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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMAGINATION IN CERVANTES' *DON QUIXOTE* AND YAŞAR KEMAL'S *IRON EARTH, COPPER SKY AND THE UNDYING GRASS*

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Abstract

It is a fact that Cervantes is one of the most remarkable writers of the Western literature, and *Don Quixote* is his masterpiece which has been accepted by the literary circles as one of the first novels in World Literature, and one of the first modern novels as well despite its publication in the early 17th century. Don Quixote, the protagonist of the novel, has become a symbolic hero all over the world with his imaginary battles with the windmills. Using the techniques such as stream-of-consciousness monologues, meta-fiction, irony, intertextuality and playing with the sense of reality of the reader, Cervantes created a masterpiece which still preserves its eminence in the literary world. Similarly, Yaşar Kemal is one of the most important Turkish writers of the 20th century who mostly wrote novels depicting the lives and traditions of the ordinary people dwelling in Çukurova region. With the translation of several of his novels, his works took their part in the World Literature attracting the attention of the Western reader as well. Both Cervantes and Kemal liked to use characters that live in imaginary worlds; thus, both writers used dreams as an important tool to blur the distinction between reality and imagination.

Keywords: Imagination, Novel, Cervantes, Don Quixote, Yaşar Kemal, Iron Earth Copper Sky, The Undying Grass.

Introduction

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, is based on the importance of the human imagination. The novel begins with the protagonist's creating imaginary characters and adventures based on chivalric romances. The protagonist Don Quixote is under the spell of the books of chivalry that he has read, and on this basis he creates an imaginary world for himself and the people around him. This imaginary setting is like a stage, with Don Quixote and the other characters as actors and actresses who will perform a play. The important point about this stage with its actors is that the characters, including Don Quixote, are aware that everything is imaginary. Nevertheless, they continue to perform their created roles. Although the characters realize that their roles are created by the imagination, they have real emotions and real reactions to the events that occur around them: they are imaginary characters with real feelings. This situation implies that the line between imagination and reality is blurred throughout the novel while Don Quixote and Sancho Panza chase their imaginary dreams. Like Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Yaşar Kemal's *Iron Earth, Copper Sky* and *The Undying Grass* are based on humanity's capacity to create dreams and live through them. Kemal blends the imaginary worlds and speeches of his characters with the real events of their daily lives so ingeniously that the reader often experiences difficulty in understanding whether something happened in someone's imagination or in reality. The insertion of stream-of-consciousness monologues and imaginary worlds and dreams makes the reading process both complicated and intellectually satisfying.

Imagination as an Important Theme

In all three novels imagination is a central theme that brings the characters to life and keeps them there. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza dream and struggle to fulfill their dreams, and when they stop dreaming in the end, they are metaphorically or actually dead. In Kemal's novels it is the same imagination that keeps the characters alive despite all their difficulties. They dream that Adil will forgive their debts, and they dream of a saint who will save them from all dangers. Hüsne dreams of running away to the town and starting a new life; Old Halil dreams of being respected by others as when he was a vigorous and clever young man; Hasan dreams of being a special and talented person who can see what others cannot see; and Memidik dreams of being a real man who is courageous and capable of having a passionate relationship with the woman he loves. All these dreams keep the villagers alive. If they cannot be happy in real life, they can imagine a life in which their dreams are fulfilled. In these novels, both Cervantes and Kemal create imaginary characters with imaginary speeches, and in the process they blur the distinctions between imagination and reality to create an ambiguity that provides a text that is open to different interpretations. The reader can question whether Don Quixote is a smart person or not, or if Old Halil is a good person or not, or if Memidik is a hero or not. Different readers can come up with different interpretations of each text, which makes these novels extremely rich. Insofar as these novels are primarily 'readerly' rather than 'writerly' texts, they have qualities of postmodern novels.

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Imaginary World in *Don Quixote*

First, I will focus on *Don Quixote* and Cervantes' use of imagination by providing examples from the text. There are hundreds of examples about the importance of imagination in this novel; however, some of them have become universally well-known by the reader, so I will try to use some of these famous scenes as examples. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator gives background information to the reader about Don Quixote' obsession with knight-errantry, which causes him to sell most of his properties in order to buy more books of chivalric romance:

You must know then, that when our gentleman had nothing to do, he passed his time in reading books of knight-errantry; which he did with that application and delight, that at last he in a manner wholly left off his country sports, and even the care of his estate; nay, he grew so strangely besotted with those amusements, that he sold many acres of arable land to purchase books of that kind; by which means he collected as many of them as were to be had. (Saavedra, 1993: 9)

When Don Quixote's reading of chivalric romances turns into an obsession, he becomes isolated and alienated from real life and his imaginary world becomes his life:

A world of disorderly notions, picked out of his books, crowded into his imagination; and now his head was full of nothing but enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds, complaints, amours, torments, and abundance of stuff and impossibilities; insomuch, that all the fables and fantastical tales which he read seemed to him now as true as the most authentic histories. (Saavedra, 1993: 10)

Don Quixote starts living in his imaginary world and he is surrounded by imaginary elements; therefore, when he meets something or someone real, he assigns it an imaginary role and continues without any interruption. For a servant, he meets Sancho Panza, an ordinary villager who works as a shepherd; nonetheless, Don Quixote tells him about his imaginary world and adventures, and makes him believe in himself by promising him the administration of an island when he conquers one. At first, Sancho, who is already a greedy person, does not believe him totally, but towards the end of the novel, it is clear that he starts to believe in Don Quixote, which means that for Sancho Don Quixote's imaginary world has become reality.

Don Quixote's meeting with the windmills is another scene which demonstrates the importance of imagination. Although Sancho warns him that they are not giants but they are just simple windmills, Don Quixote does not listen to his warnings and runs to the mills to have a combat with the giants. Despite the fact that he is injured seriously, he never complains and gives up his imaginary adventures. Throughout the novel, Don Quixote experiences a great deal of problems and difficulties that have the possibility of reminding him that whatever he has been living is just imagination; however, he never wakes up from his dreams and he explains every failure with enchanters, magic, and the enemies that are envious of him.

At the end of the novel, Don Quixote gives up chivalry when he is defeated by the Knight of the White Moon and as he promised to do so, he returns to his village to lead an ordinary life there; however, giving up his knighthood brings his downfall. When he gives up knighthood, he automatically gives up imagining which is the only source of his living; therefore, abandoning his imaginary world and his self-produced character of the Knight, Don Quixote brings his death. Imagination is the food of his soul, and when there is none of it, his heart cannot beat any more. He cannot breathe in the real world and his death comes.

In addition to the dreams and the imaginary characters, Cervantes contributes to theme of imagination by playing with the narration and the language of the novel. In several parts of the text, he reminds the reader that he is not the writer of this novel, but he just translates it from an Arabic author called Cide Hamete Benengeli. In fact, the reader infers from the text that this Arabic author is another fictional character. By producing and using Benengeli, Cervantes plays with the sense of illusion and reality.

In the first part of the novel, the reader easily distinguishes between what is real and what is fantasy; however, in the second part of the novel, it sometimes becomes difficult to decide on what is real and what is only a dream. Especially in the second part of the novel, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza know about and even comment on their fictional characters and the flow of the novel itself, all of which are done intentionally to blur the sense of reality and imagination.

The speeches of the characters add to the theme of imagination. Don Quixote speaks with such an eloquent language that he is just like a character coming out of a chivalric romance. He tells the adventures of famous knights and always uses quotations from chivalry books in his speeches. It is like he does not live his own life but acts the life of a fictional hero from such a book. Mostly what he says is reasonable but futile as his words and the situation are incompatible. In addition, he occasionally implies that he knows about his fictional character, which gives the reader a sense of metafiction. Moreover, Sancho Panza, who was

questioning if his master was insane or sane at the beginning of the novel, is questioned by the reader if he himself is insane or sane as he follows and obeys Don Quixote in most of the situations. Especially in the house of the Duke and Duchess, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza get on a wooden horse and make an imaginary voyage to the upper levels of the sky. Although they do not move even a centimeter and their eyes are tied with a scarf, Sancho tells the Duke and his wife that he has seen many different things and escaped many dangers on their voyage to the heaven. From the narration of his stories, it is clear that Sancho Panza believes what he says, which means that despite its being an imaginary voyage, Sancho accepts it real.

Last point to mention about *Don Quixote* is that it shows the reader that imagination can be harmful for people and their environment when it is extreme as it is seen in the case of Don Quixote himself. When his imagination ends in an act that is only funny, he is laughed at by the others; however, if his imagination ends in an act that is harmful for someone, then Don Quixote is criticized and labeled as a dangerous fool. When he tries to save the shepherd boy from the cruelties of his master in the first part of the novel, Don Quixote easily believes in the master's promise that he will release the boy and treat him fairly; nonetheless, after Don Quixote goes away the master catches the boy and beats him more violently. Another remarkable example is that Don Quixote meets a group of people that includes the men of the king and the criminals, and asks the criminals what they have done and they all make up fake stories in order to show themselves innocent. As Don Quixote sees himself as the savior of all innocent people, he regards these criminals as the innocent people whose freedoms were stolen by the merciless men of the king. Therefore, he releases these murderers and thieves, and after a few seconds these criminals come together and beat him. It is apparent from these incidents that imagination harms Don Quixote himself and the people around him as well.

Dreams in *Iron Earth*, *Copper Sky* and *The Undying Grass*

In *Iron Earth*, *Copper Sky* and *The Undying Grass*, Yaşar Kemal uses the theme of imagination like Cervantes. *Iron Earth*, *Copper Sky* begins with Hasan's adventures and visions. He frequently talks to his sister, Ummahan and tells her that he sees different beings similar to genies in the shapes of horses, men, foxes and birds while he watches the flames of fire. From the passages about Hasan, it is clear that he has a tendency to see what other people cannot see. Ummahan is aware of this situation. Although she warns him that seeing such things may be a symptom of insanity, he objects to her by saying that perhaps insanity is an upper level of wisdom and adds that Vurgun Ahmet, a mad man walking on the streets of the village, is a very nice and harmless man. In addition to these, Hasan likes Old Halil's stories about the genies and their marriage ceremonies a lot. He does not question these stories and easily believes in them. When the stories about Taşbaş and his miracles begin to spread to the village, Hasan becomes one of the first believers of Taşbaş. I believe that the characters of Kemal's novels like and easily believe in dreams, stories and myths, all of which are the production of imagination, due to the fact that they have no education and do not have the ability of critical thinking. They do not question anything. As they do not have so much to do in their real lives, they keep their minds busy with such imaginary stuff. And if we think that they experience lots of failures and bad events in their real lives, it becomes more understandable why they cling to these dreams and stories tightly. They do not have any religious beliefs or a mosque to go, and they do not have a teacher or a school to go. They do not know how to read and write; therefore, oral culture and especially storytelling becomes dominant in their lives. In Yalak village, this oral culture consists of gossips, lies, slanders, stories, myths, epics and folk songs.

Zalaca is not one of the major characters of the novel; however, her dreams are very important and effective for the villagers. As the villagers have lots of debt to Adil and as they know that it is not possible to pay him back under these circumstances, they are in a different mood and expect some miracles to happen so that they can get rid of their problems. Zalaca's dreams have a soothing effect for the villagers. Besides, her dreams become very important in the process of villagers' turning Taşbaş into a saint. Whenever she has a dream she goes to Muhtar Sefer and he interprets these dreams according to his taste and benefits. The interesting point about her dreams is that after a while, the villagers live up to the dreams. They exaggerate the dreams. Each villager adds something to them and, in the end, the dream turns into something very different. Villagers combine these dreams with some stories. They even distort and make up some epics in order to strengthen the popularity of and faith in Taşbaş. What is ironic about these villagers is that they make up these dreams themselves but they believe in what they have made up in the end.

Memidik is another important character that is obsessed with dreams and visions. In fact, it is possible to claim that his dreams and visions have affected the villagers very much and consolidated the faith in Taşbaş's being a saint and a savior for their village. He tells the villagers that he has seen hundreds of trees coming to the house of Taşbaş and praying to him. He says that he has seen him wondering on the tops of the mountains and talking with the animals.

Taşbaş is an ordinary villager who has never prayed to God, so at first he does not believe in the stories about his miracles. He tells the villagers that he cannot be a saint because he is an ordinary sinful

person, and if there will come out a saint from their village, it should be Ökkeş Dağkurdu as he is a religious man who prays ten times a day to God and who saves money to go to Mecca. However, Taşbaş cannot prevent himself from believing in the stories. As he is exposed to the stories everywhere even at his own home, he starts questioning himself if he is really a saint or not, and then he tries to find some evidence to persuade himself. At last, he believes that he is a saint. He thinks that if he was not a saint, there would not be so many people believing in him. There would be someone who comes out to the village square and shouts that Taşbaş is not a saint.

In addition to the dreams and visions of the characters, Kemal contributes to the theme of imagination with the help of the narration. He presents the reader stream-of-consciousness monologues of the characters. With the help of these monologues, Kemal creates a sense of ambiguity. He blurs the distinction between reality and imagination, which makes the reading process complicated. The reader tries to figure out if someone really means or does something or only imagines.

In *The Undying Grass*, imagination becomes a dominant theme. The novel begins with Memidik's killing Muhtar Sefer in his imagination. For a long time, he has this dream again and again. Dreaming becomes like a learning technique for him. He dreams every detail of the murder, and when the real murder takes place, he knows what to do and how to do. Dreams prepare him for the real life although it ends in prison. Another point to mention about his dreams is that the dream of the murder is like a sexual fantasy for Memidik. He enjoys it, so he repeats having it. When he murders someone in real life, he feels satisfied. Although it turns out that he has killed Şevket Bey accidentally, a rich landowner living in Cukurova, instead of Muhtar Sefer, he does not regret for what he has done. Moreover, he is not afraid of or disgusted by the dead body of Şevket Bey. On the contrary, he likes the corpse and sees it as a possession of himself. He likes the product of his fantasies.

Narration is also very important throughout the novel. Especially at the beginning of the novel, due to the stream-of-consciousness monologues and the dreams of Memidik, the reader questions if Memidik really killed someone or if he really killed Muhtar Sefer or later who the dead man is. Memidik becomes the protagonist of the novel with all his dreams and acts. Again the reader sees a hero or anti-hero made of imagination.

With the imaginary scenes about his mother's death in his mind, Uzun Ali becomes another major character in the novel. As he had to leave his mother in the village because she is too old to walk that distance to Çukurova, he feels guilty about it. While he is picking cotton, he always thinks about several different scenarios in which his mother experiences a different kind of death. These imaginary scenes and dreams surround everywhere in his life. He goes to bed with them at night and opens his eyes with them in the morning. Even his dreams are filled with them, so he cannot sleep properly. The narration of these dreams sounds so real that the reader can get shocked about how a dream can be told in such a realistic manner, which is one of the many qualities that make Kemal a good story teller and a unique writer.

Taşbaş's dreams and visions mark the novel and create a deep impact on the reader because his dreams, combined with the dreams and the stories of the villagers, cause his death. It is ironic that the villagers believe that Taşbaş is a saint and Taşbaş rejects all this stuff in *Iron Earth*, *Copper Sky*, and Taşbaş believes that he is a saint but the villagers reject it in *The Undying Grass*. Therefore, Taşbaş's tragedy is in a way similar to Don Quixote's in that both of them die when they lose their popularity and position in the society. The difference is that Taşbaş is made a hero with the help of the stories of the villagers, but Don Quixote regards himself as a hero with the help of the stories that he has read. They are like the protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedies; they gain fame and status, and, after a while, lose it and experience a downfall. Although they are imaginary heroes that are the result of pure imagination, the reader feels sorry for both of them.

Conclusion

To sum up, it is clear that in all three novels mentioned above, imagination is a central theme that brings the characters to life and keeps them there. Imagination is an escape world for the characters of the novels, and when they experience the feeling of not finding anything that makes them happy in their lives, they cling to imagination. It makes them breathe and survive in the real world despite their disappointments and problems. When the characters of these novels realize the fact that they cannot change anything in their real lives, they produce an imaginary world in which they have the ability to create, shape, decide and control everything. In addition to all these, imagination is used as a literary tool with the help of the dreams and stream-of-consciousness monologues by both Cervantes and Kemal in order to create a sense of ambiguity in their works. They aim at blurring the line between imagination and reality so that the reader can enjoy the reading process more.

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