

Yayın Geliş Tarihi: 13.05.2019  
Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 22.01.2020  
Online Yayın Tarihi: 29.09.2020  
http://dx.doi.org/10.16953/deusosbil.563799

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi  
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi  
Cilt: 22, Sayı: 3, Yıl: 2020, Sayfa: 961-976  
ISSN: 1302-3284 E-ISSN: 1308-0911

*Araştırma Makalesi*

## **BODY AND BEAUTY AS FETISHISED COMMODITIES IN LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'S NOVEL *BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS***

Tatiana GOLBAN\*  
Nuriye AKKAŞ\*\*

### **Abstract**

*This study attempts to reveal the concept of commodity fetishism, with its distinctly postmodern concern of body and beauty, as reflected in Louis de Bernières's novel Birds Without Wings. In his work, Bernières tries to emphasise the material exorbitance of the body and reconsiders some master concepts of Marxist and Freudian discourse, such as fetish and commodity, with reference to use-value and exchange-value of the body and beauty.*

*This study argues that Louis de Bernières's novel Birds Without Wings departs from both Marxist and Freudian representation of fetishism, and exhibits instead the social and discursive practices that encourage the fetishisation of objects, as well as the postmodern preoccupation with commodity-body-sign through the lenses of Jean Baudrillard. Louis de Bernières's characters imagine that they can determine their own value in the world, as they are modern men, but they inevitably come to acknowledge that, as a result of modernity, their body and identity become enmeshed as signs in a symbolic exchange, their value being established by outer phenomena and not by themselves. In their plight for their own authority, these characters see only the annihilation of their assertions, since they become objectified in the political economy of signs, representing only symbolic or static beings whose worth is determined in the exchange process.*

**Keywords:** *Commodity, Fetishism, Body, Symbolic Exchange, Use-value, Exchange-value.*

---

*Bu makale için önerilen kaynak gösterimi (APA 6. Sürüm):*

Golban, T. & Akkaş, N. (2020). Body and beauty as fetishised commodities in Louis de Bernières's novel Birds Without Wings. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 22 (3), 961-976.

\* Doç. Dr., Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, ORCID: 0000-0002-7860-0992, tgolban@nku.edu.tr

\*\* Öğr. Gör., Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Hazırlık Bölümü, ORCID: 0000-0002-3211-0306, nakkas@nku.edu.tr

## LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'İN KANATSIZ KUŞLAR ADLI ROMANINDA FETİŞ META OLARAK BEDEN VE GÜZELLİK

### Öz

*Bu çalışma meta fetişizmini ve onunla belirgin bir şekilde bağlantılı olan postmodern beden ve güzellik kavramlarını Louis de Bernières'nin Kanatsız Kuşlar isimli romanında yansıtıldığı şekliyle ortaya koymaya çalışır. Bernières eserinde bedenin materyalist aşırılığını vurgulamaya çalışır ve Marksist ve Freudcu söylemdeki fetiş ve meta gibi bazı ana kavramları bedenin ve güzelliğin kullanım değeri ve değişim değeri kavramlarına referansta bulunarak yeniden değerlendirir.*

*Bu çalışma Louis de Bernières'nin Kanatsız Kuşlar romanının fetişizmin yansıtılması açısından hem Markist hem de Freudcu yansımadan ayrıldığını ve onun yerine Jean Baudrillard'ın bakış açısıyla meta-beden-işaret kavramlarıyla takıntılı postmodern yaklaşımla beraber eşyaların fetişleştirilmesini destekleyen sosyal ve söylemsel uygulamaları sergilediğini savunur. Louis de Bernières'nin karakterleri, modern insanlar olarak bu dünyadaki değerlerini kendileri belirleyebileceklerini hayal ederler ancak modernitenin bir sonucu olarak bedenlerinin ve kimliklerinin sembolik değişimde işaret tuzağına düşmesi, değerlerinin kendileri tarafından değil dış etkenler tarafından belirlenmesi durumunu nihayetinde kabullenmek durumunda kalırlar. Kendi hakimiyetlerini ifade etme çabalarında, işaretlerin politik ekonomisinde nesneleştirildikleri yani değişim sürecinde değerleri yalnızca sembolik ve sabit olarak yansıtıldığı için sadece tezlerinin yok olduğunu görürler.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Meta, Fetişizm, Beden, Sembolik Değişim, Kullanım Değeri, Değişim Değeri

### INTRODUCTION

For a long time, there has been noticed a lack of interest in relations between material objects and human beings, the priority always being given to the investigation of the individual or to the social interaction between individuals within a social structure. The shift of focus from human identity and human interrelationship to human beings and their relations to material objects was made through the undeniable contributions of Marx and Freud, who used the concept *fetishism* in order to depict the human relations with non-human/material objects.

From the first mention of the word *fetish* by Charles de Brosses in 1760, who coined it to describe the religious practices of worshipping objects, to its contemporary broad cultural meanings, there is a long and tedious process.

Marx uses the term “fetish-worshippers” in his description of those who encourage the monetary and mercantile system. For him, the fetishism of mercantilists signifies the attitude of viewing the objects of private property as representing real human relations, in a way that apparently the objects have a power on their own. In a later account of fetishism, in *Capital*, Marx continues to develop this idea, but this time the concept of private property is replaced by that of

commodity. Marx considers that “real” value of a commodity is not determined by its material form, but it is rather evaluated as a social relation assured by the amount of labour employed for its production (Marx, 1976, p. 165). Consequently, the exchange value of a commodity seems to be intrinsically a part of it, as an object, and its significance as a thing. However, this way of evaluation is a deceptive one, since the fetishised exchange determines a relationship between things that do not rely anyhow on the relationship between workers who labour for the production of the things of great value to others. Marx goes further in making the distinction between the use-value of objects and their exchange-value. Use-value emerges primarily from the productive activity employed for the construction of something that satisfies a need (such as shoes or clothes), whereas exchange-value arises as an expression of the labour-power required for the manufacturing of a commodity. This expression is rather “abstract”, fetishised, deceptive, since it does not have a connection to the commodity itself, but to a form of value attributed to the commodity in relation to other commodities.

Freud abandons Marx’s preoccupation with commodity fetishism and focuses instead on sexual fetishism. For Freud, fetishism is a deviation from the “normal” sexual purpose of copulation that leads to the release of sexual tension, “a satisfaction analogous to the satiating of hunger” (Freud, 1977, p. 61). It implies a sexual overestimation of a substitute object that, although connected to the sex object, is nevertheless incompatible with the normal sexual purpose. Fetish objects may be considered parts of the body (hair, foot, etc.) or objects related to a person they substitute (shoes, undergarments, etc.). Freud is not interested in the real value of undergarments when they are used as common items. His attention is attracted by unreal or fetish value of an undergarment since in this fetishist hypostasis it functions as an agent of sexual arousal. For Freud, when an unreal object sexually stimulates the fetishist, it denotes a perversion. The origin of this perversion arises from the impression of the deficiency in the female genitalia that generates a substitute for the proper sexual object.

Unlike Marx, who is preoccupied primarily with the value of the commodity in the eyes of a community or a social class, Freud considers fetish-formation as an encounter of desire with a specific object of significance for a particular individual. The sexual fetish functions as a symbolic substitute, which replaces the real thing as a result of overestimation. Far from being considered pathological, fetishism might emerge out of frustration or suppression of a desire, inhibition or redirection of someone’s needs, an aspect which is characteristic of the human condition.

In another attempt to define the term “fetishism,” Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen summarize the following: “Fetishism, we would argue, is by definition a displacement of meaning through synecdoche, the displacement of the object of the desire onto something else through processes of disavowal” (Gamman & Makinen, 1994, p. 45).

Only through the displacement of desire, an object obtains a distinctive social value, which is emphasized mostly by the object's treatment with admiration, veneration or fascination. It is a type of desire then that increases the worth of an object, be it religious, economic, or erotic. Gamman and Makinen's definition treats fetishism as a displacement of meaning rather than an error or a misapplication of the real nature of objects.

Even though fetishism has been constantly depicted as false object or as the ability of a commodity to veil its true value of production in the process of exchange or a substitute that stimulates the desire, the fact remains that this concept has become crucial to some of the most important thinkers, among whom we consider Jean Baudrillard.

### **THE SEMIOTIC FETISHISM OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD**

In the postmodern period, many post-structuralist philosophers, such as Derrida, Deleuze, Guatarri and Baudrillard, have revealed their interest in revising and reworking the earlier modern theories of fetishism as a clear manifestation of their discontent with the portrayal of the fetish. However, for the scope of our study, we focus solely on Jean Baudrillard's ideas and his epistemological approach to the object.

Baudrillard's theory of fetishism emerges primarily from his attempt to deconstruct Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. For Baudrillard, Marx's use-value implies as much a fetishised social relation as exchange-value, since the object which will evolve into a commodity, convenient for exchange, should be evaluated in accordance with a code of functionality, a code that classifies human subjects and material objects. Use-value is neither intrinsic to the object nor is functionality considering the inborn human needs and desires. Baudrillard sees the "object" as a thing which in use is "nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves and twist around it" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 63). For Baudrillard, the object of expenditure does not exist per se in connection with natural, asocial, and human needs. It is rather obtained as a sign in a system of relations with other objects. Objects, in the process of consumption, possess a sign value that does not correspond to their real value but represents a surplus of their functional capacities. According to Baudrillard, every object "finds meaning with other objects, in difference, according to a hierarchical code of significations" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 64).

With the abolition of symbolic exchange, the reduction of the symbolic realm by semiotic logic takes place. Baudrillard reveals the process of semiotic reduction, showing that in a simulated society, the practical real has been replaced by procession of the simulacra, since the "signs of the real" have substituted the real (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2). Consequently, the new order of hyperreal implies exchange

value as a guarantee for commodities which circulate merely as signs, reproducing a code.

Baudrillard calls the attention to the fact that the fetish object includes a fetishism of the signifier, an urge for a code of desire. The fetishism for a code represents, in fact, the fascination and adoration of the system of differences, the system of objects and signs, in which the emphasis of one sign shifts constantly to another one. The fetishism of commodity as objects surpasses the situation of a perverse desire of a sexual fetishist since the commodity fetishist's perverse desire is continuously redirected.

Jean Baudrillard goes further and advances the idea that the beauty of the body is fetishised since a paradigm of beauty is constructed. As he explains, "[it] is the sign of this beauty, the mark (makeup, symmetry, or calculated asymmetry, etc.) which fascinates; it is the artefact that is the object of desire" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 94). The making of a beautiful body, through various methods like adornment, the use of cosmetics, jewellery, perfume, etc., or through cutting and adding, flattening or increasing of some parts (hair, buttocks, breasts, etc.), represents a process of marking the body. This effort asserts the body as a series of signs, produces it as an object which possesses a significant value.

The switch from the exchange of symbolic value to the exchange of sign value is characterised by Baudrillard as an "ideological process". In ancient Aztec and Egyptian cultures, the symbolic object could have had a direct, even though the ambivalent relationship with the human, where the worship of the sun was associated with the symbolism of life-giving warmth and light and also with the taking of life away in case of its absence. In modern cultures, however, the object as a sign becomes convertible in a series with other signs (the sunny vacation, sunlamp, the fitness centre) in an ideological system (the healthy and beautiful body) through which they are fetishised. Within this system that encourages the exchange of sign values, fetishism arises as a "fascination" with the signs that have been positively estimated, experienced both by persons and by the culture altogether.

### **JEAN BAUDRILLARD ON BODY AND BEAUTY**

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard focuses again on the body in a chapter entitled "The Body: The Mass Grave of Signs" (1993). In Baudrillard's view, the body which reflects a closed space is apparently alive representing instead a mass grave which is affected by outer phenomena. It is no longer a dynamic being in itself, but a fragmented, symbolic, and static being which operates within the political economy of signs.

In his attempt to give a brief history of the body, Baudrillard suggests that it "is the history of its demarcation, the network of marks that have since covered it, divided it up, annihilated its difference and its radical ambivalence in order to

organize it into a structuralist material for sign exchange” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 101). Baudrillard views the construction of signs which are related to the body in terms of nudity, striptease, and narcissism, or, as one may argue, reduplication or mirror image. In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* Baudrillard claims that “beauty and eroticism are two leitmotifs” of the body and what we have today is a “narcissistic cult” on the body. (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 132) Therefore, if in the ideological system, the body is turned into a sign, sexuality and eroticism turn the body into an abstract form which has to be captured and enjoyed by one as well. However, Baudrillard thinks that in the process of re-appropriating the body, it is not for “autonomous ends of the subject, but in terms of a normative principle of enjoyment and hedonistic profitability, in terms of an enforced instrumentality that is indexed to the code and the norms of a society of production and managed consumption” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 131). It is no longer for the subject herself or himself, but for the passion of the code that in an ideological state governs desire or pleasure in all its forms.

In the consumerist society, the fusion of subject and object emerges on the surface of the body, since it is marked by signs that convert its meaning and introduce the resultant subject/object into the circuit of signs. The marking of the body by various objects like bracelets, necklaces, rings, belts, jewels, etc. lead to the fusion of subject and object through fetishism, as it emphasizes a “symbolic articulation of lack” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 101).

The body and beauty are not consumed for their function, but for their representation: “The fundamental conceptual hypothesis for a sociological analysis of ‘consumption’ is not use value, the relation to needs, but symbolic exchange value, the value of social prestation, of rivalry and, at time limit, of class discriminants” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 30-31). The ornaments used to beautify the body are similar to exchange value. He says that “one does not dress a woman luxuriously in order that she be beautiful, but in order that her luxury testify to the legitimacy or the social privilege of her master” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 31).

In the era of consumerism, beauty today is closely related to advertisements, so models and mannequins are the best to represent it. Like labour, beauty is also emptied of its previous discourse and represents use value rather than exchange value. What goes further than the consumption of commodities in order to demonstrate social status is that the body itself is “under the sign of sexuality” and “under the sign of its ‘liberation’, caught up in a process whose functioning and strategy themselves derive from political economics” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 101). The body and sexuality which are converted into signs are turned into fetish objects via striptease and desire. In this manner, through striptease and desire, the body is turned into a fetish object. Baudrillard states that “in the ‘fetishist’ theory of consumption, in the view of marketing strategists as well as consumers, objects are given and received everywhere as force dispensers (happiness, health, security,

prestige, etc.)” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 91) Therefore, the body as a fetish object in itself takes its place in the consumerist society.

When the female body is subjected to dressing and undressing through commodification and striptease, it becomes a fetish commodity. Baudrillard claims that “if women are not fetishists it is because they perform this labour of continual fetishisation on themselves, they become dolls” (Baudrillard, 1993: 110). The act of striptease itself is a way in which women turn themselves into dolls and the wrapping of their bodies and touching the smooth naked skin is an act of seduction. Baudrillard says that “the doll is a fetish produced in order to be continually dressed and undressed” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110). The woman performing the striptease is seductive, and she adores herself and “[it] is the gaze of autoeroticism, of the object-woman who looks at herself as perfection and perversion. Woman is never so seductive as when she adores herself” (Gane, 1991, p. 111). Around this self-adoring and autoeroticism, it is the act of embracing one’s body and castrating the other that is the cause of most seduction. It is the mannequin itself who is the perfect representation of the body for fashion and “[a]round the mannequin is an intense narcissism, a paradigm of self-seduction. The woman becomes her own fetish and, therefore, a fetish for the other” (Gane, 1991, p. 11). Similar to that of mannequin for fashion, the woman performing the striptease converts into her own fetish through narcissism.

Once the woman turns herself into an object for her pleasure, she accordingly turns herself into a living phallus. Baudrillard states that “[to] be castrated is to be covered with phallic substitutes. The woman is covered in them, she is summoned to produce a phallus from her body, on pain of perhaps not being desirable” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110).

For Baudrillard, the relation between striptease and castration is “the fascination of the strip-tease as a spectacle of castration derives from the immanence of discovering, or rather seeking and never managing to discover, or better still searching by all available means without ever discovering, that there is nothing there” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110). The search is for the female genitals, and their invisibility creates castration anxiety. Quoting from Freud, Baudrillard comments that

*[T]he obsession with the hole is changed into the converse fascination with the phallus. From this mystery of the denied, barred, gaping void, a whole population of fetishes surges forth (objects, phantasms, body-objects). The fetishised woman’s body itself comes to bar the point of absence from which it arose, it comes to bar this vertigo in all its erotic presence, a ‘token of a triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it’.*  
(Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110)

This quest for the female genitals, the obsession or anxiety over castration and awareness of the bar increase the anxiety, and this gains a perverse erotic

function. While the parts closer to the genitals have an erotic role, like that of underwear or the thighs, the lack of vagina or the anxiety of its lack create a different type of eroticism which always tries to deny the castration.

### **THE REPRESENTATION OF BODY AS FETISHISED COMMODITY AND OF BEAUTY AS SIMULACRA IN *BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS***

Louis de Bernières' novel *Birds Without Wings* is set in a time of significant changes for Turkey as well as for the entire world, which is the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, followed by World War I. After the intrusion of the outside world, the peaceful fabric of life of the country and especially of the village of Eskibahçe is totally devastated. The harmony of the character's world is destroyed as a result of religious intolerance and over-zealous nationalism. Louis de Bernières presents the idyllic space of Eskibahçe where the human decency prevails and juxtaposes it to the grim historical record of human hypocrisy, megalomania, and psychopathy.

The small town of Eskibahçe is benevolently ruled by Rustem Bey, a wise "aga" who is constantly preoccupied with personal and communal felicity and well-being. He is a man who seeks for opportunities to be brought by supreme changes in order to make his personal presence in the world meaningful. In this respect, Tatiana Golban claims that "[the] priority of the other becomes significant in Rustem Bey's life. He tries to connect his thoughts to the necessary ethics in order to abandon all the prejudices that try to dominate his individual or collective identity and attempts to bind himself to an absolute rationality" (Golban, 2015, p. 48). As he intends to have a memorable presence in this world, he wants to abandon the vestiges of thinking of the old world, creating in all respects an identity of a modern man. As a man of modern society, he pays much attention to details and objects:

*His hair and moustache were freshly oiled, his cheeks were recently shaved, his bearing was proud, his scarlet fez was well brushed, his boots were gleaming with new polish, and in his sash he carried his silver-handled pistols, his yataghans and the knife that he had taken from Selim (de Bernières, 2004, p. 76).*

The abundance of commodities seems to increase his value and social status and also increase his own expectations concerning his personal presence in the world. Likewise, as a Turk who enters the modern world, he "...sets in place a whole array of sham objects, of characteristic signs of happiness, and then waits (...) for happiness to alight" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 31). Thinking that he will experience happiness from the objects, he encircles himself by various precious objects, like clocks, beautiful clothes, boots, and when the happiness does not arrive, he sets himself to wait for another object - a young and beautiful wife - that will help him accomplish this expected happiness.

The arrival of the bride, Tamara Hanim, seems to be a miracle for Rustem Bey, as she might present some signs of happiness that he has expected as a reality

for a very long time. Her body and beauty represent some of the signs of happiness, and Rustem Bey makes a great effort to make her believe that the abundance of objects will contribute to their future felicity. Golban mentions that “[with] Tamara Hanim, he has gone to all lengths to create an erotic paradise where the two of them will experience ultimate happiness” (Golban, 2015, p. 48). Therefore, he buys her a modern bed and even chairs which are brought in pieces on camels, revealing how valuable she is for him. Nevertheless, the more spectacular the expected reality is, the more distance is placed from that reality since their world is consumed via signs, a fact that leads to the notion of the hyperreal.

Tamara Hanim, in fact, is not treated like a human being, with her own needs, wishes, and desires. She becomes mostly a miracle object that is expected to transfer Rustem Bey into a paradisiacal state. Rustem Bey takes pride in buying her various luxury things primarily to testify the legitimacy and the social status of her master. Being a product of consumerist society, he commodifies Tamara Hanim, the object – beautiful wife - that grants him prestige. Pär-Ola Zander, following Baudrillard’s ideas on consumption (1998), states that “consumption is not purely use driven, although it satisfies many needs”, moreover, this mode of consumption should be mostly understood “as the satisfaction of ‘false needs’” (Zander, 2014, p. 387). Being driven by these “false needs”, Rustem Bey fails to understand that his attempt to create an identity for her via commodities will only replace some signs of the real with other signs, a fact that will keep the real at a distance, preventing him from experiencing it. Instead of becoming an identity/subject, Tamara Hanim is constructed as a social sign within the circuit of other signs, and she is not comfortable in this hypostasis.

Aware that the marking of her body with various objects leads to the merging of the subject with the object via fetishism, Tamara Hanim tries to resist this process of commodification, attempting to stay true to herself, her own feelings and aspirations, as an authentic being. She is indifferent to the commodities and signs around her, uninterested in anything that would emphasize any of her symbolic ‘lack’. Every time Rustem Bey tries to buy her gifts, she accepts them “with a gracious lack of enthusiasm” that brings “childish tears of disappointment to his eyes, which he had, with dignity and a show of indifference, held back” (Bernières, 2004, p. 93). The seduction techniques through commodities do not work for her. She categorically refuses to use the commodities that could represent his and her social status. Tamara Hanim refuses to be represented by the objects of her husband’s rank, and she is against being an object herself. She is only comfortable around the objects that she brought from her home with her as a bride.

The body and beauty now are emptied of their previous significance, becoming simply signs of use-value vs exchange value. As Rustem Bey is willing to consume his marriage in bed, as signs of his expected pleasure and felicity, Tamara Hanim keeps him away from this ‘real’ as she eschews to turn her body into a sexual

object for him. As we learn from the novel, “[a]fter their wedding night, however, Rustem Bey knew with angry resignation that much as he might invade her body, he would never touch her heart. Thus it was that he reaped nothing but heartache from his assault on happiness” (Bernières, 2004, p. 97). Rustem Bey is definitely not a cruel man who would try to abuse his wife on the claims of his rights. However, unwittingly, as a man of the system of objects as sign values, he tries to consume the commodities which would prove his social status. This brings her body ‘under the sign of sexuality’ and under the sign of its ‘liberation’ that cannot be prevented.

From all the objects given by Rustem Bey, Tamara Hanim keeps only a pair of shoes brought from Smyrna as a gift received in the early months of their marriage. Rustem Bey hoped that his wife would be seduced by the soft red fabric and their stitching of silk and golden thread. However, these shoes gain a symbolic value, and as Baudrillard defines the symbolic as “ambivalent”, any gift exchange may “sometimes [prove] disastrous for the givers”, who are enmeshed in the game of the association and differentiation of signs (Zander, 2014, p. 387).

Louis de Bernières plays with the ambivalence of the shoes, as shoes represent an important fetish object in the display of sexuality and femininity. The social and sexual signification of the shoes becomes inverted in the novel by Tamara Hanim’s ingenious function found for these objects, as “she used them merely in order to pretend that she had a visitor”, that is as a sign to keep her husband away (Bernières, 2004, p. 93).

It is interesting that although Tamara Hanim tries to stay away from objectification and pays attention only to genuine feelings, in the contemporary world, as Baudrillard claims, she cannot prevent her objectification, since her body, particularly as an object “is sealed in signs, increasing its value through a calculus of signs that it exchanges under the law of equivalence and the reproduction of the subject” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 107). Consequently, the signs of the body amplify the subject through abstracted systems of reference, constituting an ‘identity’ whose worth is calculated within a codified, although floating and liable to change, system of value, and also in terms of sex or the phallic exchange standard.

Kim Toffoletti claims that consumption “plays an important part in the construction of collective and individual identity. And it is through the consumption of signs that Baudrillard argues identity is forged” (Toffoletti, 2011, p. 76). Therefore, Tamara Hanim’s identity cannot stay independent in the system of signs; she becomes the object-woman, a fetish for the other. Her body emerges as a phallus, and, regardless of its nudity, causes castration.

Watching the slippers exhibited by his wife at the entrance of the haremlık, Rustem Bey feels castrated because he cannot have contact with the body, so both slippers and body become abstracted into signs that paralyze him by an unyielding phallic demand. As we see in the novel,

*It was the shoes that did it, those accursed shoes (...). Standing there outside the door of the haremluk with his hand on the latch, the aga, Rustem Bey, would look down and behold the footwear that would, yet again, announce that his wife had a visitor so that therefore he could not enter. (...) Rustem Bey had come to regard them with a sharp loathing. The sight of them caused the blood to beat behind his eyes and his lips to tighten grimly. (De Bernières, 2004, p. 93)*

Rustem Bey's fascination with the slippers, as a part of the spectacle of his own castration, leads him to the discovery or quest by all means "without ever discovering, that there is nothing there" (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110). He incessantly tries to reach Tamara's body, but the more he attempts to attain the perception of her nudity, the more he is denied this possible happiness and perceives only nothingness. The distance between Rustem Bey and Tamara Hanim's body is symbolically revealed in the novel by the veil that his wife constantly uses in order to cover herself. Unable to see his wife's naked body, as well as unable to enjoy the sexuality implied by it, Rustem Bey becomes extremely frustrated, frenetically exclaiming: "No woman veils herself in front of her husband! Unveil yourself!" (Bernières, 2004, p. 99). This demanding claim stresses the fact that he, as a subject, had the impression that the proximity to the object of his desire will make the event attainable, however he sees that staying closer to the world of event – Tamara's body - in a world which is consumed via signs keeps this real at a distance, a situation which infuriates and frustrates him even more.

This search for his woman's genitals, their absence or invisibility causes his castration anxiety. He desperately tries to discover a token that would make him go beyond the threat of castration. In a moment of rage, he unveils Tamara's lover, Selim, and in his willingness to protect himself against this feeling of castration he kills the lover, although he has never displayed any inclination for violence earlier. Surprisingly, the search for the female genitals and the obsession or anxiety over castration is also a source of pleasure. Being aware of the situation, Rustem Bey chooses to punish Tamara Hanim through public exposure and stoning, thus providing the opportunity for her 'unveiling', an act that has a perverse erotic function which stems from his refusal to admit his castration.

In this fascinating vertigo, in this perverse act, the entire village is involved, as people regardless of age and religion stone her, kick her or spit on her over her suspected adultery. Indeed, the local people are not impressed by anything as they try to punish her for the signs that she represents: "It was satisfying, in any case, for those lowly folk to have the opportunity to destroy a spoiled and perfumed darling from a higher walk of life" (Bernières, 2004, p. 103). As we understand from the text, Tamara is not being punished for her adultery, but mostly for her social significance. At the same time, we see that the villagers' act represents what Baudrillard calls "myopia of castration". Pretending to reestablish the situation, the people unconsciously "'eye up' the void"; instead of admitting castration, they

establish phallic alibis that will eventually be dismissed “in order to uncover the ‘truth’, which is always castration, but which is in the least instance always revealed to be castration denied” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 110). This perverse fetishist tendency is captured in the novel by Ayse Hanim when she attends Tamara Hanim’s body after this horrible event:

*what shocked us more than anything and made us shake our heads and worry about the good people of this town, (...) was where they’d been kicking her when she was lying there in the dust in the meydan. It was all in the breasts and the private parts, and I think that’s really disgusting (Bernières, 2004, p. 115-116).*

This public exposure symbolically replaces the bar which, according to Baudrillard, “erects” the body into a sign of that which is missing: the phallus. Every marking that is overlaid on the surface of Tamara Hanim’s body, like bruises and injuries, have the effect of inserting her body into an exchange of signs of a phallic order. In the consumerist society, the signs are read in connection with the subject’s identity, which is not negotiated but superimposed: “The subject is no longer eliminated in the exchange, it speculates. The subject (...) is enmeshed in fetishism: through the investment [faire-valoir] of its body, it is the subject that is fetishised by the law of value” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 107).

No matter how hard Tamara Hanim tries to resist her own fetishisation by refusing to participate into the process of turning her body into a fetish object (since she considered that her body should respond to and represent only love), she fails to attain it. In modern society, not only her body but also her beauty becomes simply a ‘material for the symbolic exchange’. Beauty is well known to be a construct, and its value becomes arbitrary through its relation to goodness and virtue, which are also ambivalent. Tamara gains the awareness of this ambivalence, as “although she is a beautiful woman, [this] beauty is not [experienced] for her own sake and she becomes a fetish object for the people in the town in relation to her husband’s rank rather in relation to her own beauty” (Golban & Akkas, 2017, p. 43). The subject’s identity – the wife/respectable and beautiful woman - is re-marked or fetishised by the law of value, turning the same body into another sign – a whore in the brothel. It is a case of simulacra, an instance of circulation of meaning through which a subject, via sign objects or marks, is transformed into a fetishised object. Tamara Hanim’s beauty, which represented a sign of her prestige earlier, becomes neutralized when her body is re-marked by the bruises and injuries, and it gains a completely new signification – it can be enjoyed by everyone.

The description of the body as a fetishised commodity reveals that the modern world exploits the productivity of the body as labour-power, distancing it through the commodification of labour, and also manipulates the ‘consummativity’ of the body, illustrating it through marking its sexuality. The sexuality of the body gains autonomously some powers that transform it into a sign of its own. The beauty

of the body becomes then simulacrum, and the body totally loses its natural reference. Baudrillard claims that sexuality of the body becomes “functionalised”, and therefore an “element in the economy of the subject” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 115).

This is what happens with Tamara Hanim when she is taken to the brothel. Her body becomes that which is signified or represented since all the men in the town visit her. Her body then, in a grotesque manner, becomes a kind of pilgrimage of all who are attracted not by a promised pleasure but by this signified which should be consumed. Her sexuality then becomes a function of the ‘expression of subjectivity’, a kind of individualized production. Tamara Hanim’s indifference to all men that buy the pleasure of her body and beauty in the brothel is outstanding. However, her adamant refusal to simulate pleasure or orgasm does not prevent the ‘consumers’ from their purpose, as no one is interested any longer in the nature or beauty of her body, but only in her signification – as Rustem Bey’s wife. In fact, the productive functionality of sexuality becomes delineated “around the exercise of a particular sexual model”, the wife of the town’s aga, which takes the sexual organ as its reference point and therefore “closes the play of the body’s signifiers” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 115).

At this point, the privilege seems to be granted to the ‘genital function’, be it erotic or reproductive, and this aspect has definitely affected the structures of a community’s social order since the phallic organ becomes the absolute signifier around which all sexual possibilities are calculated. Although many years have passed after Tamara Hanim’s exposure, Rustem Bey never divorced her, never accepting his concubine in the position of his wife, this place been kept by the aga only for Tamara Hanim. As he tells Tamara, “You are still my wife, and when you die you will still be my wife, and I will provide the white shroud and the grave, and the headstone in the shape of a tulip, should you be the first to die” (Bernières, 2004, p. 417). He refuses to marry Leyla Hanim, the woman he has brought from Smyrna in his search for pleasure, partially as he may realize that the process of consumption is experienced only as magical, partially as he may acknowledge that the signs of happiness replace the real, which for him represents the equal of total satisfaction. He came to understand that the signs of happiness are somehow invoking the endlessly postponed arrival of total satisfaction. At the same time, although he gains this awareness, for Rustem Bey, Tamara Hanim’s body represents that signifier around which he calculates all his sexual possibilities, and he is aware that the complete satisfaction or pleasure can be consumed only at the virtual level.

Even though Tamara Hanim sexually represents an “unskilled and very poor entertainment”, the phallus evolves into the signifier around which the possibilities become measured or arranged and become comparable. Tamara is one of the poorest whores in the brothel due to her lack of desire to simulate or give satisfaction, but Rustem Bey insists on his willingness to have sexual intercourse with her. He explains his desire as following:

*Sometimes it is not entertainment that one wants. With us, something has been sundered, like a pot that has fallen on the floor and broken into two pieces. Sometimes, if you haven't thrown away the pieces, you pick them up and fit them together, and look at how good the fit is, and see whether or not there are little chips missing, and your heart wishes that they could be joined once more. Sometimes when I am lying with Leyla Hanim I see her face in the dark and my mind changes her face and her body into yours (Bernières, 2004, p. 419-420).*

In a world which is consumed via signs, the desire leads to the rise of phallus as a “general equivalent of sexuality”, and in its connection to sexuality itself becomes a reference of the “virtualities of symbolic exchange” that outlines the “the emergence of a political economy of the body”, which is deeply rooted due to the collapse of the symbolic economy of the body (Baudrillard, Symbolic 116). Enmeshed in his fascination of the system of differences, Rustem Bey exceeds the perverse desire of a sexual fetishist, as his perverse desire is constantly redirected. From Tamara Hanim to Leyla Hanim and then to Armenian girls and back to Tamara Hanim, there is a continuously fluctuating desire in which one body is changed by another and is totally deprived of its significance and is virtually consumed in the political economy of the body, regardless of its beauty and attractiveness, but always convertible within a series of other signs. This confirms Baudrillard’s concern about the impossibility of finding a precise equivalence of any value – whether emotion or commodity – in real life, since one

*deals with the world or the universe as a whole, but also with systems within the world like law, politics, economics, aesthetics, even in the field of biology. In any of these systems, it is possible to pretend to be able to represent reality at the micro level, but at the macro level, the entire system is without grounding, unless we posit a ‘higher reality’ through religion or metaphysics (and this is not acceptable in a secular society) (Gerofsky, 2010, p. 71).*

The impossible exchange leads eventually to a pessimistic conclusion related to the postmodern condition of radical uncertainty, which perpetually generates multiple illusions of some possibilities, but these illusions cannot last for too long since they are destroying themselves as soon as they are perceived by the individual.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we have attempted to present the human body as a fetishised commodity as reflected in Louis de Bernières’s novel *Birds Without Wings*. The material worth of body and beauty are reconsidered from the perspective of Jean Baudrillard’s philosophical ideas regarding exchange-value and use-value of the body in the fetishist world. Louis de Bernières’s novel discloses the ways in which the fetishist world neutralizes the relationship or social interaction between the

individuals. The novelist stresses the fact that in the community based on political economy, any principle of pleasure, satisfaction or happiness leads only to the experience of the hyperreal since the bodily signs become symbols that are exchanged within this group. Through various characters of the novel, Louis de Bernières tries to emphasize that in this exchange system, there is no negotiation of identity by a subject nor is it the case of a subject able to manipulate the signs. On the contrary, the marking of a body devours completely the subject's identity, so that the social form operates within a system of inversion of possession and dispossession, in which the body becomes only a kind of material in the symbolic exchange. As the body gains a function, through its association with sex, in the political economy, it leads to the complementary annihilation of body, sex, and identity.

## REFERENCES

- Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*. St. Lois: Telos Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993). *Symbolic exchange and death*. I. H. Grant, (Trans.) London: Sage.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. S. Glaser, & A. Arbor, (Trans.) Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society*. (C. Turner, Trans.) London: Sage.
- Bernières, L. (2004). *Birds without wings*. London: Vintage War.
- Freud, S. (1977). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*. In S. Freud, *On Sexuality*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Gammam, L., & Makinen, M. (1994). *Female fetishism: A new look*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gane, M. (1991). *Baudrillard's bestiary: Baudrillard and culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gerofsky, S. (2010). The impossibility of 'real-life' word problems (According to Bakhtin, Zizek and Baudrillard), *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31(1), 61-73.
- Golban, T. (2015). The apocalypse myth in Louis de Bernières' novel *Birds Without Wings*: Rustem Bey and an individual apocalyptic experience in the Kierkegaardian frame, *The Annals of Ovidius University of Constanta – the Philology Series*, XXVI (1), 44-52.

Golban, T., and Akkaş, N. (2017). The recreation of beauty as revealed in the postmodern novel *Birds Without Wings* by Louis de Bernières, *Journal of Awareness*, Volume 2, Special Issue, 31-46.

Marx, K. (1976). *Capital (Vol. 1)*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Toffoletti, K. (2011). *Baudrillard eframed: Interpreting key thinkers for the arts (Contemporary thinkers reframed)* New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Zander, P-O. (2014). Baudrillard's theory of value: a baby in marxist bath water?, *Rethinking Marxism*, 26 (3), 382-397.