
SABAHATTIN ALİ’NİN *KŪRK MANTOLU MADONNA* ADLI ROMANI İLE IRIS MURDOCH’IN BAZI ROMANLARINDA RESİM SANATININ KARAKTERLERE ETKİSİ

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Öz

İrlandalı yazar ve filozof Iris Murdoch felsefesinin yansımaları yazdığı romanlarında da görülmektedir. Platon’un bazı düşüncelerini yorumlayarak kendi felsefi yaklaşımını geliştiren Murdoch’a göre insanların çoğu yanılsama içindedir. Bu düşüncesini de Platon’un ünlü mağara alegorisine dayandırır. Murdoch çok az insanın yaşadığı yanılsamalardan kurtularak gerçeği olduğu gibi gördüğüne inanır. Murdoch’a göre bir bireyin yanılsamadan kurtulup gerçeğe ulaşabilmesinin belli yolları ve nedenleri vardır. Bunlardan en önemlilerden biri de sanattır. Bu bağlamda sanatın Murdoch felsefesinde çok önemli bir yer tuttuğu anlaşılmaktadır. Murdoch’ın felsefesinde sanatı ön plana çıkarmasının yansımaları romanlarında gözlemlenmektedir. Birçok romanında sanata belli ölçülerde değinmektedir. Bu çalışmada ele alınan romanlarda sanatın özellikle vurgulandığına dikkat çekilmiştir. Söz konusu romanlarda sanat herhangi bir tema olarak ele alınmaz, sanat belli bir gücü olan, bireylerin yaşama bakış açılarını değiştiren ve yol gösterici özellikleriyle ön plana çıkarılır. Iris Murdoch’ın sanatı ele alışındaki yaklaşımın benzer bir örneği

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Sabahattin Ali'nin *Kürk Mantolu Madonna* adlı romanında gözlemlenir. Ali'nin bu romanında da sanatın ön plana çıktığı görülmektedir. Roman kahramanı Raif sanata düşkün, resim galerilerini gezen ve sanatla ilgili haberleri takip eden bir karakterdir. Raif karakterinin Murdoch karakterleriyle özdeşleştiren olay *Kürk Mantolu Madonna* isimli tablo ile karşılaşması sonucu gerçekleşir. Bu portrenin etkisi altına giren Raif'in hayata bakış açısı değişir. Hayata başka bir pencereden bakmaya başlar. Sanatın yaşantısında neden olduğu değişiklikler açısından Murdoch romanlarındaki karakterlere benzemektedir. Bu çalışma sanatın bu etkisi üzerinde durmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanat, Yanılsama, Gerçeklik, Sabahattin Ali, Iris Murdoch

THE EFFECT OF ART OF PAINTING IN SABAHATTIN ALI'S *KÜRK MANTOLU MADONNA* AND NOVELS OF IRIS

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Abstract

The reflections of Irish writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch's philosophy can be seen also in her novels. According to Murdoch, who developed her own philosophical approach by interpreting some of Plato's thoughts, most people are in illusion. She bases this idea on Plato's famous cave allegory. Murdoch believes that very few people see reality by getting rid of their illusions. According to Murdoch, there are certain situations for an individual to get rid of illusion and eventually see the truth. One of the most important factors that shatters illusion is art. In this respect, it can be deduced that art has a very important place in Murdoch's philosophy. The reflections of Murdoch's bringing art to the fore in her philosophy are observed in her novels. She refers to art to a certain extent in almost all of her novels. It is pointed out that art is especially emphasized in the novels discussed in this study. Art is not addressed as any theme in these novels, art is brought to the fore with its specific power, changing and guiding aspects of individuals' perspective on life. A similar example of Iris Murdoch's approach to art is observed in Sabahattin Ali's novel *Kürk Mantolu Madonna*. It is seen that art is at the forefront in this novel of Ali as well. The hero of the novel Raif is a character who is fond of art, visits art galleries and follows events about art. The event, which identifies Raif's character with Murdoch characters, occurs as a result of his encounter with the painting *Kürk Mantolu Madonna*. Raif falls under the influence of this portrait and his perspective on life totally changes. He starts to look at life from another angle. It

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is similar to the characters in Murdoch novels in terms of the changes that art causes in his life. This study focuses on such effects of art on the lives of the characters.

Keywords: Art, illusion, reality, Sabahattin Ali, Iris Murdoch

I. Introduction

Art is in contact with our existence almost in every period of life on various occasions. It has reflections on almost every aspect of entity and in this respect it has a very wide field of study. Yet in this study art will be discussed within the framework of literature. Art has showed up as a focus of attention in many literary works. Some literary studies only briefly touch on art, while others focus entirely on art. It is a well known fact that art occupies an important place in philosophy and novels of Iris Murdoch. Fragments of Murdoch's philosophical considerations about art are incarnated in some of her novels. It should be stated that art does not take stage as an ordinary theme in Murdoch's novels. The power and influence of art is deliberately highlighted in her novels. In Murdoch's novels it seems as if the stage is prepared to underline the capacity of art. The reader can easily determine Murdoch's exceptional approach to concept of art in her novels and some instances of this unique approach will be discussed in this study. A similar circumstance appears in Sabahattin Ali's *Kürk Mantolu Madonna*. The concept of art comes into view as a quite strong status in this novel as well. The art does not appear as an ordinary theme in Ali's novel in question. One can easily figure out that the art and its impulse have been deliberately highlighted in this novel. In this respect it is possible to make a comparison between the studies of the aforementioned authors.

II. Iris Murdoch's Approach to Art

As stated earlier, Iris Murdoch is both a philosopher and a literary figure. Her initial career starts with her studies on philosophy. Moral philosophy has been Murdoch's main field of interest in the broad spectrum of philosophy. According to Murdoch moral philosophy has been neglected in twentieth century, that's why she believes that more attention should be paid to this area. The basis of Murdoch's moral philosophy is the phenomenon of "goodness".

The importance and necessity of the concept of goodness is abidingly underlined in Murdoch's philosophy. However; she figured it out

ineffective to convey such concepts through abstract terms of ethical theory. For this reason, Murdoch turns to literature where abstract concepts can be shaped more efficiently through characters and themes. There are many common areas of concern for literature and philosophy. And Murdoch combines philosophy and literature very successfully, she does not leave the worlds she created in her novels under the pressure of philosophy, but enriches it with her philosophy (Kaehele and German, 1967; 556).

Plato has an important influence on the formation of Iris Murdoch's philosophy. Murdoch's metaphysical understanding is based on the reconstruction of Plato's thoughts (Antonaccio, 2000; 27). According to Murdoch reaching goodness and truth is like a demanding journey. She gives Plato's famous cave allegory to clarify this situation. According to this allegory, very few people in the cave eventually see the sun, which allows them to see everything clearly. In other words, most of the people do not see the reality because of their selfishness. She states that; "I assume that human beings are naturally selfish and that human life has no external point..." (Murdoch, 2001; 76). People are the prisoners of their own selves, egos, dreams and consciousness. The individual puts himself at the centre of life and looks at the world through the mirror of his own consciousness. He paints the world, events and his surroundings with the paint of its own consciousness. An individual who does not view the world with a virtuous consciousness will not be able to see the world with its reality (Vice, 2007; 61). From this perspective it can be stated that the 'self' functions as a barrier between the individual and reality.

As mentioned above according to Plato's cave allegory very few people succeed to approach reality. So the question to figure out is what guides these few people to reach the reality. There shall be some facts, concepts and events that will motivate an individual to seek the reality. According to Murdoch, there are certain elements that guide a person to the reality.

The very first and most important of these elements is art. Murdoch's moral philosophy focuses on art to a large extent. Of course in

addition to art there are some other concepts and events that will bring people to reality; they can be listed as follows; beauty, nature, learning an intellectual discipline, the experience of coming face to face with death, humility and love, however, art is at the forefront. When giving form to her philosophical foundation Murdoch is mainly influenced by Plato, nevertheless she does not adopt Plato's strict approach to art and the artist. It is a well known fact that Plato looks down on art because of its delusive nature. However, according to Murdoch's philosophy there is no conflict or contrast between art and morality. On the contrary, morality and art are like two sides of the same struggle. That is to say contrary to Plato's philosophy, art occupies an important place in Murdoch's philosophy. In this respect one of the tasks of the artist is to convey the truth, show the world as it is in his art. Otherwise the self is reluctant to see the reality.

The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself. In some ways it resembles a machine; in order to operate it needs sources of energy, and it is predisposed to certain patterns of activity. The area of its vaunted freedom of choice is not usually very great. One of its pastimes is day-dreaming. It is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of self or through fictions of a theological nature. Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of self. I think we can probably recognize ourselves in this rather depressing description. (Murdoch, 2001; 76-77)

In fact this statement is an interpretation of Plato's cave allegory. The selfish human being needs external stimulus to redirect its energy from his self to reality. Murdoch takes art as one of these stimulants. At this point, it is necessary to underline what is meant by art. It is a well known fact that it is not possible to accept all productions of art

as great art. There are certain characteristics that distinguish great art from ordinary art. In the scope of this study the most important feature of great art to be focused on is that great art is far from individuality and it has potential to show the individuals the reality clearly. An individual who looks through his self is in illusion. When his self is derived between him and reality he sees the reality directly. And at the first stage of confronting the reality directly causes a shock on individual and this state of shock turns into pleasure in progress of time. The reason for this state is that the individual is not used to looking at the reality directly. Great art also teaches the individual not to be ambitious of one's self and teaches him how to look and love the real things without falling into greedy desires. This situation takes its sources from the time of production process of great art. When an artist works on a real art he looks at the items he will use, whether good or bad, with an impartial, fair and compassionate perspective (Yıldız, 2010; 9). This attitude of artists is reflected in the people who encounter their art. In this regard this study will review Murdoch and Ali's approach to art in some of their novels.

III. Comparison of Art in Murdoch's and Ali's Novels

It is a known fact that art has an important place in the philosophy of Iris Murdoch, and it can be deduced that art has a substantial place in her literature. As mentioned previously art does not appear just as an unexceptional phenomenon in the course of events in Murdoch's novels. The characteristics, power and role of art are purposefully underlined in her studies. A similar approach to concept of art can be viewed in Sabahattin Ali's *Kürk Mantolu Madonna* as well. In this scope it can be intriguing to make a comparison of contextualization of art between the works of these two authors.

Actually the concept of art is prominent in one of Sabahattin Ali's novels; however, it stands out in many of Iris Murdoch's novels. For the sake of a relevant comparison, some of Murdoch's novels that particularly signify the art of painting and one novel of Sabahattin Ali will be examined in the scope of this study. The first novel of Murdoch to be scrutinized is *The Bell*. In this novel the character to be

considered in the context of art is Dora Greenfield. Murdoch generally affiliates her characters with art one way or another. Dora is a former art student married to an art historian, Paul. Their marriage is not portrayed as an ideal one which causes Dora to go through hard times. Art galleries serve as an oasis in her tumultuous life. In this respect National Gallery is a place where she has been many times before. But her last visit is depicted different from the previous visits.

Dora was always moved by the pictures. Today she was moved, but in a new way. She marvelled, with a kind of gratitude, that they were all still here, and her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless. Even Paul, she thought, only existed now as someone she dreamt about; or else as a vague external menace never really encountered and understood. But the pictures were something real outside herself, which spoke to her kindly and yet in sovereign tones, something superior and good whose presence destroyed the dreary trance-like solipsism of her earlier mood. When the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value. But now there was something else in it after all. (Murdoch, 1999; 190)

Dora's last visit to the art gallery is not depicted as an ordinary social event. This visit is presented as a phenomenal happening. The power of art is consciously highlighted. During this visit to art gallery Dora goes through an awakening. The reality of pictures destroys Dora's insignificant daily anxieties. She feels related to pictures which speak to her kindly but this speaking occurs in sovereign tones (Murdoch, 1999; 191). Her encounter with reality of art makes her to see the reality and directs her to experience a revelation. The sovereignty of

art aspires her to kneel in front of one of the pictures and to clasp it while whining (Murdoch, 1999; 191). At the end of the visit, art has changed Dora's perspective on life. The sources of concern become less significant. The reality of art supplants her daily anxieties. The power of art is vigorously highlighted.

The characters in illusion frequently appear in Murdoch's novels. Murdoch deliberately confronts these characters with art in one way or another. A character's encounter with art has some consequences. According to Murdoch, the great art is actually reality itself; it allows us to see what we have not seen before (Schwartz, 2009; 315). In this respect it has an awakening feature. Characters who encounter great art may have a chance to escape from their illusion. The character in illusion in *The Sea*, *The Sea* is Charles Arrowby. Charles is at sixties and he comes into prominence as a selfish and arrogant character. After secluding to a house near the sea Charles encounters Mary Hartley who is his first love of decades earlier. His feelings towards Mary start to flare up again. His approach to Mary is quite obsessive and selfish. Actually he is in an illusion. His life goes through a difficult and turbulent process. While in such tangled emotions his visit to an art gallery is striking. He is overwhelmed with admiration while looking at the paintings of great artists in the gallery (Murdoch, 1980; 171). He enjoys the calming and pleasurable atmosphere of paintings. He feels recovered from the complex emotions in the venerable atmosphere of the art surrounding him. Although there was not a complete recovery from his illusions, visiting the art gallery makes him relieved for a while.

In another novel, *An Unofficial Rose*, art again functions as a noteworthy element. The painting that comes forward in this novel is Susanna and Elders by Tintoretto, a 17th century Venetian painter. The owner of the painting is Hugh Perronet. Hugh has an extraordinary bond to this painting. When he passes some time far from this painting, turning back to portrait gives a great pleasure to him. The painting is a sanctuary of refuge for Hugh. Hugh's bond to this piece of art is considerably exaggerated in the course of the novel.

As it is seen in the above-mentioned examples art, paintings, visits to art galleries are essential components of Murdoch's novels. Such elements are encountered in many novels of Murdoch. Similar to Murdoch's novels an extraordinary approach to art is observed in one of Sabahattin Ali's novels, *Kürk Mantolu Madonna*. In this respect it can be considered appropriate to make a comparison between these two authors. As per usual it is not a special situation to deal with art in the novels. These two authors' handling of the subject makes it remarkable. The crucial point is the excessive emphasize in their approach to concept of art.

The main character of *Kürk Mantolu Madonna* is Raif who is an introvert, shy and ordinary character. At the beginning of novel he is depicted as an unattractive, regular person. The absorbing reality about his story and his character is only revealed after the notes he took about his past are read by his co-worker. In these notes the part that concerns this article starts with Raif's visit to the National Art Gallery. Raif is a loyal visitor of the art galleries and he follows the upcoming art exhibitions from newspapers. Similar to characters of Murdoch, Raif takes refuge in art to soothe his soul. During his visits to the National Gallery, Raif sometimes watches some of the paintings for a while and then after he leaves the gallery he envisions the same faces and images in these paintings in the following days (Ali, 2019; 57). Raif's perception of art bears a resemblance to Murdoch's characters. He is competent enough to make comments and criticize paintings at the galleries. During one of his visits he is astonished by a portrait. He stands in front of the painting as if he is nailed. He can hardly define the feelings he senses in front of the portrait. An indefinable strong connection is established between Raif and the portrait. He becomes obsessed with this painting and he is under the influence of it. He becomes a regular visitor of this painting. "I seemed to see new expressions on her face every time, and a life that gradually became apparent" (Ali, 2019; 60). Raif's encounter with this painting causes some considerable changes in his approach to life. He realizes his hidden feelings about his pursuit for the correct person all his life. The portrait gives him the hope that it is possible to find the person he is looking for, and perhaps she is very close to him. Raif's

situation is quite similar to the characters of Iris Murdoch. The depiction of art, the power of art, the effect it causes on characters are very similar in novels of both authors.

IV. Conclusion

As mentioned before there is nothing remarkable about taking art as a subject of a literary work. As a matter of fact literature itself is a branch of art. And art has been at the core of many literary studies. What makes this situation as substantial as the topic of this study is the way of handling art in a novel. Two authors that have been focused on in this paper display similar approaches to art in their aforementioned novels. First of all the exaggeration of the power of art is exhibited in the studies of the two authors. The sublime vigour of art over people is insistently highlighted in their novels in question. Another point is the awakening feature of art on characters. In the course of life most of people go through some illusions. Murdoch states that the reality is curtailed by these illusions and only very few people succeed to escape from these illusions and see the reality. One of the ways that guide an individual to reality is art. Murdoch urges that human beings and art are created for each other, and where this bond breaks, human life also breaks (Murdoch, 1974; 15). Art only emerges in a free environment, and where there is no freedom, neither art nor truth can be mentioned. The characters of both authors experience some sorts of awakening at different scales through art. In this respect it is allegeable to assert a similarity between their approaches to subject of art in their novels. To sum up the semblance in their approaches to concept of art make it necessary to draw an analogy. And this study focuses on such similarities in their novels.

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