

Intertextuality in Beckett's and Ağaoğlu's Work

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Volume 16 Issue 1 (March 2014) Article 2**Elmas Şahin,****"Intertextuality in Beckett's and Aġaoġlu's Work"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss1/2>>

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Abstract: In her article "Intertextuality in Beckett's and Aġaoġlu's Work" Elmas Şahin discusses Adalet Aġaoġlu's 1973 novel *Ölmeye Yatmak* (Lying Down to Die) and Samuel Beckett's 1950 *Malone Dies* in terms of intertextuality. Şahin employs tenets of comparative literature in order to analyze the two texts with regard to form and content and focuses on the on protagonists' worlds. In Şahin's interpretation, Aġaoġlu's protagonist Aysel is narrated in postmodern intertextuality as an individual of our days alienated from society, searching for her self/selves as she cannot succeed in dying. Both Beckett's and Aġaoġlu's protagonists attempt to "escape" from their selves and are alienated from the world and their environments and thus they represent postmodern narration.

Elmas ŞAHİN

Intertextuality in Aġaoġlu's Work

I begin with a definition of intertextuality proposed by Marko Juvan in his 2008 *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*:

The concept in literary theory led to the formation of views of literature as a self-referential system that changes and guides itself by its own means, and at the same time remains ever integrated in the network of other discourses. Intertextuality fundamentally altered theories of the production, existence, structure, meaning, function, and reception of literary works. It turned out that texts cocreate the social construction of reality and that they do not represent the so-called extra-textual world directly (via mimesis), but only through an unobtrusive filter of clichés, of previous textualizations (semiosis). The category of intertextuality was tested with equal success in literary history: not only in scholarship that dealt with fashionable postmodernism and metafiction or the forms, genres, and styles with obvious intertextual connections (e.g., citations, allusions, parody, pastiche, baroque, avant-garde, and acmeism), but in the reexamination of the recondite affiliations of literary works—belonging to different periods, cultural spaces, and genres—with their sociocultural, linguistic-ideological, and aesthetic contexts. In this way intertextuality could open fresh insights into the text's position in literary processes, traditions, canons, and mechanisms of intercultural and interliterary interaction. ... The concept of intertextuality ... is in accordance with some other principles of Tötösy de Zepetnek's proposal for comparative literature within comparative cultural studies (see *Comparative Literature* 13-17, 30-31): intertextuality is essentially a cross-cultural phenomenon linking together not only one national literature with other — including marginal, peripheral — literatures and cultures, but also, within a given semiosphere, mainstream literary production with its past, forgotten forms, and marginal, subaltern, or emergent subsystems; finally, intertextuality structures the text's affiliation and response to its cultural contexts — of other arts, social discourses (from politics to science), sociolects, ideologies, ways of living, and media. (4-7)

Several types of above characteristics of intertextuality are found in Adalet Aġaoġlu's work, one of the most important women authors of contemporary Turkish-language literature. In the study at hand, I am comparing Adalet Aġaoġlu's 1973 novel *Ölmeye Yatmak* (Lying Down to Die; the novel has not been published in English translation yet) with Samuel Beckett's 1951 *Malone Dies* in terms of intertextuality. Beckett's works show characteristics of intertextuality with regard to Marcel Proust and in turn, Aġaoġlu writes texts with intertextual characteristics with regard to texts by Beckett, Faulkner, and Huxley.

I consider the work of Aġaoġlu postmodern and thus take a brief detour to discuss postmodernism first. It emerged and developed after the 1950s as an artistic, philosophical, and cultural movement. The study of postmodernism came to prominence in the mid-1980s and during this time the concept started to appear "in all directions across different debates, different disciplinary and discursive boundaries as different factions seek to make it their own, using it to designate a plethora of incommensurable objects, tendencies, emergencies" in different disciplines, such as art, music, film, literature, sociology, architecture, communications, fashion, technology and gender studies (Woods 2). According to Jean-François Lyotard, the term postmodern means "incredulity toward meta-narrative" and a culture of pluralism rises in modernism (xxiv). Postmodern fictions carry features such as parody, irony, play, display, tragedy, deconstruction, loss of self, self-seeking, loss of consciousness, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, the past, and asylum in an effort to live with the postmodern conditions. As the theorist Ihab Hassan also says, the most important features of a postmodern work are reflected in the words of the heroes: they are lucky and equipped with absurd actions, they are devoid of moral behavior, alienated from the environment, their life is full of irony and contradictions and they have (115-18).

We find postmodern approaches in the sciences, history, psychology, sociology, religion, etc., and one of its main components is that knowledge is understood not as an absolute right and the postmodern realizes new literary genres as open and meta-textual, thus intertextual: the postmodern "is defined so variously that it is, currently, akin to such terms as 'the Imagination,' 'history,' or 'Postmodernism' terms which are ... underdetermined in meaning and overdetermined in figuration ... Intertextuality, one of the central ideas in contemporary literary theory, is not a transparent term and so, despite its confident utilization by many theorists and critics, cannot be evoked in an uncomplicated manner" (Allen 2). Postmodernists believe that "truth" in ideas and experience are imperfect and "fluid." That is, postmodernists argue that objective truth is unknowable and that the essence of the individual is questionable. They question the nature of truth and reality and thus

knowledge is contextualized by its cultural and historical references. Thus, postmodern thinkers reject universal knowledge or the "truths" of the Enlightenment's socio-cultural, theological, historical, philosophic, aesthetic, etc., products which are marks of the modernist world and they suggest new approaches and opt for self-consciousness, parody, irony, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, simultaneity, and the breakdown between high and low forms of artistic expression and production. Postmodern writers use tropes including the nostalgic past, historical fantasies, flashback techniques, new formations, popular cultures, hair styles, clothes, absence, breaking of family ties, etc. Writers in the West who are considered postmodern include, for example, Borges, Beckett, Nabokov, Barth, Barthelme, etc., and in Turkish literature prominent postmodern writers are Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Oğuz Atay, Orhan Pamuk (with several novels and who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, İhsan Oktay Anar, Süreyya Evren, Murat Gülsoy, Mehmet Açar, Latife Tekin, and Hilmi Yavuz.

Following Juvan's definition above, intertextuality is the creation of a text in an other text or a complex relationship between different texts. In a way, the writer reinterprets the texts which he/she encounters. According to Julia Kristeva — the main early proponent of the notion of intertextuality — the author is no longer just a product of a literary work: there are also links to other works in addition to its own structure and thus intertextuality "is the absorption and transformation of one another, a mosaic of quotations (66) although I would put "quotations" to indicate that the "mosaic" is not direct in most cases. Another take on this would be that the "new" "text cannot be independent of any text in another text" (Hawkes 144). In intertextuality narration can contain references to other texts and thus the writer creates a new text, re-writes, recreates, excerpts thoughts, ideas, etc. — directly or indirectly — and thus it is "intertextualized" from preceding texts to the "new." The style of a text, technique, content, or character's aspects can concern a writer as an important point or view and thus the importance of intertextuality. The writer's aim is to enrich his/her text with new meanings ascribed. Hence postmodern writers ascribe and inscribe the "new" text and thus the "new" text is associative. The discipline of comparative literature enacts "the study of relationships between two or more literatures" (Wellek and Warren 39) and thus the intertextual is a basic tenet of the discipline. In comparative literature relations are studied between preceding or contemporary works and are reviewed with regard to interaction. Thus comparative literature has "intrinsically a content and form which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature" (Tötösy de Zepetnek 13).

With the concept of *Weltliteratur* introduced in 1828 by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (see, e.g., Birus <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1090>>), in comparative literature the study of the literatures of all cultures is an objective and as Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek argues, the discipline's appeal remains — at best without Eurocentrism and the nation approach — as a contribution to the notion of the global and international: "What is remarkable — and this is paid scant attention to in Anglophone comparative literature or world literatures scholarship — is that both the concept of the discipline, as well as its institutional presence are advancing in so-called 'peripheral' languages and cultures including Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, Greek, etc., and this is the case also in Latin American languages, Chinese, Indian languages, in Arabic or Farsi (e.g., a new journal was founded in 2010 — entitled *Comparative Literature Journal* — published by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature and several new departments of comparative literature were also inaugurated)" (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári 4; on more recent work about comparative literature and world literatures, see also Boruszko and Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/>>; Grishakova, Boldrini, Arnolds <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss7/>>; Juvan <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/>>). Importantly, what is occurring with regard to comparative literature outside of the centers of the discipline (i.e., Europe and the U.S.), it is also gaining in Turkish scholarship in a perspective both inward and outward oriented: "in order to develop our own literature, look at literature of other nations, browse, understand what they are doing" (Aytaç 21; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Here are a few examples published in the last two decades: Mesut Tekşan's 2012 *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi* (The Science of Comparative Literature), Kamil Aydın's 2008 *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat: Günümüz Postmodern Bağlamda Algılanışı* (Comparative Literature and Its Perception in Today's Postmodern Context), Emel Kefeli's 2000 *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat İncelemeleri* (Comparative Literature Studies), Gürsel Aytaç's 1997

Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi (The Science of Comparative Literature), and İnci Enginün's 1992 *Mukayeseli Edebiyat* (Comparative Literature).

Now I turn to Ağaoğlu's novel: in *Lying Down to Die* we find both the theme and style of Beckett's fiction in intertextual and postmodern perspectives and this confirms Nirmala Jain's position that "in some cases it would be impossible to capture the spirit of a particular movement or a particular trend in its entirety, without reference to more than one literature" (81). Therefore, I examine Ağaoğlu's and Beckett's work in order to apply "comparative literature is the analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. It further studies themes, modes, conventions and the use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more" (Das 1; for a socio-literary analysis of Ağaoğlu's novels see, e.g., Baskal). Ağaoğlu's novel was published nearly twenty years after Beckett's *Malone Dies*. Beckett narrated the collapse of the cognitive and physical self where the protagonist Malone expects to die in a room and where he does not know where he is. This is in anticipation of various stories he tells: he is in search for identity. Moreover, he waits for dying in his bed, but he is still alive at the end of the work. However Ağaoğlu also tells Aysel's story, a professor lying down to die in a hotel room in Ankara. The novel begins at 7:22 am and ends at 8:49 am. Ağaoğlu narrates Aysel's inner life and her childhood in flashbacks from 1938 until 1968 by means of inner dialogues with herself. The protagonists Malone and Aysel wait for dying in the same intertextual postmodern situation. Both characters are on quests, try to live the past, moment, and future in similar ways. They appear as characters on the verge of physical destruction in self-seeking and helplessness.

What I propose is that when we compare these two narratives in the context of intertextual relations, we see that Ağaoğlu's text emerges by intertextual impact from *Malone Dies*. Both Beckett's and Ağaoğlu's characters expect to die in a small room. Why do they stay in a room? Why do they want to die? Do they really dream of dying? Is Death of salvation for them? When will death come? Neither Malone nor Aysel know the answers to these questions. More precisely, the protagonists are not aware of anything. Aysel and Malone are incapable and are in mental depression and physical collapse. Malone is crippled and waits for death in his bed and Aysel feels incapable of action. Neither know when the death comes for them and they feel weak, helpless, and strange: they are afraid of dying although they want to die. Malone says that "I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all. Perhaps next month. Then it will be the month of April or of May. For the year is still young, a thousand little signs tell me so. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps I shall survive Saint John the Baptist's Day and even the Fourteenth of July, festival of freedom" (1) and Aysel speaks in a similar way although she is not crippled, but she is weak: "I lay motionless in bed. I entered a warm room to die. My naked body is clean, still cold on the starched linens. I'm tremble under the blanket. This chill brings me death, and death away. Perhaps a death shake. But I understand, this shimmer shows me that I wasn't dead" (26). Aysel is similar to Malone naked in bed: "I am naked in the bed, in the blankets, whose number I increase and diminish as the seasons come and go. I am never hot, never cold. I don't wash, but I don't get dirty. If I get dirty somewhere I rub the part with my finger wet with spittle" (7).

Both Malone and Aysel question themselves in a consciously and unconsciously way. Beckett and Ağaoğlu narrate streams of consciousness of characters by simple sentences in similar way. Malone: "I shall not watch myself die, that would spoil everything. Have I watched myself live? Have I ever complained? Then why rejoice now? ... What was that I said? It does not matter" (1-2). Aysel: "I did not know that I would also lie down to die around eight in the morning. I was sensing, but delaying it. I wonder, was that so? Did I not know really? Have I decided it is in a consequence of incompetence?" (45). On the one hand they want to die and on the other hand to delay death, but they want to extend life by mentioning objects and their pasts and futures, yet both hesitate about to die or not to die and Aysel says as if replying to Malone: "Because I have not yet completed my death what must I do? Should I wait" (101) and Malone: "My desire is henceforward to be clear, without being finical. I have always wanted that too. It is obvious I may suddenly expire, at any moment. Would it not then be better for me to speak of my possessions without further delay? Would not that be wiser?" (3).

One of the most interesting correspondences between the two texts is the quest of "self": a sense of belonging, self-seeking, the back-and-forth between reality and dream, weakness of consciousness. While Beckett's protagonist is a man and Ağaoğlu's a woman, their common feature is to wait for

death in a small room. Malone does not know exactly where he is, but he tries to estimate: "I do not know quite what floor I am on, perhaps I am only on the mezzanine. The doors banging, the steps on the stairs, the noises in the street, have not enlightened me, on this subject. All I know is that the living are there, above me and beneath me. It follows at least that I am not in the basement" (44). And Aysel goes to a hotel and remains on the sixteenth floor of the hotel: because she came consciously there, she knows where she is. However, she is incapable of knowing how many days she has stayed there or whether she will stay there: "We full went sixteen-flats by the lift. We got on the sixteenth floor. I am walking after the boy to show room to me. He passed a short corridor. He stood in front of a room. Therefore, I stopped. He opened the door and we entered. I turned all lights off. I quickly undressed. I opened the bed in the corner. I went in naked. I lay dying" (7). Malone speculates about the place he is in: "Perhaps I came in for the room on the death of whoever was in it before me. I enquire no further in any case. It is not a room in a hospital, or in a madhouse, I can feel that ... No, this is just a plain private room apparently, in what appears to be a plain ordinary house. I do not remember how I got here. In an ambulance perhaps, a vehicle of some kind certainly. One day I found myself here, in the bed. Having probably lost consciousness somewhere, I benefit by a hiatus in my recollections, not to be resumed until I recovered my senses, in this bed" (5) and Aysel says this: "The sound of a vacuum cleaner is heard outside. The floor servant must have started to clean rooms. Is she not late to work? I remember. I forgot hanging 'please don't disturb' on the door of the room. Pity. I should hang it. But I cannot get up anymore. I am dying" (61).

While waiting for death, they tell stories about past and future and lives past in present in postmodern nostalgia, they desire silence, but sometimes they are afraid of silence and they are startled by a voice outside. The sounds of outside world refers them to the past and lead them to their childhood and youth: "The old fog calls. Now the case is reversed, the way well charted and little hope of coming to its end. But I have high hopes. What am I doing now, I wonder, losing time or gaining it?" (Beckett 4) and Aysel: "Fortunately I am in one of the top floors. I do not hear the noise of the city. I only hear murmurs of the vacuum cleaner in the corridor. I wish I'd had the mind to shut off the middle door. Must I get up and close it? Beside I hang on the plate. But I cannot get up. Without anything in this bed I lay down not getting up" (62) Ağaoğlu, like Beckett, often leaves the reader in doubt and she plays games with the readers: "I do not know what I think. I am stirring. Various words are forcing my brain. They are not a kind of a sentence by coming up side by side" (102) and we read similar expressions in Beckett's text: "When I have completed my inventory, if my death is not ready for me then, I shall write my memoirs ... My bed is by the window. I lie turned towards it most of the time. I see roofs and sky, a glimpse of street too, if I crane. I do not see any fields or hills. And yet they are near. But are they near? I don't know ... I do not see the sea either, but I hear it when it is high" (6). Aysel, like Malone, describes her memories lives the past in the present in expectation of death and although in some ways their thoughts and feelings are confused, time literally stops.

Animals and objects also have an important place in their thoughts and these symbolize fear for: "Yes, I got great amusement, when young, from their so-called silence. The sound I liked best had nothing noble about it. It was the barking of the dogs, at night, in the clusters of hovels up in the hills, ... It came down to me where I lay, in the house in the plain, wild and soft, at the limit of earshot, soon weary. The dogs of the valley replied with their gross bay all fangs and jaws and foam" (Beckett 31) and Aysel: "I as five years old. In the garden, around grass I saw a beautiful flower in a terrible way. To me, for I had never seen a flower, which is nice. I stuck out my hand. I wanted to touch it. Touch and touch ... and then I yelled in pain. It was not the flower, but a poisoned animal" (337). Sounds in the real and in the dream are enriched by connotations in the two protagonists' minds lying to die. Like their feet, their ears are also defective and they cannot fulfill their functions in full: "Note then, without emotion, that of late their hearing seems to have improved. Oh not that I was ever even incompletely deaf. But for a long time now I have been hearing things confusedly" (Beckett 31) and Aysel: "My sleep is mixed by wakefulness. As if I was lying awake with my one eye. My one ear is deaf, the other is open as well. I am thinking of, the fact that my sleep is awake is not new. No" (301).

Malone and Aysel remember the past better than the present and they question their lives with regard to the their perceptions of time: "I know the year of my birth, I have not forgotten that, but I do not know what year I have got to now. But I think I have been here for some very considerable

time ... I tremble a little, but only a little. The groaning of the bedstead is part of my life" (8-9) and Aysel: "The room is getting hot. Behind the scenes the sun must be born. I wonder what time is it? Eight, nine, maybe ten." (25). Although they wish to sleep and are afraid of dying, they talk about matters of time: "I fell asleep. But I do not want to sleep. There is no time, I sleep in my time-table. I do not want ... Live and invent. I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live. No matter. I have tried" (Beckett 18) and Aysel: "In the armchair. According to parts of body that touch eyes I am naked. Finally, however, I thought to dress up. I wanted to dress up only to have done something, in order to stall myself against my death delayed. I mean, without it, I was asleep in the chair. I was nearly fainted" (297). Aysel like Malone fails to express themselves coherently about the ambivalence of death: she like him struggles between life and death by fragmented selves without any reasons: "I wonder, I take my last cigarette before I die? I want to smoke very much a cigarette. Why will I not smoke then?" (105), and Malone: "I say living without knowing what it is. I tried to live without knowing what I was trying. Perhaps I have lived after all, without knowing ... Of myself I could never tell, any more than live or tell of others" (18-19). Further, one of the characteristics of the postmodern is "I." He/she has no any clue about who he/she is or what he/she is: "But as far as I myself am concerned the same necessity does not arise, or does it? And yet I write about myself with the same pencil and in the same exercise book as about him. It is because it is no longer I" (Beckett 32). And we hear Aysel's sound in the same way, as if they are twins: "For a moment, who or where I am, I do not know what to do" (297).

The instability of the individual and his/her searching of self in both novels is an important intertextual similarity and there is the search for the "I": Aysel like Malone often talks to herself alone and is isolated from outside environment and society. Some reflections of the sentences of "what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am" (Beckett 52) we find in Ağaoğlu's novel: "I can distinguish that the curtains of the room is dark green. Does it appear dark because the room is dark, I wonder? At one point, as if the sun was behind them. Now, no light, does not say what there is outside of time. I do not have any clue. Must I open the dark green curtains? Do not I? ... I'm not in the bed, but in an armchair. Must I open the curtains? Here's all the same armchair, I ask this question without installing the real meaning. Because I have neither willing nor unwilling to open the curtains" (147). And thus the passing of time takes the "I" with it: "That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world. Not now, any more. A man changes. As he gets on" (Beckett 26) and Aysel is narrated as the woman version of Malone: "I should struggle not to wake up. What a hopeless situation ... I am still here, my dreams, and here is me and my dreams, in fact, I'm in a line between 'I' and situation here. This is a maddening line ... neither I am that, not this one" (297).

Aysel's room, just like Malone's, is grey like death. This indicates another level of intertextuality: the grey color suggests a stifling and suspicious world that people imprison themselves in: "The light is there, outside, the air sparkles, the granite wall across the way glitters with all its mica, the light is against my window, but it does not come through. So that here all bathes, I will not say in shadow, nor even in half-shadow, but in a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow, so that it is hard to say from what direction it comes, for it seems to come from all directions at once, and with equal force" (46) and this appears in Ağaoğlu's novel as "I pass under worn clothing and dull pants almost dividing the room. I am looking at the walls, lying on either side of the door, that door painted grey like a prison door. In any case, once upon a time the walls were whitewashed by parchment-colored paint" (218). A further important matter is that of nihilism of postmodernism and almost all lines in the texts consist of nothingness: "nothing is more real than nothing" (Beckett 199) and for Ağaoğlu, "Did I not tell you? I did not say? I said nothing. At the coast of nothingness, so I keep, my mouth is open" (312).

In conclusion, I posit that Ağaoğlu's novel demonstrates intertextuality with regard to Beckett's texts. However, I submit that that this is not "influence" or "borrowing," a frequent take on perspectives deemed moving from the West to the "East"; rather, it is a parallel development of narrating the postmodern with all its characteristics while at the same time intertextuality and the adaptation of narration but so that the new work (i.e., Ağaoğlu's) represents a creative reworking and re-narration of the functions of the postmodern. Ağaoğlu uses the name "Molloy," one of the

protagonists of Beckett and reflects the name in Aysel's mind in her deathbed: You smoke too much ... coughing ... Molloy ... endless fight? ... where is my fosfostimol, whose was the sinister courtyard? ... Ivo ... Ivo ... Oh, my god! ... Okay. I will go to bed. Why will I not go to bed? As a Western thing, like a man, so " (270). Ađaođlu's protagonist Aysel is narrated in postmodern intertextuality as an individual of our days alienated from society, searching for herself/selves as she cannot succeed in dying. Both Beckett's and Ađaođlu's protagonists attempt to "escape" from their selves and are alienated from the world and their environments and thus they represent postmodern narration.

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