



REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING IN UMBERTO ECO'S *THE MYSTERIOUS FLAME OF QUEEN LOANA* AND MURAT GÜLSOY'S *NİSYAN* (OBLIVION)

UMBERTO ECO'NUN *KRALİÇE LOANA'NIN GİZEMLİ ALEVİ* VE MURAT GÜLSOY'UN *NİSYAN* ROMANLARINDA HATIRLAMA VE UNUTMA

Burcu ALKAN 

Dr., Research Fellow* (primary), Europe in the Middle East - The Middle East in Europe Programme Forum Transregionale Studien; Honorary Research Fellow, Department of English, American Studies and Creative Writing University of Manchester, Burcu.Alkan@manchester.ac.uk

Makale Bilgisi

Türü: Araştırma makalesi
Gönderildiği tarih: 16 Nisan 2022
Kabul edildiği tarih: 1 Temmuz 2022
Yayınlanma tarihi: 20 Aralık 2022

Article Info

Type: Research article
Date submitted: 16 April 2022
Date accepted: 1 July 2022
Date published: 20 December 2022

Anahtar Sözcükler

Hafıza Kaybı; Demans; Benlik; Murat Gülsoy; Umberto Eco; Nisyan; Kraliçe Loana'nın Gizemli Alevi

Keywords

Memory Loss; Dementia; Selfhood; Murat Gülsoy; Umberto Eco; Nisyan; The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana

DOI

10.33171/dtcfjournal.2022.62.2.23

Abstract

This article compares Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) and Murat Gülsoy's *Nisyan* (2013, *Oblivion*) in terms of how they explore the relationship between memory and selfhood. The unique multi-layered ways in which the novelists depict remembering and forgetting render such a comparative analysis insightful. In *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, the protagonist, who suffers from memory loss following a stroke, embarks upon a journey of remembering to re-establish who he is/was. In this journey, the books he had read become his guide as he rebuilds his sense of self through his remembering of bookish memories. Approaching the topic from the opposite direction in *Nisyan*, Gülsoy portrays forgetting as a fragmentation of selfhood through a writer-narrator who suffers from dementia and struggles to write his final book. The two characters of the two novels lean on the un/written word in their attempts at anchoring back to life as a reader and as a writer. In these narratives, the unreliable memory work becomes the precarious connection between life and death as the un/written word becomes the life force that holds together (or not) the broken structures of memory and selfhood.

Öz

Bu makale Umberto Eco'nun *Kraliçe Loana'nın Gizemli Alevi* (2004) ve Murat Gülsoy'un *Nisyan* (2013) romanlarını hafıza ve benlik arasındaki ilişkiye yaklaşımları açısından karşılaştırmaktadır. Yazarların bahsi geçen metinlerinde hatırlama ve unutma temalarını sunarken kullandıkları özgün yöntemler anlatıları arasında bu tür bir karşılaştırmayı postmodern edebiyat tartışmaları bağlamında ilgi çekici ve anlamlı kılmaktadır. *Kraliçe Loana'nın Gizemli Alevi*'nde baş karakter inme geçirir ve hafızasını yitirir. Roman karakterin kaybettiği hafızasını okuduğu kitaplardan hatırladığı parçalarla geri kazanma ve böylece yitirdiği benlik algısını metinler aracılığıyla yeniden kurma çabasını anlatmaktadır. Murat Gülsoy *Nisyan*'da hafıza ve benlik ilişkisine dair benzer meselelere hastalığa bağlı unutma deneyimi açısından yaklaşmaktadır. Gülsoy'un yazar-anlatıcısı demans nedeniyle giderek hafızasını yitirmektedir. Romanda bu sürecin bir sonucu olarak karakterin benlik algısının parçalanması ve yaşadığı yıkımın pençesinde son romanını yazma çabaları anlatılmaktadır. İki karakter de hayata tutunmak için okur/yazar olarak kelimelere ve imgelere tutunmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda metinlerde tasvir edilen hafıza süreci (unutma/hatırlama) ölüm ve yaşam arasındaki bağı oluşturmaktadır. Yazma ve okuma edimleri hafıza ve benlik yapılarını bir arada tutan (ya da tutamayan) hayat enerjisi görevini görmektedir.

*We are our memory,
we are this chimerical museum of shifting forms,
this heap of broken mirrors.*

-Jorge Luis Borges, 'Cambridge'

Introduction

In his poem 'Cambridge', Jorge Luis Borges writes, the “odds and ends of memory are the only wealth / that the rush of time leaves to us” (Borges, 1975, p. 23). From the perspective of an embodied, experiencing self and not disregarding the diverse

epistemological purview on selfhood in its complexity, we are indeed what we remember. Our lived experience transforms into the narrative of our sense of self as we recall and retell. Our memory work makes us the protagonists of our own life story. How we define who we are and how we perceive the self that we establish as such maintain the storyline formed by the relationship among our lived experience, what we remember actively, and what has left its impression on us to become an internalised form of memory. The process that constructs the manifold complexities of the self is not straightforward but mutable based on the various determinants that play a role in its construction.

What happens when our very own life-story is shattered due to an organic disruption to our memory? Whether sudden as a result of an accident or a stroke or gradual as experienced in cases of dementia, memory loss is not simply the disappearance of details of one's life as remembered. It is a disorienting reality in which the confusions arising from the gaps in the past culminate in confusions in the perception of the present. The vulnerabilities arising from such a disruption to the experienced reality renders the future an intimidating prospect. The impact of memory loss runs deep, travelling through the palimpsest of a person's selfhood and unsettles fault lines that threaten its integrity.

Such a powerful experience and its impact upon selfhood naturally have echoes in the literary imagination. *Still Alice* (2007) by Lisa Genova, for instance, is a popular novel that centres on the experience of early-onset Alzheimer's disease and it was made into a highly successful film in 2014 with Julianne Moore winning numerous awards for her performance in the lead role. Wendy Mitchell's memoir *Somebody I Used to Know* (2018) is another acclaimed personal narrative of dementia that provides insight into the challenges and transformative experiences of living with gradual loss of memory. Approaching the subject matter from another perspective, this article focuses on two contemporary works that stand out in terms of their representation of memory loss with an emphasis on literary application: Umberto Eco's novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) and Murat Gülsoy's novella *Nisyan* (2013, *Oblivion*).¹ These two works, former from Italy and the latter from Turkey, depict characters that endure injury to their senses of selfhood due to an organic experience of memory loss, whereby the acts of

¹ The editions used in this article are: Eco, U. (2004). *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. Trans. Geoffrey Brock. New York: Harcourt and Gülsoy, M. (2013). *Nisyan*. Istanbul: Can. All translations from Turkish are my own. As Gülsoy's novel is unavailable in English, passages from the original are provided for reference.

remembering and forgetting become the bridge between life and death, the self and its fragmentation.

Memory (Loss) and Selfhood

In the kind of gradual memory loss as in dementia, the idea of the loss of self is often part of the medical narrative discourses (Ronch, 1996; Cohen and Eisdorfer, 2001). However, such discourses inducing fear and stigma have been challenged by personal (non-)fiction narratives that present portraits of people living with dementia, like *Still Alice* and *Somebody I Used to Know*. Furthermore, combined with these kinds of narratives, scientific studies show how the loss of the sense of selfhood in neurodegenerative illnesses is not entirely true. In fact, as Kathleen Taylor notes, “in most cases of dementia, what goes first is what matters less for identity: recent memories, money management, the ability to plan. The emotions, more basic to who we are, last longer” (Taylor, 2020, p. 116). From the Constructionist view, Steven R. Sabat and Rom Harré (1992) talk about two types of selves: that of personal identity and those that are publicly presented. The self of the personal is linked to one’s agency and is “experienced as the continuity of one’s point of view in the world of objects.” The publicly presented self is often a “repertoire of selves,” one’s personae (Sabat and Harré, (1992, p. 445). They show that contrary to general perception, in Alzheimer’s disease, the self as personal identity remains intact despite memory loss and other related cognitive issues. Instead, any sense of loss of self occurs in relation to the attitudes of those “who are regularly involved in the social life of the sufferer” (Sabat and Harré, 1992, p. 459) when they are positioned, presented, and treated as fragile and helpless.

Eco and Gülsoy utilise memory loss as a literary device to explore the challenges it poses to this idea of selfhood. These texts are not primarily narratives of illness, although they could be read as such, but are creative experiments on the relationship between narrativity, memory, and selfhood. They emphasise remembering and forgetting as processes and propose the self as a dynamic construct composed of lived experience, inner world, and bodily reality, all of which centre upon memory in its loss. The loss of selfhood as proposed by the novelists is highlighted in *Nisyan* through its fragmentation towards the ultimate end (‘oblivion’) and in *Loana* its reconstruction towards life (despite the novel’s ending). These texts present memory in its loss in order to show how it is intrinsically linked to the construction of selfhood by investigating its consequent fragmentation. Their uniqueness lies in the way they integrate the idea of the written-word-as-narrative in a self-reflexive way as they ask broader questions about the construction and

definition of selfhood. They thus contribute to existentialist epistemologies through their distinctive postmodernist modes of expression.

The chosen texts are unique within the oeuvres of their respective novelists as well. In addition to his numerous scholarly works, Umberto Eco, a semiotician and medievalist by profession, penned seven novels. Beginning with his most renowned *The Name of the Rose* (1980), all his novels are historical narratives of one form or another, including *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. However, *Loana* differs from all others in that the focus of its historicity is closer to home both personally and temporally. Set in contemporary times and with references to the fascist period of Italy, it tells the story of an old man, an antiquarian book dealer remembering his childhood in the 1930s and 1940s. Although his final novel, *Numero Zero* (2015) similarly refers to the twentieth century history of Italy, *Loana*'s timeline has stronger personal links to Eco's own life. In *Confessions of a Young Novelist*, he refers to his own rare-book collection (Eco, 2011, p. 66) and the "kitschy songs" he heard as a child that found their way into *Loana* (Eco, 2011, p. 192). In short, *Loana* follows his signature narrative technique of amalgamating history and meta-textuality. Yet, it is unique in that its explicit focus on memory and ageing is more personal.²

Likewise, *Nisyan* is unique among the numerous works of Murat Gülsoy with its experimental narrative style, while also being linked to the rest of his oeuvre through its subject matter. With a degree in psychology and a university career in biomedical engineering, Gülsoy focuses on the creative processes of the mind in the majority of his works. Mental pathologies, creative practices, and the tormented self are themes that he often explores as he combines the narratives of his characters, the various kinds of texts they write, and the actual novels themselves through a multilayered meta-textuality with a direct or an implied relevance to the characters' senses of selfhood. While his latest novel *Ve Ateş Bizi Tüketiyor* (2019, *And The Fire Consumes Us*) portrays the wanderings in the city of a character who is suffering from dementia, his *Nisyan* stands out particularly with the way the actual process of memory loss is presented. The production process of *Nisyan* parallels the depicted process of memory loss and becomes manifest in its formalistic structure.

² The protagonist of *The Prague Cemetery* also suffers from memory loss; however, in *Loana* the experience stands out as the key element of the narrative. Furthermore, discussions on *Loana* predominantly revolve around its postmodern historiographic or semiotic elements as opposed to its exploration of memory and selfhood. See Capozzi, R. (2006). *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana: A Postmodern Historiographic Illustrated Novel of a Generation*. *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 40.2: pp. 462-486 and Danyte, M. (2007). National Past/Personal Past: Recent Examples of the Historical Novel by Umberto Eco and Antanas Sileika. *Literatura* 49.5: pp. 34-41.

The novella comprises of 100 fragments that correspond to the fragmentation of its protagonist's memories. These fragments were initially published on the novelist's personal blog one fragment at a time, as he was mourning the losses of his father and his grandfather (Akşehir-Uygur, 2017, p. 125). Accordingly, the process of remembering and forgetting and the protagonist's ability to write (or lack thereof) are complemented by the way the text is written and the experimental style in which it is done so.

Self, Memory and Narrativity

Anne Whitehead notes in *Memory* that "From the very outset [...] remembering is intimately bound to figures of writing and inscription" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 15). As she traces the history of memory, she reveals how memory-work is essentially related to language in its broader sense. It could be argued that, in their complex manifestations, images, words, and broader linguistic elements help us make sense of lived experience and both memory and selfhood are intertwined with the linguistic skills that enable us to recall and retell. Following upon this mode of thinking, narrativity is another formulation of such intertwinement. The two novels examined in this article portray the significance and significations of the entanglements of life, self, and memory through multi-layered conceptualisations of narrativity. In these two works, the narratives of the novels mirror the narratives of memory that maintain the narratives of life, highlighting the integrated meaning-making processes in the construction of the sense of self.

Both texts present memory-loss from the perspective of their aged protagonists in first-person narration. Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* begins with 60-year-old Yambo, waking up with aphasia after having suffered a stroke. He does not remember his wife or his life, or whether he likes a particular type of jam or not. However, he remembers parts from the books that he has read and he is able to quote them at length. The self that has woken up, without the memories, is thus, a shell of a self, made of other people's words. The novel is centred upon Yambo's quest to remember and rebuild his life to become his 'self' again. The narrative follows him revisiting his old reads, old homes, and old loves. It is an impressive postmodern novel made of montages and loaded with intertextuality that integrate Yambo's personal past with the history of modern Italy.

In Murat Gülsoy's *Nisyan* the narrator is an old writer who is suffering from dementia. He remembers that he is a writer even though his memory falters. The very first lines of the novel sustain the tone of his entire narrative. He whispers, "Once upon a time, I whisper in the darkness, I used to command the words; now

I've become their plaything" (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 13).³ He slowly loses more of his memory and his ability to write. As he alternates between moments of lucidity and memory-loss, it becomes clear that he was married and he has a son, and he is being looked after by a caretaker at home. His inability to remember leads to confusions and paranoia, resulting in emotional outbursts and instability. His mental distress is combined with his physical weaknesses and his ailing body, whereby ageing and death overshadow his narrative. Consequently, through his story, we encounter how his sense of self comes apart in a rather painful fashion. This fragmentation is underscored particularly in the way he is alienated from the world as he used to know it, as well as the world of the words that he used to "reign."

Forgetting shapes *Nisyan's* world as the narrator forgets himself while approaching death (as depicted through evocative imagery) and a fragmented narration matches his mental condition. The 100 short pieces of text that make up the novella and his namelessness is a symbolic representation of his fragmenting self. It is vital for the narrator to remember so that he can maintain his sense of selfhood and remain in the world of the living. Yet, his ability to do so is frustratingly diminished and the narrative presents his struggle, suffering, despair, and fear of oblivion. One of the earlier fragments reads as follows:

Who are you?

The mirror is a hazy, dirty lake, stagnant. I can't see the details of my face through its pitch black silver clouds. There's someone looking towards me, squinting. Imitations keep the original alive. The man in the mirror speaks with the sentences of others. His voice is foreign, tremulous, coarse. I'm trying to clean the spit that accumulates in my throat as he speaks, feel like retching. At the age of bile my body is dark yellow. A filmy bridge oozing down my mouth disappears into the black hole of the sink. When I lift my head up so does he. He fluctuates on the surface of the lake of silver. He looks as if he wants to say something. In despair. As if he knows what to say but is unable to find the relevant words. I ask in order to help: Who are you? (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 18).⁴

³ 'Bir zamanlar, diye fisıldıyorum karanlığın içinde, kelimelere hükmederdim; şimdi onların oynacağı oldum'.

⁴ 'Kimsiniz? Ayna puslu, kirli bir göl kıpırtısız. Kapkara gümüş bulutlarının arasından yüzümün ayrıntılarını göremiyorum. Gözlerini kısıp bakan biri var bana doğru. Taklitler aslını yaşatır. Başkalarının cümleleriyle konuşuyor aynanın içindeki adam. Sesi yabancı, titrek, pürüzlü. O

This early depiction presents how the link between his memory loss and his sense of self is more than a metaphor. He does not remember who he is as the man in the mirror. The physical manifestation of his ageing in the form of the imagery of the abject, i.e. the spit, the bile, the retching join with the coarseness of his voice that he does not recognise, amalgamating the mental and the bodily for a composite portrait of self-estrangement. The text is often ambiguous about the boundaries between reality and metaphor in the portrayal of this self-estrangement and that ambiguity sustains and strengthens the complexity of the depiction of memory loss in it.

Eco's *Loana* also has a 'man in the mirror' scene at the initial stages of Yambo's memory loss. The protagonist sees himself in the mirror for the first time after his stroke and thinks, "I was fairly sure it was me, because mirrors, as everyone knows, reflect what is in front of them" (Eco, 2004, p. 9). Not recognising oneself in the mirror is surely a disconcerting experience. Yambo handles his situation through another literary reference, Mr Hyde: "I am a monster." The humour in the textual association is the character's compensation for the disquieting feeling of 'having a self in there somewhere', to whom he does not have access. Despite the difference in their tones, the shared emotional turmoil resulting from self-estrangement due to memory loss points out the works' analogous conceptualisation of the relationship between memory and selfhood.

In contrast to *Nisyan*, Umberto Eco's *Loana* is built on remembering as it begins with memory loss and moves towards a reconstruction. Yet, similar to its Turkish counterpart, the process begins with self-estrangement along the lines of personal identity and physical reality, i.e. his forgotten name and hospitalised body:

"And what's your name?"

"Wait, it's on the tip of my tongue."

That is how it all began.

I felt as if I had awoke from a long sleep, and yet was still suspended in a milky gray. Or else I was not awake, but dreaming. It was a strange dream, void of images, crowded with sounds. As if I could not see, but could hear voices that were telling me what I should have

konusurken boğazıma biriken tükürükleri temizlemeye çalışıyorum, öğürtü geliyor. Safra çağında bedenim koyu sarı. Ağzımdan incecik bir köprü lavabonun karadelğine inip kayboluyor. Kafamı kaldırdığımda o da kaldırıyor. Gümüş gölünün yüzeyinde dalgalanıyor. Bir şey anlatmak ister gibi bir hali var. Umutsuz. Ne diyeceğini biliyor ama ilgili sözcükleri bulamıyor sanki. Yardımcı olmak için soruyorum: Kimsiniz?'

been seeing. And they were telling me that I could not see anything yet, only a haziness along the canals where the landscape dissolved. Bruges, I said to myself, I was in Bruges. Had I ever been to Bruges the Dead? *Where fog hovers between the towers like incense dreaming? A gray city, sad as a tombstone with chrysanthemums, where mist hangs over the façades like tapestries . . .* (Eco, 2004, p. 3).

Having survived a stroke, remembering is Yambo's movement back to life by rebuilding his past. Although his narrative begins behind an obscuring veil, in which he needs to reacquire an understanding of his surroundings and his former life, it is still rich with the books that he has read. The initial seeming chaos and fragmentation leaves itself to a well-structured narrative of Yambo's journey to his past and to the roots of his sense of self. His is a mind that is anchored in the literature that he has read. This anchor enables him to stand on firm ground as he steers through remembering and re-establishes a sense of concreteness amidst the fog, a theme about which he was apparently obsessed and a key metaphor for memory loss in the novel.

The tone that is established in *Loana* is soft in comparison to the quakes of loss in *Nisyan*. In fact, from the very beginning, the story of Yambo is guided by quotations on fogs with associations to life that promise clarity. He quotes from *Gordon Pym*:

The gray vapor was gradually losing its grayness of tint, the heat of the water was extreme, and its milky hue was more evident than ever ... And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us.

I heard people talking around me, wanted to shout to let them know I was there (Eco, 2004, p. 4).

Following his stroke, Yambo is initially unable to communicate with the outside world. However, this physical sense of being trapped, 'not being heard' is mentally presented to him in the imagery of the slowly weakening fog. As such, the immovable, incommunicable nature of his bodily experience mentally opens up to free space in a way that has a soothing suggestion. Essentially, the impact of the highly distressing experience of not remembering one's identity and being immobile and unable to communicate is softened by a familiar world built on literary texts. Yambo, like *Nisyan's* unnamed narrator, is relying on other people's words. However, for him they serve as anchors back to life, while for his counterpart, they are the signs of the immense loss being experienced.

Yambo quotes from a Carl Sandburg poem, Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret, and Sherlock Holmes (all printed in italics) in a short space and goes on to connect his own experience (in regular font) as he comes around. While the narrative is fragmented to highlight the nature of his mental condition, the language is still suggestive of a meaningful coherence within chaos:

The fog comes on little cat feet . . . There was a fog that seemed to have taken the world away. Yet every so often it was as if I had opened my eyes and were seeing flashes. I could hear voices [...] Someone was aiming a light into my eyes, but after the light it was dark again. I could feel the puncture of a needle, somewhere. Maigret plunges into a fog so dense that he can't even see where he's stepping. ... The fog teems with human shapes, swarms with an intense, mysterious life. Maigret? Elementary, my dear Watson, there are ten little Indians, and the hound of the Baskervilles vanishes into the fog (Eco, 2004, p. 4).

The puncture of the needle leads to a soft plunge into a peopled fog. The ominous hound disappears as the rich imagery of Yambo's dance between the outside world and the inside of his mind links his narrative as a literary figure to the narratives of other literary figures, fashioning the novel's self-reflexive and playful intertextuality.

Postmodern texts are defined by their playful language, experimental narratives, intertextual associations, and metafiction references, all of which are present in Umberto Eco's novelistic writing to varying degrees. However, as Eric Schilling also emphasises, the relationship established among postmodern intertextuality, narrativity, and selfhood in *Loana* is different from his other literary works. Schilling argues that as various kinds of textual fragments, particularly "illustrations, comic books, textbooks, and magazines" replace Yambo's memory, they

actually do not emphasize the postulated authenticity of a fictional story by making it more plausible via the medium of image. Instead they foreground the fictional nature of the text. By the example of its protagonist, the text demonstrates that biography as well as historiography is essentially fictional in nature (2015, p. 806).

Following on Schilling's idea of fictionality along the lines of constructedness, the level of metafiction may be raised further to the Empirical Author Umberto Eco through the direct personal links between the novel and the novelist. JoAnn

Cannon quotes from an interview with Eco after the publication of *Loana*: “The majority of the memories of those times are my personal memories, and all the images of magazines, discs and comic books are the images of my personal memorabilia” (Cannon, 2007, p. 407). Moreover, in his works such as *Confessions of a Young Novelist* and *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Eco uses some of the very same quotes that Yambo does, establishing further links between the shared Empirical Author of the various texts and their intertextual and ideational worlds. These multi-layered metafiction traits lay bare the constructed and narrative nature of selfhood as maintained by memory: the memory of the author seeping into the novel to become the memory of the character, all of which textualised in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. Schilling notes, “It is not about constructing an entertaining plot that plays with historical elements from the safe-distance of the narrator but asking the existential question of one’s own identity” (Schilling, 2015, pp. 806-807). The novel’s playful approach to memory is a part of its literary existentialist philosophy with a postmodern attitude.

There is a needle scene in Gülsoy’s *Nisyan* as well that is comparable to the one in *Loana*. However, while the depiction of the moment of injection points to a relatively safe environment in Yambo’s experience of his condition, the one in *Nisyan* presents a stark contrast, as the writer-narrator has a paranoid outburst in response to the needle that draws blood. While the nurse “desperately” looks for his vein, he observes how his “arm is riddled with holes.” When she finally manages to fill “the tube” with the dark blood in its “dense consistency,” he has a meltdown blaming the nurse for “stealing [his] ink” (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 40).⁵ The writer-narrator is already traumatised by the loss of control resulting from his ageing body and the fragmentation of his memories. As his metaphor of ink, “the blood of writing” (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 26)⁶ transforms into a delusion in his tormented mind, it adds another layer of meaning to the relationship between his identity as a writer and his bodily materiality that betrays him in ageing. His paranoid state has a double meaning in the form of both a literary metaphor and a material depiction of the

⁵ ‘Kadın şefkatle dokunuyor yaralarım. Tatlı bir sesle konuşuyor, dinlemiyorum onu. Damarımı arıyor umutsuzca. Kolum delik deşik oldu. Yeter artık, diye bağıyorum. Hayır, bağırmıyorum. Kapının yanında bekleyen Adem için susuyorum. Kapı karanlık kuyu, az sonra yutacak onu. Kim bilir ne zaman geri verecek. Hemşire sonunda tüpü dolduruyor, koyu kıvamlı neredeyse siyah. Mürekkep ama bu! Hırsızlar mürekkebimi çalıyor. Onlara engel ol. Omuzlarımdan bastırıyorlar. Gücüm tükeniyor. Birdenbire kapı hepsini yutuyor. Kahve ister misin? Kadın şefkatle dokunuyor yaralarım.’

⁶ ‘yazının kanı’

character's mental condition as his fears are linked to his anxieties about losing a key sense of his self, namely, being a writer. Such associations of the literal and the metaphorical establish the narrative as being that of a writer and bring the storyline close to home, to literature in a way that is similar to that of Eco's *Loana*.

Yambo, upon waking up in a hospital room, feels "muddled, as if [he] were waking up after having drunk too much" (Eco, 2004, p. 5). Even though it is disconcerting, comparatively speaking, it is not too traumatising an awakening process. He acknowledges his condition, asking weakly in a "whisper" if he was sick. He is asked a series of basic questions, such as what "six times six" is, in response to which he goes off on one of his first associative tangents from thirty-six to "Pythagoras of Samos. Euclid's elements. The desperate loneliness of parallel lines that never meet," revealing to the doctor an "excellent memory" (Eco, 2004, p. 6). However, things get complicated when he is asked his own name: "That is where I hesitated. And yet I did have it on the tip of my tongue. After a moment I offered the most obvious reply. 'My name is Arthur Gordon Pym.'" He offers "Call me . . . Ishmael?" upon learning that he is not Arthur Gordon Pym. He is also told that they are in April, to which he replies "April is the cruelest month," and with this response, the doctor eventually pinpoints the problem with Yambo's memory: "I'm not very well read, but I think that's a quotation." In fact, Yambo speaks with the "sentences of others" more than the narrator of *Nisyan* does. As the doctor runs more tests, Yambo re-learns what brushing his teeth or listening to the water running felt like. The narrative of memory loss in the novel is thus set as the narrative of memory restoration that is gradual, progressive, and constructive. From the very beginning, Yambo's mental capabilities are intact, giving him enough sense of security and confidence to work with and setting an erudite and at times humorous tone.

In contrast to Yambo's coherent and in control first-person narration, the narrator of *Nisyan* is increasingly lost in the shadows and the chaos around him, the chaos that his broken, distressed mind projects upon the outside world. He has difficulties in recognising people, "their faces don't stay fixed. They lend them to one another; from mother to daughter, father to son pass the masks" (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 17).⁷ In the exhaustion of such moments, he also submits to "sudden immersing fog, sleep," although his exhaustion is characteristically different from that of Yambo in its roughness. The images and sounds in *Loana* point to a temporary loss of

⁷ 'yüzleri sabit kalmıyor. Birbirlerine ödünç veriyorlar, anadan kıza, babadan oğula geçiyor maskeler'.

perspective, whereas those in *Nisyan* represent the empty shell of what once was now lacking its substance. *Nisyan*'s protagonist is experiencing what Andrew Blaike defines as "deep old age" (cited in Chupin) whereby life is defined primarily through "lack" (Chupin, 2013, p. 198). For the narrator of *Nisyan*, "Life multiplies as the absence of some people. Time doesn't pass, only the emptiness amplifies" (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 17).⁸ As Yambo remembers his quotes one after another, making up the impressive intertextuality of *Loana*, *Nisyan*'s writer-narrator loses everything that matters to him, including his words.

This crucial loss of *Nisyan*'s writer-narrator is represented in the symbolism of "yellow post-it notes" that pile up around him but never amount to an actual narrative, either that of himself or his final novel. Initially these yellow pieces of paper serve to remind him of practical details like medication times, phone numbers, and names of things. However, in time, filled with "scribbles," they are "everywhere." The more he feels lost the more these little notes take over. In their not-becoming his final novel, they become the potent image of the loss of his sense of selfhood as a writer. Paralleling this symbolism and in a formalistic experiment that complements the content, the fragments that make up the actual narrative emulate the gradual memory loss of the character. *Nisyan* as a novella-in-fragments is the narrative of not being/becoming a novel and stylistically embodies its subject matter.

Postmodern Textualities

Both Umberto Eco and Murat Gülsoy are interested in the textual and meta-textual possibilities of literature. What makes their comparison particularly engaging is the complementary and distinctive ways in which they draw on metafiction in their works. Separate from his academic work, Gülsoy regularly teaches creative writing workshops. In *Büyübozumu* (2004, Breaking the Spell), his collection of lectures on the topic, he brings together the practices of close reading of narratives and the dynamics of writing them, discussing the ways in which an active reading process raises questions about how a literary text is written. Accordingly, he portrays the idea of writing-as-a-process in *Nisyan* and creates a narrative that invites the reader to the world of the written word in the process of being written. However, although he fundamentally explores the writing-self, his actual choice of its negation diverts the attention to the significations of its loss. For

⁸ 'Hayat birilerinin eksikliği olarak çoğalıyor. Zaman geçmiyor, boşluk çoğalıyor sadece'.

Gülsoy, these significations are essential in the establishment of selfhood. As he argues in *Büyübozumu*, narrating and telling stories are an innate part of being human, it is a “fundamental mental process” (Gülsoy, 2004, p. 80),⁹ and thus, its loss stands out as an imperative issue. Gülsoy explores this loss in a dramatic fashion by doubling up its effect through a narrator who is also a writer. *Nisyan*’s protagonist gradually loses his memories and his ability to recall and retell his own story due to dementia. He also loses his ability to tell stories professionally, as a writer, for the same cognitive reasons. His loss of his sense of selfhood is, therefore, forceful and comprehensive in its multi-level manifestation.

As a literary scholar, Eco discusses narrative structures and the agency of the reader in the interpretation of the text. In his *Role of the Reader*, he proposes that the author has to “foresee a model of the possible reader,” through his choices of certain linguistic codes, literary styles, and specific specialisations (Eco, 1984, p. 7). Moreover, this Model Reader is not only foreseen by the author but also created by the text through such choices, as the Model Reader would be expected to engage with the text in a particular way that would shape their reception of it. Read in the context of Eco’s scholarly work, *Loana* is probably the novelist’s most self-aware text in terms of such narrative possibilities. With its openly paraded intertextuality, Eco aims for a very specific type of reader who could follow the overcoded “inferences by intertextual frames” (Eco, 1984, p. 21). In fact, the significance of *Loana*’s metafiction self-awareness lies in the overcoding of this overcoded “discursive structure.” Yambo himself is a “sterile genius” (Eco, 2004, p. 31) in his qualities as a reader, that is, he is first and foremost a Reader. Intertextuality not only makes up a major portion of his story but also complements its portrayal of memory. Both Yambo and the Model Reader need their specialised memories to make sense of the intertextuality of the narrative at hand. *Loana*’s potential Model Reader would have a strong taste for reading as a practice, recognise Yambo’s literary quotations, and appreciate the importance of previously written texts in finding refuge against memory loss.

In a way, Eco’s *Loana* is the self-reflexive glorification of literature and its permanence presented through its wealth of intertextual references. Yambo’s profession as an antiquarian book dealer is rather symbolic in that sense. He is not just an extremely well read man with an extraordinary memory who can quote

⁹ ‘Hikâye temel bir zihinsel işlevdir’. Gülsoy gives examples from experiments on the links between brain surgery and cognitive processes along the lines of the resolution of gaps in self-narration.

numerous texts from a multitude of genres and periods (and in different languages, too) with ease. He is also an expert on very old and valuable books that has survived time as both written texts and material artefacts. The written word as such promises a form of material permanence alongside its longevity in the form of knowledge. Moreover, the diverse range of works that Yambo quotes in his attempts to build his personal memory is essentially the building of not just his life, or even the modern history of Italy, but a collective memory of the literary that transcends all. Similar to the way dealing antiquarian books presents Yambo with the permanence of a “fixed point, the day that Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Mainz, to go back to” (Eco, 2004, p. 122), written literature, in *Loana*, underlines the different possibilities of permanence in the inevitability of the passing of life, as well as against memory loss.

In contrast, Gülsoy presents memory in its negation and underlines a strong sense of transience. The protagonist cannot remember life and living enough to be able to remain connected to a sensible narrative whether in the shape of his life, his memory, or his writing. He cannot remember the books he has written, even though he remembers he has written books. He cannot remember the name of his wife who is herself long dead. In fact, he cannot remember her in general. She appears in his mind as a shadow of something that was once present, a ghost accompanied by an indefinable pain. In essence, he feels that he is “being disintegrated slowly” (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 96)¹⁰ towards death. Contrasting images of life and death are juxtaposed in his dream world in a way that emphasises the mental and physical exhaustion of such a fragmented existence:

If I knew my name, I could die.

Smooth white surface. I touch it. A tingling feeling. I’m dreaming. I’m weightless. White stone grave is ready my name must be written on it. Apricots, peaches, ripe cherries hanging down from fruit trees. I must pick them. If I knew my name I could die. I laugh at my cantabile phrases. I put plums walnuts cherry laurels on the plates. Old friends have come for help. Joy laughter lightness. If only you knew we’re inside a dream. Ah if only you knew, could you still laugh? What a shame: I wake up to an achy body. There’s only an ominous

¹⁰ ‘ayrıştırılıyorum yavaş yavaş’

song. Its lyrics sharp. If I knew my name, I could die (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 98).¹¹

In the growing impossibility of the fragments of memories amounting to a meaningful totality and the consequent turmoil that overshadows the glimpses of whatever joyful ones are left, death is not just an inevitability but a possibility of inner peace, at times impatiently awaited.

The ways in which memory loss is formulated in the works set the pace and the tone of their narratives. In *Loana*, the immediacy of memory loss establishes a clear awareness of the state of things, an intellectual engagement with the experience, and a focus on recovery. Yambo, despite his initial difficulties, is an active agent of remembering. He is aware that he is faced with a medical condition, the knowledge of which enables him to establish a plan for a constructive healing process through self-search. Therefore, the tone of the narrative is exploratory and even the moments of melancholy, like those of the fogs he quotes, are short-lived with the promise of light at the end of the tunnel. This outlook makes the narrative expand outwards towards an opening.

In *Nisyan*, forgetting renders the narrator passive; it is essentially a loss of power, stripping him off his agency. The pathology of dementia manifests itself as an extremely confusing experience, instigating fear and anxiety. As Naomi Kruger puts it, such “existence without story” and the terrifying challenge of not being able to maintain a coherent narrative of one’s self is a “break between soul and body” (Kruger, 2015, p. 123). The narrator’s physical existence in the face of such a break ceases to be a stabilising point as he reaches out “to meet his soul that is wandering around the columns of past civilisations” in a landscape with water nymphs and dancing natives (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 85).¹² In the grip of his dementia,

¹¹ ‘Adımı bilseydim ölebilirdim. Pürüzsüz beyaz yüzey. Elimi sürüyorum. Gıdıklayıcı bir his. Rüya görüyorum. Ağırleksizim. Beyaz taş mezar hazır üzerinde adım yazmalı. Meyve ağaçlarından sarkan kayısılar şeftaliler olgun kirazlar. Toplamalı. Adımı bilseydim ölebilirdim. Gülüyorum şarkılı sözlerime. Tabaklara koyuyorum erikler cevizler karayemişler. Eski dostlar yardıma gelmiş. Neşe kahkaha hafiflik. Bilmeniz bir rüyanın içinde olduğumuzu. Ah bir bilseniz, yine gülebilir misiniz? Ne yazık: Ağrılı bir bedene uyanıyorum. Uğursuz bir şarkı var sadece. Sözleri sivri. Adımı bilseydim ölebilirdim’.

¹² ‘Kuşkulu bir yerindeyim mekanın. Geçmiş uygarlıkların sütunları arasında dolaşan kayıp ruhumla buluşmak için ellerimi uzatıyorum. Bir zamanlar bu sütunların arasında gezinen teknelerde. Su perileri şeffaf. Yerlilerin dansları. O adam kim? Parmaklarının arasında dumanlar. Dimdik. Asla yorulmayan perçemler. Güçlü kollar. Hepsi film mi? Rutubet karartıyor tüm yaşananları. Bütün şehir ağır ağır çürüyor. Yosunlu taşların üzerinde sıçanlar akıllı. Beyaz dişleri. Ölüler ırmağının kıyısında zehirli çiçekler açıyor. Ben. Ellerim sadece ıslak ahşaba değiyor. Bir gemi hayali kuran tabut. Kuşkulu bir yerindeyim mekanın’.

however, his vision of his long-lost past soon transforms into a “slowly rotting” one with “venomous flowers” blooming “on the shores of the river of death.” The man that was once “Upright. Tireless forelocks. Strong arms” finds himself “in a suspicious location in space” and the ark in which he floats is revealed to be a coffin dreaming of being an ark.

Metaphoric Anchors

The image of the ark has a key place in the narrative with its multitude of interchangeable allusions to life and death. It is a boat that travels in the river of life (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 85), the narrator’s life itself of which he is the captain now lonesome (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 28), the stage of his one-man act (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 32), and the unstable vessel that shakes in the rough waters of his memory (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 26). It is both the vessel of life as journey and himself travelling that journey. It is both the ageing body represented as the old, dried out wood and the eventual symbol of a coffin, the ominous inevitability of death. The ark is also presented as the narrator’s home and adds another level of figurative materiality to the depiction of dementia: “House. It hasn’t been my home for a long time. An ark filled with the copies of what once used to be mine, old. It’s as if we’re travelling in stormy weather. The boundaries of the world are closing in upon us. The time is running out” (Gülsoy, 2013, p. 19).¹³ As the creaking of the floorboards of the house matches the groans of the planks of the ark, his home, a place that is supposed to offer security and refuge becomes destabilising and sinister in his fragmented mind. While he struggles to remember, the only thing that still contains the remnants of his life transforms into a diminished world with locked doors (to keep him off from wandering) that trap him.

The protagonist of *Nisyan* experiences his memory loss as a gradual transformation in the way he perceives the world around him. He is depicted in an intensely introverted existence that distances him from his present time. As the world around him dissolves into a reality that he cannot make sense of anymore and leads to a feeling of entrapment, the sense of security that would be constructed around the home and the state of being ‘at-home’ness’ are threatened and in return become threatening. This sense of insecurity at home and the inability to replace what is lost aggravate the experience of the character’s memory

¹³ ‘Ev. Benim evim değil nicedir. Bir zamanlar benim olanların kopyalarıyla doldurulmuş bir gemi, eski. Fırtınalı bir havada yolculuk ediyoruz sanki. Dünyanın sınırları üzerimize yaklaşıyor. Süre daralıyor’.

loss. He thus suffers great distress and turmoil as his sense of selfhood is shattered further with the loss of the things that could alleviate his agony.

Similarly, *Loana's* Yambo seems to have conflicted feelings about his "childhood home" in Solara where life and self began. His wife reminds him that his "relationship with that house has always been bizarre" (Eco, 2004, p. 33) and that he had "made a clean break" (Eco, 2004, p. 34) from it. Still, in contrast to Gülsoy's portrayal of home in *Nisyan*, the symbolism of Yambo's move from his current home to his childhood one contributes to the positive undertones of the representation of memory loss. His wife, a psychologist by profession, recommends that he visit his family home in Solara in order to gain entry to his "caverns of memory" (Eco, 2004, pp. 74-75). Inspired by *The Man with a Shattered World* by A.R. Luria, in which a war veteran with a brain injury finds his way back to his memories through writing, she believes that something there, among the papers of his childhood, might "hit home" for him. Accordingly, Yambo's remembering process is pitched as a form of homecoming, both a return to an authentic self and a time-space of its foundation.

Once in Solara, Yambo walks around the large house with its many rooms. He comes across many books in the study, the attic, and the chapel. He browses through these books and other collectibles and strives to remember. In fact, his childhood home transforms into an actual, physical memory palace and his personal memory becomes the collective memory of a family legacy: he is the heir of his grandfather, another "seller and collector of books" (Eco, 2004, p. 100). While in Part I the quotations he remembers are his primary source of knowledge during his initial aphasia, the many books those quotations come from are in the forefront in Part II. Both the quotations and the memory-work gain a material existence in this second section, as the obsessive process of citing leaves its place to the equally obsessive process of reading. In fact, his excavation of the "fog of [his] past" (Eco, 2004, p. 118) promises a treasure hunt in an extraordinary collection. Through the merger of the symbolic signification of homecoming with that of the physical materialisation of the concept of the memory palace, Eco constructs a palimpsest of images, symbols, metaphors, texts, and codes in a cleverly multi-layered fashion. Rocco Capozzi outlines the levels of Eco's integrated spatial-textual playground: "he employs the metaphor of the attic/storage in order to illustrate intertextual echoes of several other architectural metaphors dealing with memory dating as far back as to Aristotle and St. Augustine: the cave, palace, museum, theatre of memory, Wunderkammer etc." (Capozzi, 2006, p. 465).

A metaphor becomes a real physical space where Yambo voraciously reads the books, looks at the images, and listens to the music of his childhood in search for who he is. However, while his present “memory of one day blurs into the next” (Eco, 2004, p. 117), the mood and the mode of his self-reconstruction is reversed. As an entire textual world opens up for him to explore, pulled into that world, he grows introverted. His healing process is set back by the intense, erratic and disorderly fashion that he takes upon the quest, putting his health at risk once again. Triggered by an exciting find, his obsessive dive into the textual world of his past eventually leads to another stroke. In his final coma, he truly remembers the home and the self that he had left behind, as the narrative time of Part III slows down in the moments of his death to reveal the story of who Yambo is.

Conclusion

The portrayal of the loss of a sense of selfhood in *Nisyan* through the narrator’s memory loss is striking and powerful particularly because of the concision of the text, as well as its rich and intense imagery. The playfully intertextual metafiction of *Loana*, on the other hand, presents a portrayal of selfhood and memory in an equally rich and colourful fashion but in a rather different tone and mood. Reading these two texts from different literary traditions comparatively shows how questions of selfhood and memory are similarly associated in different linguistic contexts and share analogous postmodern sensibilities despite their divergent methods. Both Umberto Eco’s *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* and Murat Gülsoy’s *Nisyan* explore remembering and forgetting through multi-layered and integrated narrativities that highlight their innate interconnectedness. By means of their creative approaches, they also encourage novel ways of talking about selfhood as a dynamic construct not only in its formation but also in its disintegration. Their distinct depictions of memory loss confirm how literary texts bear a great potential in extrapolating upon the multifaceted complexities of selfhood.

The writers’ choices of a reader-self (*Loana*) and a writer-self (*Nisyan*) as narrators contribute a textual self-reflexivity to the works’ suggested multi-layered and integrated narrativities. The added metafiction level as presented in the acts of reading and writing becomes the postmodern thematic and formalistic thread that holds the narratives together while also underlining the dynamism and unreliability of the different narrativities (memory, selfhood, fiction) proposed in the texts. Furthermore, in these works, memory loss does not merely serve as a convenient literary device to explore the constructed nature of selfhood, memory and

narrativity. The inclusion of the theme of ageing in the form of a medicalised portrayal of memory loss complements the complexities of selfhood in the texts by implementing the bodily experience, once again, through an emphasis on negation. Consequently, the interconnection between memory loss as an ailment and finitude of physical existence in ageing underlines the implications of the discussions on selfhood and memory in terms of a matter of life and death, the limitations of selfhood, and inferentially, the meaning of life. Through the “mysterious flame” and the “flickering fragments” of memory, Eco and Gülsoy thus propose a postmodern literary existentialism.

References

- Akşehir-Uygur, M. (2017). Murat Gülsoy. In B. Alkan & Ç. Günay-Erkol (Eds.) *Turkish Novelists Since 1960 Second Series (DLB 379)*. (pp. 119-128). Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Cengage.
- Borges, J.L. (1975). Cambridge. *In praise of darkness*. (N. di Giovanni, Trans.) (p.23). London: Allen Lane.
- Cannon, J. (2007). Lost in the fictional woods with Umberto Eco: La misteriosa fiamma della Regina Loana in the context of Eco’s oeuvre. *Forum italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies*, 41(2), 403-416.
- Capozzi, R. (2006). The mysterious flame of Queen Loana: A postmodern historiographic illustrated novel of a generation. *Forum italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies*, 40(2), 462-486.
- Chupin, H. (2013). Growing old and searching for identity in Anne Tyler’s *Noah’s Compass* (2009) and Umberto Eco’s *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004). In U. Kribernegg & R. Maierhofer (Eds.). *The ages of life: Living and aging in conflict?* (pp. 193-209). Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Eco, U. (1984). *The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (2004). *The mysterious flame of Queen Loana*. (G. Brock, Trans.) New York: Harcourt.
- Eco, U. (2011). *Confessions of a young novelist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gülsoy, M. (2004). *Büyübozumu: Yaratıcı yazarlık kurmacanın bilinen sırları ve ihlal edilebilir kuralları*. Istanbul: Can Yayınları.

- Gülsoy, M. (2013). *Nisyan*. Istanbul: Can Yayınları.
- Kruger, N. (2015). The “terrifying question mark”: Dementia, fiction, and the possibilities of narrative. In A. Swinnen & M. Schweda (Eds.). *Popularizing dementia: Public expressions and representations of forgetfulness*. (pp. 109-133). Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Ronch, J.L. (1996). Mourning and grief in late life Alzheimer’s dementia: Revisiting the vanishing self. *American Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease* (July/August), 25-28.
- Sabat, S.R. & Harré, R. (1992). The construction and deconstruction of self in Alzheimer’s Disease. *Ageing and Society*, 12, 443-461.
- Schilling, E. (2015). Umberto Eco between postmodernism and narrative: Il nome della rosa, Il pendolo di Foucault, and La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana. *Forum italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies*, 49(3), 800-811.
- Taylor, K. (2020). *Dementia: A very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whitehead, A. (2009). *Memory*. New York: Routledge.

Summary

This article compares a contemporary Italian novel, Umberto Eco’s *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) and a contemporary Turkish novella, Murat Gülsoy’s *Nisyan* (2013, *Oblivion*) along the lines of the way they handle the relationship between memory and selfhood. It discusses the ways in which the narratives utilize the processes of remembering and forgetting in the construction and fragmentation of their characters’ senses of selfhood. Moreover, the choice of the acts of reading and writing and their impact on selfhood in the works renders such a comparison particularly meaningful in terms of the general appreciation of the writers’ literary endeavours.

The protagonist of *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* is an antiquarian bookseller who suffers from memory loss due to a stroke. He wakes up at a hospital not remembering who he is. However, curiously, he remembers all the books he has read in his lifetime to the extent of being able to quote extensively from them. Beginning with such an extensive bookish memory, the narrative follows his process of remembering and thus re-establishing his sense of selfhood. His journey through the fragments of his memory takes him to his childhood home whereby the spatial experiences of home, combined with long-forgotten memories of his childhood, present both a literal and a metaphorical memory palace. Consequently, he seeks to stabilise his sense of selfhood through an obsessive remembering process that includes books and other kinds of memorabilia as a form of connecting back to life.

In Murat Gülsoy’s *Nisyan*, however, the protagonist experiences a slow memory loss as the process of losing his sense of selfhood. Suffering from dementia and the various ailments of old age, the nameless protagonist of the narrative struggles to keep his heavily fragmented self together and remain anchored to life as he knows it. Gülsoy’s protagonist is a writer and his connection to life (or lack thereof) is very much connected to his writerly self. As a result, his gradual memory loss leads him to suffer from a double-layered fragmentation of his sense of selfhood. He not only loses his memories that establish who he

is but also grows unable to write because of it and this inability further fragments his selfhood as a writer. The narrative presents his slow departure from life through a hallucinatory state as his sense of selfhood dismantles due his dementia.

Both novelists employ various postmodern techniques in order to establish a multi-layered set of associations among the narrativities of their novels, the experiences of reading and writing, the concept of selfhood, and the processes of memory work. Umberto Eco, being a semiotician and a postmodern theorist of literature (both in terms of the writing and the reading experiences), makes use of meta- and inter- textuality in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. The many works his protagonist quotes from throughout the narrative establish not only the intertextual structure of the work but also the textuality and fictionality of both personal and historical memory. Furthermore, Eco's metatextual references expand beyond the novel in question and towards his own life as a writer as he himself mentions in his interviews. The novel thus becomes one big extended narrative of its protagonist, its writer and the broader literary world that it belongs.

Murat Gülsoy, who is also very much interested in the metatextual nature of postmodern narratives both in terms of their production and consumption, chooses to emphasise its writerly mode. In the inability of his protagonist to write his final novel, the creative act of writing in its relation to other mental processes are portrayed in an inseparable state. Whether it is in the form of memory or along the lines of the pathology of hallucinations, both the establishment of selfhood and the act of literary writing are connected narratively at a metatextual level of awareness. As such, the fragmented nature of the novella itself, the unwritten novel of the protagonist, his dismantling memory, and the actual physical book that contains it all form an extended, multi-layered narrative on narratives similar to Eco's work yet still unique in its own right. Its exploration of a broken writerly self exposes its metatextual level in its fragmentation and oblivion.

Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* and Murat Gülsoy's *Nisyan* are two rich texts that demand an active agency on the reader's side in order to view the ways in which narrativity at its different modes work. This attitude reveals the postmodern drives and expectations of their respective writers as well as proposing the textual natures of memory and selfhood (in their construction and destruction) from a literary perspective.