



(Book Review)

Selim İleri, A Cursed Mind Splitting, Istanbul: Everest Publications (2013)

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Abstract

Having the national artist title since 1998, Selim İleri is a great author who writes a vast number of novels and stories with a striking style. Adding his career the experience of scriptwriting, İleri also performs acting and directing. Additionally being as a columnist, Selim İleri has carried out various TV and Radio shows.

The aim of this study is to make an analysis of Selim İleri's book, *A Cursed Mind Splitting*, via the book's protagonist Sayru Usman and through giving examples from the text.

Key Words: Selim İleri, *A Cursed Mind Splitting*, Criticism, Interpretation, Work of Art

Selim İleri, *Melun Bir Us Yarılması*, İstanbul: Everest Yayınları (2013)

Özet

1998 yılından beri devlet sanatçılığı ünvanını taşıyan Selim İleri çok sayıda roman ve hikayeyi çarpıcı bir üslupla kaleme alan usta bir yazardır. Kariyerine senaryo yazarlığını da dahil eden İleri aynı zamanda yönetmenlik ve oyunculuk da yapmıştır. Köşe yazarlığı da yapan Selim İleri pek çok TV ve Radyo programına da imza atmıştır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı Selim İleri'nin *Melun Bir Us Yarılması* başlıklı eserinin kitabın başkahramanı Sayru Usman aracılığı ile ve metinden örnekler vererek analizini yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Selim İleri, *Melun Bir Us Yarılması*, Eleştiri, Yorum, Eser

1. Criticism and Interpretation

The protagonist of the story is Sayru Usman. According to the information given by the author, the protagonist's name is quite appropriate for the novel's content; the name is composed of the words Sayru: Patient, and Us: Mind. As can be understood from the other title of the novel, Sayru Usman is a "schizoid" character that suffers from dissociative identity disorder and thinks that he is a famous writer. Sayru Usman spends his life in the midst of past and present, and imagination and reality:

So to say, two different Sayru Usman exist: The first one is struggling with the scuffle, named life and trying to survive, to revive and not to break down, day and night. Publishers, publishing companies' mental advisors, and the traitors, who return his files by sniffing, badly destroy this Sayru.

(+)Other Sayru comes into existence in his place of seclusion through escaping from this miserable crowd, and he takes solitude as a shelter. Standing idly by to the events around him and what happened to him just a while ago - being brutally battered, abused, humiliated, collapsed... - he ran to his writing table through covering his soul, and hysterically wrote his dreams, truths, philosophy, savings, observations, evaluations, happiness, and suffocation. He wiped out the wuther and the beastly murmur outside, through the music in his heart; he knew how to silence, thank heaven! (Page: 506-507)

It is observed that the process and the individual analysis, which create the schizoid character of Sayru Usman, are explained throughout the novel. Usman tells us his experience of life through his inner monologues. First of all, he suffers from the environment where he grows up and lives. He runs away from the people. On the one hand, he needs to love and to be loved; on the other hand, he runs away from the people's insincerity and so from the cruelty of life. He turns in upon himself, and hence he created himself an imaginary world; day-by-day he alienates from the society he lives in. Through talking with the second Sayru in himself and through writing these dialogues, he finds a way to prevent his loneliness:

... Yet, I was in need of escaping from the tactless truths of life. By the way, I should state that I have a weakness for nihilism's denial of truth in spite of all kinds of truths. Moreover, our truths are composed of deadly but lightweight conflicts... (Pg.: 31)

Again I feel the gap between me and others. (Pg.: 53)

I grew up without an elder sister or brother or any siblings. My nickname in school was Lunatic; my schoolmates and classmates accepted Lunatic Sayru among themselves only to tease. While Professor İbrikçibaşoğlu was addressing me as 'Mr. Sayru!' I do not know how he learned it but he turned 'Mr. Sayru!' into 'Mr. Sayru Lunatic!'' My days in military service elapsed through standing sentry at the lavatory everyday and everyday. And later, nothing has changed. (Pg. 152)

I was always longing for marvellous adventures. To bear my loneliness. Distant roads and distant seas in my dreams... (Pg. 83)

... I can say that I grew up in an environment, which has been hostile towards thinking. What I mean by environment is almost everyone. Even today I live among them, together with them. Yet, as being hidden into my 'cave'. (Pg. 104)

'Good God, when will this misery come to an end?! I do not drag my life, I drag my misery... (Pg. 120)

... Among my experiences, there are acquaintances and conversations with valuable painters. Also, the whole tumult of the theatre world is in these notebooks. (Pg. 124)

... Sayru Usman created each beauty, art, and glory from his sufferings!.. (Pg. 168)

... I was sick of people's unfamiliarity, your unfamiliarity, everybody's unfamiliarity. (Pg. 166)

... How good it will be if you commit suicide tonight: Neither the need of love, friendship nor love, shiver of compassion... (Pg. 305)

You do not need to have your eyes on me. I do not exist... (Pg. 382)

... When my grandmother Radife was angry at me, she had been calling me as "cursed!" mother Jülide had been laughing like she had the hiccups, mother Havva had been crying, Rasim Rıza had been protesting against it by saying "Cursed is less! Cursed is less!" (Pg. 443)

Sayru Usman compiles his criticism on literature, art, politics, history, and society. Sayru Usman narrates his longings about society, and the polarisation of society from different aspects. The author, who sheds light upon modern-day, frequently mentions the argument that for centuries, throughout the world, contradictions generate each other; he expresses the society's adventures of disappearance and rediscovery of self within these "contradictions" via a schizoid character, sometimes through first person sometimes through second person inner monologues:

I added East/West, Old/New, Yesterday/Today, Progressive/Retrogressive, Intellectual/Blind Follower, Islamist/Secularist. I hid again. This list drags on. (Pg. 31)

Besides, so what if the most radical atheism and the most radical religiosity were read in sequence, side by side, even one within the other? Cannot the most radical religionist be happy with the most radical atheist's verses? Or cannot the most radical atheist be happy with the most radical religionist's verses? What if they all sit around a boiling up tea urn, they drink tea – the ones who desire drink punch – they eat shortbreads, they chat and chat... What if ideas, opinions, beliefs flutter around infinite peace... (Pg. 70)

The author handles the Westernisation adventure of the country from different aspects, and he expresses that it is more like "mimicry". He narrates that for this reason, the society is neither occidental nor oriental; but it alternates between these two:

Continually we calculate whether we reach the level of contemporary civilisation or not through staging Hamlet. However – although I cannot take my revenge on Muhsin – my curse takes affect that performances of Hamlet do not attract the attention of audiences except five or ten of them. Tough cheese! (Pg. 292)

Since the gap between Asia and Europe never crossed our minds, we supposed that this morning we would be European and tomorrow morning we would be Asian. He says we do not have classics, he implies that we do not have a shit; by this way he becomes the most Occidental. However, the cruellest torture is not to know what the

Orient or what the Occident is. You are living in the middle of two realms and you are stuck between the two, and you do not have any idea! (Pg. 438)

We only imitate. In our country, liberty, legal system, and science have been the imitations of the West for two centuries. These are the words that have musty meanings for two centuries. Public does not understand anything from these... (Pg. 438)

The author puts forward that there are also binary oppositions and separations in the case of history, and it cannot be removed easily; he makes an appropriate observation by saying “a nation that does not know its history has to live its history again and again:

Ignorance is so widespread that the number of the ones who know our state’s history gradually decreases. Let alone knowing this glorious history, the beginning point of this history becomes a problem. Roughly they are divided into two. While some of them wander between Ertuğrul Gazi and Osman Gazi, some of them only accept the establishment date of Turkish Republic, which is 1923... (Pg. 349)

The author criticises that the society he lives in, does not know any value, he criticises the society’s bigotry, loss of memory, and even partly its remorselessness; and, he questions that for whom and why he will write. He states that because of these qualities, the society looks like a total community of riddle, and within this riddle he feels himself left out. He indicates that within this riddle – although they do not want – other individuals of the society will push each other into loneliness:

Not knowing the value of the values is peculiar to our community. Hamid’s being totally forgotten today is a good example for our unknowing of any value.

(+) In our country, bigotry caused people to stay senseless to many others’ tragedies. A devotee does not commit suicide; but, a devotee creates a son of devotee again...

(+) I try to write down everything. My writings unfortunately lost their memories – or made to lose their memories – they will mean nothing to people...

(+) In some enlightenment moments of my heart, I feel that this is a community where nobody wants to lose anybody but everybody loses everybody! (Pg. 151)

Which house was happy! They were the years when girls and boys – not really boys actually, in their thirties – got married through arranged marriages; which mother or father or children could be happy! (Pg. 345)

Can any progress (advancement) be made in a society where people’s lives are composed of nothing but spying on other people’s fertility lives? (Pg. 345)

... A community that even cannot agree on what to say in a condolence speech! Good heavens! (Pg. 349)

Nobody cared. My doom was to be driven away to loneliness. I am in a community where people’s conscience is rotten! (Pg. 406)

It is like that in here: eras come, promises and sayings change; today you can say what you could not say yesterday, tomorrow you may not say it again. (Pg. 517)

In my opinion, we are a 'community of riddle'. Like the riddles we have not solved for centuries, we will also have new riddles that will continue from past to today, and from today to tomorrow...'' (Pg. 520)

The author compiles modern-day readers' and publishers' qualities (simplicities) and expectations; and he deals with Sayru Usman's resistance as an author with sensibility and also deals with his seclusion in his ivory tower even then:

Today people, who have not even read a journal, unfortunately are in the position of manager, boss, editor, redactor, proof reader, and even chief editor in flamboyant, and wealthy publishing companies; I am familiar with this situation through my acquaintances... (Pg. 231-232)

Fools, called readers, admire him. Because they do not slog or get tired while they are reading him. They both cry and laugh, what could they want more?! (Pg. 271)

For years, flighty women and meatheads have warned you. You stand idle by. The features of literature have changed. It means that ragtag reads this stuff. What you call as ragtag are your readers in the future. No, I will hide myself in my notebooks. There is a life in my notebooks where no ragtag exists. I will fly higher. I will fly so high that my misery will end. (Pg. 66)

After the author presents modern-day readers' and publishers' simplicities, with the sensibility of the author whom Sayru Usman represents, he states what kind of audiences he desires. According to the author, for the act of reading one must have at least a little intellectuality. However, modern-day reader does not have it. For this reason, Sayru Usman is asked to make some changes in his books. Yet, the real literature should be unique. Books that have been shaped by the will of the reader are not unique. According to the author, writers whose principle is pleasing the reader, writers such as Dickens, only try to save the day and to live a prosperous life:

To read my notebook and to understand what I have written, it is required to know our literature likewise and to have a comprehensive knowledge of our literature's history. They should be informed about both the literary works and the personal lives of the figures that write those literary works.

(+) Readers should not be contented with these, either; painting being in the first place, they should be informed about all kinds of art.

(+) They should know what the theatre is. Sarah is the greatest name in theatre world's history. They should know how many times Sarah have come to İstanbul. (Pg. 228-229)

Under the disguise of essay, the author gives information about journal, which is a literary genre, via the protagonist's inner monologues; and, he makes remarkable comments about why diaries are written:

First, I thought to classify my notebooks with regard to the years. In this way, it appears that I am a great journal (diary) writer... Years are reflected through his pen and Sayru Usman becomes the most important journal writer of the Turkish literature!.. (Pg. 162)

These are totally lies. Even the ones, who write their dicks' pleasure, know that these journals will be read tomorrow. Actually they were written to be read and to amaze

the reader. Supposedly, they were posthumously published by her husband, supposedly, they were posthumously published by his wife or by acquaintances; they omit some chapters; they censor some parts by brackets with triple dots, these are all lies. These are the methods used by the inheritors to tickle the reader's fancy (Pg. 176)

The author tells that he writes to eliminate his loneliness, to pour his heart out, and in a way to understand that he is alive. Also, we always encounter this situation in literature, as a general reason for the need of writing; with their pens, people somehow feel like they are alive in this world whose insincerity and speed are hard to keep up with.

... If I did not have this notebook on which I drip the life and its venom, my activities would be finished. For this reason, I write and write, and I find a bitter consolation. (Pg. 205)

It is indicated that Westernization process gave a start to the imitation in our art and literature; it is stated that we are mistaken by thinking that we should exclude what belongs to our essence and we should be alienated from our own roots. It is emphasized that this mentality have reached to these days like this, and it will unfortunately continue in the same way:

Like our history of literature, our history of painting is also full of quest for Western impacts. In Paris, in here and there, in which artist's studio they receive their education; our painters are particularly influenced by that artist... (Pg. 163)

Ours attempt to present an artist, who alienates from our essence, as an imitator or as a mimetic. They pretend to be intellectuals. As if nothing unique can be created on this land!

(+) Yet, protesting is a waste of time: this disdain will go on in future (Pg. 164)

It is told that adaptation dominates our culture in various fields. It means laziness, and taking the easy way out:

Our life is a series of adaptations starting with the Byzantium's institutions. (Pg. 5)

... Whereas, Muhsin's Victim of Lust was a poor adaptation of the Blue Butterfly... (Pg. 79)

By saying that "Dichotomies ruined my world of ideas and spirit." Sayru Usman states that the situation of being neither occidental nor oriental, which is mentioned above, affects his spirit and ideas; he says that these dichotomies absolutely appear in every field of our lives – even in mothers – and turn the society upside-down:

Tulip Era that is praised to the skies in our literature class because of Yahya Kemal becomes an era of shame in our history class. Which one is it? (Pg. 71)

... From ladle to eggbeater, chef's fork to possibly never used roast beef, and to ham knives, everything was there... Dichotomies even in kitchenware! (Pg. 19)

Mother Jülide was a woman in European style ... (Pg. 20)

My father was a scholar, my mother was semi-illiterate... (Pg. 339)

The author lets out a protest scream against modern-day people's ordinariness. He struggles to explain them what we call life is not composed of only materiality and show off. According to the author, modern-day people try to acquire same things by looking at each other and as capitalism commands they always seek for consumption. However, these bring forth

ordinariness and people become same... and then our author, without objecting Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* – without referring Gregor Samsa – likens modern-day people to cockroaches, since they turn themselves into useless entities and become same, he wants to echo in the reader's mind by saying let the cockroaches die:

These, I mean most of the people, assume that having a house, a car, the newest model of television or a mobile phone, and owning their little, miserable passions is life itself. (Pg. 511)

Ordinariness and being like everybody else immediately bring mischief: Let the cockroaches die! (Pg. 9)

Sayru's endless love (imaginary love) is Cahide, who is a stage actress. Cahide is sometimes in the disguise of Sarah or Kette and she is always beside Sayru. She sometimes encourages him, sometimes scolds him. Cahide is almost Sayru's reason of living. Although Sayru knows that Cahide is unattainable, he does not give up on her. For this reason, he frequently goes into a trance and daydreams to see his love Cahide. The author, at the same time, portrays his 'artist loneliness' through the character of Cahide:

Because, the love, one will feel for one another, the love, one can feel for one another are marvellous illusions, illusions that appear after rancour. The only truth is to foresee that it will be in this way. I came to this conclusion. (Pg. 337)

My love for Concordia rose Kette was a corporal love. But my love for Cahide was spiritual. (Pg. 201)

I wanted to belong to you. Since I knew that you would not be mine, being belong to you, being yours... (Pg. 356)

Look at me oddly named young man! Artists' flamboyant lives seem pleasant from a distance. The woman, whom you consider as goddess, is a miserable poor, a sorrowful tearjerker. I wish your snow-white roses bring a cure to her dark world... (Pg. 417-418)

You insisted like 'I do not act a lady, you see she broke households, destroyed families!

(+) Now I merely realize that like the whole country, your perspective of art was simple, just that simple. Alas!

(+) For a moment, she looked at my face. 'Was s/he also alone like us?' ... That is to say, lonely ones do not understand each other, either. (Pg. 470)

The author compares the old and the present sense of art. It is stated that once the aim in art was to reach the beauty, but nowadays the aim is to reach the favourite, which means the most money-winning one, and he states that he feels uncomfortable with this situation. Changing world order altered the valuable one and removed art from its essence. It is stated that art has been losing its uniqueness day by day and it has diverged from its essence:

Once artists were divided into two as rightists and leftists... Now right and left are being used for getting unearned income. (Pg. 251)

... Not to the beautiful one, to the one that will be loved the most... Look! When you make them say 'the man is thinking just like me', your way will be opened... (Pg. 468)

In his novel, the author frequently yearns for the past and the old state of İstanbul. He associates the new state of İstanbul with his old age, and the old state of İstanbul with his childhood; that is to say, just like a person's childhood that is pure and cheerful, İstanbul's old state was also purer and more beautiful than its present state. Moreover, the ones who see İstanbul, even if they do not know its past, will not be pleased with its current situation. With his identification, the author in fact presents the feelings of İstanbul's residents:

Of course a 'causeway' was not built. The sea is not full of shit. (Pg. 47)

My childhood's Göztepe was not smashed by huge and monotonous highroads. People were still in search of heaven in the city's architecture. Such a woodworking, such perseverance, such patience! Workman could have given his soul while he was driving a nail.

(+) The roads had been partly expanding partly narrowing down with wooded gardens, houses, mansions, and even with orchards. When the soul had been about to conceal, it had refreshed; just the time it had refreshed too much, it had turned back to the misery of the world. (Pg. 47-48)

Now, this dock is not alone in the sea together with the remnants around it. The green colour of the sea, it was becoming blue in my picture, and it was becoming cloudily purple, now it turned into muddy green, ash grey, soot, and into mottled smoke. (Pg. 185)

In the novel, we frequently encounter with lilac. It sometimes heralds the coming of a season, sometimes symbolizes love, and sometimes it means the nostalgia for the past. The author skilfully reflects different emotions and yearnings with lilac flower; through counting the lilac types, he even gives new information to the reader:

"...The lilac is in the death agony. No, the lilac is resisting.

- Do lilacs remind you any memories Sayru?

- Of course, lilacs remind me some memories. My goddess, with an acquired romance, used to adore lilacs..." (Pg. 25)

The lilac shrub blossomed up to the brim. Will it remember its blooming when its flowers are gone? (Pg. 32)

I do not remember whether someone told me or I read in somewhere: this summer, lilacs did not blossom... such a painful statement. I wonder why did not the lilacs blossom in that summer? (Pg. 109)

Lilac's leaf is a very green heart, a verdant heart and slightly for this reason, yesterday novelists present lilac as love flower. (Pg. 171)

2. Conclusion

As a conclusion, while in his novel, the author makes observations about history, literature, music, painting, politics, and society, he also gives information about Turkish and foreign artists and men of letters. We, more than once, observe Nurullah ATAÇ's 'Language Ideal', which is almost integrated to his personality, in the novel, and we are informed about the movements that support simplification of language and clearance of Turkish language from

alien words. Thanks to the character of Sayru Usman – to the intellectuality of the author – one by one we encounter with the founder of Modern Turkish Theatre Muhsin Ertuğrul, “The Great Poet” Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan, novelist and academician Halide Edip Adivar, our famous storyteller Sait Faik Abasıyanık, poet Ahmet Haşim, stage actress Cahide Sonku, painter Hüseyin Avni; actress Sarah Bernhardt, the genius of painting art Van Gogh, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, Shakespeare; from the stage of history Suleiman the Magnificent and Hürrem.

We observe that the novel is written in a critical tone and with a fluent narration. The author flavoured the narration with ‘haiku’, which is a type of poem. Since he takes advantage of the richness of language as much as possible, he does not fall into repetition. Nascence of the novel through inner monologues gives the novel a quality of essay genre, which is “narration like talking to oneself”. Through the protagonist’s shuttle between reality and imagination, the novel goes beyond the ordinary and keeps the reader’s attention.

The novel examines individual’s psychology in depth, and presents various facts about life to the reader such as polarization in the society, isolation of the individual, yearning for the past, and the old and the present sense of art.

This novel, which has unity and vitality with respect to either its subject matter or its language or its construction, achieves to go beyond the ordinary; and with its uniqueness, it heralds that it will be transferred to the next generations and will be here to stay.