes to Razumov partly because he has confidence in him, and because he is a bastard who has no ties: "You are the last person that could be suspected – should I get caught. That's an advantage, you see, ... It occurred to me that you – you have no one belonging to you – no ties, no one to suffer it if this came out by some means" (Conrad, 1980, 23-24). Razumov finds himself in a great dilemma. His tragedy begins with the sudden appearance of Haldin. Razumov's rational existence is destroyed by the sudden appearance of Haldin, whose presence strikes at the heart of Razumov's sense of self-possession. It is self interest that dominates his thinking: "The sentiment of his life being utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime expressed itself quaintly by a sort of half derisive mental exclamation, 'There goes my silver medal!' " (Conrad, 1980, 21). Razumov's self interest prompts him to try to help Haldin to escape. He believes that he is self-sufficient and self-contained, that he is capable of acting solely according to the dictates of reason.

However, Razumov forgets that reason does not create as much as it discovers the conditions of human happiness. In the interest of self-protection and self-delusion, he goes in search of the peasant sledge driver, Ziemianitch, but he cannot wake him from his drunken sleep. He beats him unmercifully. It is Razumov's anger at the failure of a man on whom Haldin depended and on whom Razumov also now depends to extricate himself from the position he is in.

Joseph Conrad focuses on his hero's self protected and self-deluded mind. Razumov's deep resistance to knowing the painful aspects of his mind is the main core of Conrad's interest in Under Western Eyes. Razumov is not aware of the fact that there is something else in his soul which runs contrary to his rationalism. Conrad's interest in the springs of behaviour finds its best expression in a split personality. Razumov's tormenting and agonizing situation deprives him of any sense of the actual world. The inner drama of his feelings is so powerful that he cannot make a differentiation between appearance and reality. His dilemma between betrayal and faithfulness leads him into such a great loneliness that he finds it increasingly hard to tell hallucinations from the real situations. His intolerable loneliness exposes his enigmatic nature. On his way back, Razumov sees a hallucination-a figure of Haldin on the snow. The dilemma Razumov faces is symbolized in the hallucination of Haldin. This is the consequence of a complex of causes, the shock and strain of the problem Haldin presents:

Suddenly on the snow, stretched on his back right across his path, he saw Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes, clad in a brown close-fitting coat and long boots. He was lying out of the way a little, as though he had selected that place on purpose. The snow round him was untrampled. This hallucination had such a solidity of aspect that the first movement of Razumov was to reach for his pocket to assure himself that the key of his rooms were there. But he checked the impulse with a disdainful curve of his lips. He understood. His thought, concentrated intensely on the figure left lying on his bed, had culminated in this extraordinary illusion of the sight. Razumov tackled the phenomenon calmly. With a stern face, without a check, and gazing far beyond the vision, he walked on, experiencing nothing but a slight tightening of the chest. After passing he turned his head for a glance, and saw only the unbroken track of his footsteps over the place where the breast of the phantom had been lying. (Conrad, 1980, 38)

Razumov tries to exorcise the ghost by walking over its chest. Razumov's reaction to the hallucination dramatizes with extraordinary force the full ambiguity of his predicament. It is the product of his obsessive concentration on his uninvited quest. The phantom have been responded to "as Razumov himself initially does- by attempting to exorcise it by treating it as a clinical symptom of a diseased, guilt-ridden psyche" (Vulcan, 1991, 116). As Goonetilleke comments, "to the end of his life, he is literally and metaphorically haunted by Haldin, somewhat like Shakespeare's Macbeth, seeing

Banquo's ghost" (1990, 262). The apparition of the phantom recurs throughout the story until it becomes one of the fixed characters in the cast of the novel, a constant shadow figure for Razumov.

According to Aristotle, *peripetia*, reversal of intention is another aspect of plot. As pointed out by Aristotle, "reversal of situation is a change by which the action veers round its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity." (1996, 26) It is an attempt to do one thing that actually brings about its opposite. It is a form of irony called tragic irony which involves a discrepancy between what a character expects or plans and what happens. The purpose of such irony is not to surprise but to create a deep impression of the contradictory and complexity of human experiences. So it is functional. In tragedies reversal causes a change from good to bad. Conrad places his analysis not on Razumov's physical situation but his psychological state of mind. Conrad's exploration of Razumov's psychology brings a great enrichment to his art, and his use of psychology in his character delineation gives subtleties and depths to his portrayal of Razumov's nature. Razumov's carefully laid plans are shattered with Haldin's coming. He tries to cope with the situation by betraying Haldin without knowing that the consequences of his act will be far greater than expected. He mutters: "I shall give him up." (Conrad, 1980, 38) Then he gives him up. C. B. Cox remarks:

Razumov's decision to betray him is like the Ancient Mariner's killing of the Albatross, an abandonment of the ties that bind man and nature, man and man. The claim Haldin made on him had fundamentally nothing to do with matters of politics or revolution. The betrayal is an archetypal sin, like the murder of a guest. Immediately afterwards Razumov's character breaks to pieces under the burden of guilt. (1977, 32)

Having betrayed Haldin in the name of his own individual free will and autonomy, Razumov paradoxically finds that his freedom and individuality begin to dissolve under the new role he has taken. Driven by an implacable sense of guilt, Razumov becomes ill. He suffers not from a physical ailment, but from a psychological breakdown. Like Macbeth who aims at happiness in killing King Duncan and takes the throne, but wins only sorrow, betraying Haldin in order to protect himself, Razumov is bound to suffer to the end of his life.

Conrad's universalising interpretation of betrayal follows the feelings of isolation and loneliness that plague Razumov. His spiritual collapse begins with his moral conflicts. His tragedy begins in his soul, and the external action only serves to reveal his psychological alienation and loneliness. Razumov must pass through an excruciatingly painful split in his soul in order to arrive at an understanding of himself. As no one knows about Razumov's treachery, the authorities send him to Geneva to spy on the revolutionaries. As R. A. Goonetilleke remarks, "Razumov's tragedy – and the central irony in the novel – is that, apolitical and law-abiding though he is, he is unable to avoid political involvement, and he is forced to assume a role which is the very antithesis of what he wants in life" (1990, 163). In Geneva Razumov's agonies become more acute when he meets Natalia, Haldin's sister. His mind splits, and the shattering of

his ambitions make him profoundly bitter. To use Tonny Tanner's words: "Life for Razumov changes into a grotesque pantomime, a hideous farce, a monstrous puppet show, a nightmare anything but normal reassuring reality" (in Goonetilleke, 1990, 166). Miss Haldin, very attractive and young responds to him warmly as he was the only one named in his brother's letters and in terms of highest praise as a "man of unstained, lofty and solitary existence" (Conrad, 1980, 118).

Conrad portrays the betrayal's immediate effects upon Razumov's soul. Like other writers of the twentieth century, Conrad is also obsessed with the theme of duplicity. He expresses the dualistic nature of his hero. Conrad explores the doubleness of Razumov's character. His sense of isolation and the inner drama of his feelings are so powerful that he has to live a double life. Razumov is not the whole man as he sees himself: he is split in two. He is an enigma to himself. In order to resolve the ambivalence of his nature and achieve a unified whole, he has to suffer terrible pangs of regret. Razumov plans to avenge himself on Haldin for ruining his life by stealing 'his sister's soul,' but her personality affects him so much that his duplicity becomes intolerable to him. He is close to madness. He comes down with a nervous breakdown and attack. He finds his solitude intolerable: "His mind hovered on the borders of delirium. He heard himself suddenly, saying, 'I confess'" (Conrad, 1980, 61). Razumov makes his own choice by betraying Haldin, and he begins to live in an unreal world. Razumov is no longer capable of distinguishing dream from reality. His life style completely turns to a lie. People look at him in a different way. In committing betrayal, Razumov fatally damages his self-respect, self-sufficiency and his pride.

In classical tragedy, "recognition or *anagnorsis* is a change from ignorance to knowledge" (Aristotle, 1996, 23). It is a form of discovery. It is a discovery of truth about himself that the tragic hero had not seen before. The irony of human life is that there is still, while it goes on, something further to know; in tragedy the as yet unimagined becomes real. Razumov realises in giving Victor Haldin up, it was himself after all, whom he has betrayed just as Dostoevsky's Raskolnikoff understands "I killed myself not the old hag" (Dostoevsky, 1993, 229). Jacques Berthoud remarks that, "of all the consequences of suppressed guilt, however, I would like to single out one: the sense of overpowering moral solitude" (Berthoud, 1978, 179). His sense of guilt leads him to self questioning, self examination and suffering. Razumov is cut off from all honest human relationships, and he cannot endure the strain. The pervasive split between his public and his private identity is one of the consequences of his betrayal. His sense of guilt transforms him from a man in whose life "there was nothing secret, or reserved" (Conrad, 1980, 14) to one who must constantly "conceal his impression" (Conrad, 1980, 166), part of his personality from his fellowmen. His sense of pressure is revealed, first in his reflections on the secret sides of life and later in his detestation of lying. The necessity to tell lies in Geneva to maintain the revolutionaries' assumptions about him oppresses him because it emphasises the split between public and private identity. It is humiliating and fills him with moral distaste and even affects him physically in the form of repeated difficulties of breathing in the "choking fumes of falsehood" (Conrad, 1980, 225).

Razumov is doomed to his archetypal sin and suffers the terrible consequence. The end of Under Western Eyes is in line with the classical tradition going back to ancient Greek tragedy and its concept of guilt and atonement. Razumov has to take the

ultimate responsibility of his sinful act. Justice is achieved through retribution. His unconscious repeatedly tries to betray him into exposing his own guilt. Since his only hope lies in confession and punishment, Razumov accepts his guilt: As his personality splits, he is disgusted with the situation. His self mastery and being in control are quite important for him. He sees that he is about to lose contact with self-mastery. Although he is safe and sound, he decides to confess his guilt. The only person who could implicate him, Ziemianitch commits suicide. He cannot bear to live under such strain. Razumov confesses to both Miss Haldin and the revolutionists. When Razumov confesses to the revolutionists, - "haven't you understand that I am that man?" (Conrad, 1980, 302) - Nikita bursts his ear-drums, and in his deaf state he does not hear a tramcar which runs over him. The conclusion of Under Western Eyes also resembles that of classical tragedies in which characters proceed from crime and punishment to redemption.

Conclusion

Aristotle who lived in the fourth century B. C. is the spokesman for the theory of Greek tragedy. In his Poetics he describes the practices he has observed in Greek tragedies. Greek tragic practice have continued to set an example for tragedy up to the modern times. Joseph Conrad, as a modernist writer, made use of Aristotelian rules in Under Western Eyes. At the end of the novel, Conrad could have killed Razumov. A death may be striking, but it is not necessarily tragic. The tragic hero, Razumov, suffers much. He becomes ennobled through his suffering. Thus, we are left with a sense of the greatness of man as well as of the suffering and endurance involved in human life.

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