

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: Ömer Seyfettin's Short Story "The Rainbow": A Precursor of Transgender Narratives

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PAGES: 924-936

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3692911>

Ömer Seyfettin's Short Story "The Rainbow": A Precursor of Transgender Narratives

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Abstract

Ömer Seyfettin, one the prominent and widely read figures of modern Turkish short story, published "The Rainbow" ("Eleğimsağma") in 1917 in a magazine. The story revolves around a ten-year-old girl, Ayşe, and her gender transformation as part of a struggle against masculine hegemony and suppression. Although this transformation takes place through the protagonist's dream, Seyfettin successfully showcases how gender roles and stereotypes become central in building respectful, acceptable, and powerful personas in society. The story also helps to question the so-called domestic roles of women by juxtaposing the responsibilities of the two genders based on existing cultural norms. To this end, this study aims to investigate how established gender roles in a patriarchal society are called into question and how gender fluidity defies stereotypical understanding of gender representation in a male-dominated society. The analysis of this gender transformation in the story will be made through the concept of *performativity* which has been introduced by Judith Butler. Though biologically female, Ayşe enjoys activities such as riding, wrestling, shooting, and playing in the streets, which are almost always associated with the male gender. Furthermore, she is subjugated to societal and religious pressure to act like a girl and cover her body. In this respect, Ömer Seyfettin's "The Rainbow" can be hailed as a leading narration that puts gender performativity in the limelight at the beginning of twentieth-century Turkish literature.

Keywords: Ömer Seyfettin, The Rainbow, gender performativity, transgender, Butler

ÖMER SEYFETTİN'İN "GÖKKUŞAĞI" ÖYKÜSÜ: TRANS ANLATILARINDA BİR ÖNCÜ

Öz

Modern Türk öyküsünün önde gelen ve aynı zamanda geniş kitlelerce okunan bir figürü Ömer Seyfettin "Eleğimsağma" başlıklı öyküsünü 1917 yılında bir dergide yayımlamıştır. Öykünün merkezinde on yaşında bir kız olan Ayşe ve onun maskülen hegemonya ve baskılamaya karşı mücadelesinin bir parçası olarak cinsiyet geçişi yer almaktadır. Söz konusu değişim ana karakterin rüyasında gerçekleşmesine rağmen Seyfettin cinsiyet rollerinin ve kalıp kişiliklerin toplumda saygın, kabul edilebilir ve güçlü personalar oluşturmada nasıl temel bir rol oynadığını gözler önüne serer. Öykü aynı zamanda mevcut kültürel normlar üzerinden iki cinsiyetin sorumluluklarını kıyaslayarak kadınların sözde evsel rollerinin sorgulanmasına yardımcı olur. Bu amaçla, bu çalışma ataerkil bir toplumda yerleşik cinsiyet rollerinin sorgulanmasının ve cinsiyet akışkanlığının erkek egemen bir toplumda cinsiyet temsillerinin basmakalıp yargılarla anlaşılmasına nasıl karşı gelindiğinin araştırılmasını hedeflemektedir. Öyküdeki bu cinsiyet değişiminin çözümlemesi Judith

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Gönderim tarihi: 29 Ocak 2024 Kabul tarihi: 20 Mayıs 2024

Butler tarafından ortaya atılan *performativite* kavramı aracılığıyla yapılacaktır. Biyolojik olarak kadın olsa da Ayşe hemen her zaman eril cinsiyetle özdeşleştirilen ata binme, güreşme, silahla ateş etme ve sokaklarda oynama gibi faaliyetlerden zevk alır. Bunun yanı sıra bir kız gibi hareket etmesi ve bedenini örtmesi konusunda toplumsal ve dinsel baskılara maruz kalır. Bu açıdan Ömer Seyfettin'in "Eleğimsağma" öyküsü yirminci yüzyıl Türk edebiyatında cinsiyet performativitesini odağına alan öncü bir anlatı olarak selamlanabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ömer Seyfettin, Eleğimsağma, cinsiyet performativitesi, transeksüel, Butler

INTRODUCTION

Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920) established himself as one of the most prominent short story writers in Turkish literature despite his short life. In addition to his vast volume of stories, he published poems, journal articles, and a novel. His fiction mostly follows a realistic technique and contains didactic issues such as patriotism, dedication, hospitality, reverence, self-sacrifice, and patience (İnce, 2021, p. 1324). "The Rainbow" ("Eleğimsağma" in original), published first in a magazine in 1917, distinguishes itself from its counterparts with its taboo subject matter and fantastical elements. The story is about a ten-year-old girl named Ayşe, and her gender transformation as part of a struggle against masculine hegemony and suppression in late Ottoman society. The protagonist's twofold struggle materializes against herself and the heteronormative structure of societal institutions and figures. The story also helps to question the so-called domestic roles of women by juxtaposing the responsibilities of the two genders based on existing cultural norms. By using Judith Butler's *performativity* concept as a springboard, this study aims to investigate how established gender roles in a patriarchal society are called into question and how gender fluidity defies stereotypical understanding of gender representation in a male-dominated society.

The first part of the study will present certain introductory information about the performative view of gender roles based on Butler's approach. In this regard, the concepts of "sex" and "gender" will be explained. In a similar vein, the concepts of "performance" and "performativity" and their distinction will be discussed. Within this context, the tension between performativity and masculinity, and the determining role of the heterosexual matrix will be pointed out. In addition, agency, another indispensable aspect of gender, and its components such as language and discourse will be the next focus of the study. In the second part of the study, gender roles in the patriarchal society in which Ayşe lives and her gender transformation as part of a struggle against the heteronormative matrix will be investigated through Butler's approach.

SEX VS. GENDER

The concepts of sex and gender and how they differ have long been a debated issue considering its historical development. In addition to interpretations that refer to their interchangeability, some scholars tend to draw certain boundaries between the two. Therefore, current studies with a focus on these concepts fail to reach a consensus. That being said, it is possible to classify the gender theories and their main arguments regarding the concepts of sex and gender. According to Wood, one main approach which foregrounds the biological characteristics over socio-

cultural claims that sex is determined by human biology and later is shaped socially (Wood, 2013, pp. 19-21). In other words, sex should be categorized based on human genetics and biology. However, gender is not an innate feature and is fixed unlike sex, and has a changing pattern that is revealed by social interactions with others.

On the other hand, theories such as Butler's queer theory choose to emphasize the profound impact and significative features of cultural structures and practices. Butler confronts the biology-based perspective by arguing that sex cannot be a pre-determining factor or condition for the formation of gender as both sex and gender are social constructs (2008, pp. 9-10). To put it differently, sex cannot be considered to be a cause of gender, but it rather seems to be an outcome or an output of it. By subverting the already established heteronormative approach, Butler points out the mistaken and misunderstood cause-effect relationship between sex and gender. This subversion attempt may seem naive and subjective but what Butler tries to illustrate is that the "signification" (the determining factor of sex and gender) is not based on natural and compulsory factors. On the contrary, it is "contingent" with its arbitrary, historical, and cyclical nature (2008, p. 190).

Butler questions the established categories of sex and gender and the reasons why the former determines the latter according to the biological approaches. She argues that the gender concept is structured and forced upon individuals in the heterosexual matrix. Hence, a causality between these categories is misleading, so she suggests asking the following question:

Can we refer to a "given" sex or a "given" gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? ...If the immutable character of "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Butler, 2008, p. 10)

As Butler opposes the idea that the gender concept has a fixed basis, beginning or end, it can be suggested that gender is not something "we are", but it is rather something "we do" (2008, p. 52). This leads to the conclusion that both the concepts of sex and gender are social constructs and they are far from being fixed or stable. Butler's approach is also endorsed by Wittig who argues that these categories tend to be shaped by political interests or benefit (2008, p. 39). In a similar vein, Wittig claims that sexual categories are products of the heterosexual norms of society and underlines the artificiality of these categories.

PERFORMANCE VS. PERFORMATIVITY

The discussion of gender and sex and Butler's efforts to unsettle the gender categories lead us to key terms such as performativity. Before elaborating on this term, it is significant to make a distinction between performance and performativity. The former signifies an actor who deliberately follows or refuses to follow a script. Therefore, "the individual is not free to choose an identity in the way they might select an outfit, and equally, the individual is not condemned to simply act out a structurally determined identity" (McKinlay, 2010, p. 234). To put it simply, performance is the accumulation of acts and behavior of a person in life based on their genders and sexes in society. However, Butler asserts that performance is connected to sexuality or sexual practices as opposed

to Silvia Federici's argument that sexuality is controlled and policed within capitalist societies, particularly through institutions such as the family, the state, and the religious organization (Federici, 2019, p. 154-55).

On the other hand, performativity is a process concept that avoids or rejects the dualism of structure and agency (Weeks, 1998, p. 127). Furthermore, Butler claims that performativity is not a temporary concept: "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (2008, p. 15). To put it another way, the concept of performativity must be carried out by means of various and new performances. These performances are changeable yet they need to be in the form of habits that can be repeated.

Derrida elaborates on the repetitive nature of the performativity concept by arguing that it is evidentiary and self-reflexive; therefore, it can be evaluated independently without an imperative context although it can undertake new contexts (Gön, 2016, p. 17). To put it simply, performativity functions with consensus and repetition. Butler also puts an emphasis on the agency of the performativity concept and juxtaposes it with performance. With reference to Derrida, she argues that while performance assumes an already existing subject, performativity refuses such a subject and it exists by repetition and recitation (Osborne and Segal, 1996, p. 112). Thus, performativity allows for an understanding to explain gender without basing it on a certain essence or natural/fixed identity. Instead, it explains gender through its repetitive referentiality. In order to exemplify her point, Butler presents *drag* performance and argues that it reveals the misconception that gender has an intrinsic reality. By enforcing and subverting gender identities, *drag* performance lays the groundwork for liberating the gender concept from its reality or artificiality discourse (Butler, 2008, pp. 224-225).

HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX AND BODY

Butler questions the normative structure of gender and claims that the power apparatuses such as the heteronormative hegemony instrumentalize the concept of sex and gender, turn them into imperative means, and determine subjects as male or female (2008, p. 85). Her discussion regarding how the normative gender places its boundaries leads us to the subject of "body". She asserts that there is "the sense of gender reality" (2008, p. 22) in every individual and people build the reality of gender on the body: "If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of these perceptions as the "reality" of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks "reality" and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance" (2008, p. 22).

Following the steps of Foucault¹, Butler positions the scientifically explained *body* concept as a construction that is created as part of a discourse (2008, p. 54). *Body* is presented as a text which can

¹ In his acclaimed work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault discusses how disciplinary power operates through techniques such as surveillance and normalization, which have profound implications on the bodies of individuals. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976), he suggests that discourses around

be constructed and deconstructed. Moreover, it is considered to be “a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated” (Butler, 2008, p. 226) rather than an unchanging entity. This understanding of a constructed *body* approach enables Butler to suggest that sex itself can be interpreted as a construction, too. This conclusion is not based on ontological or factual differences but it is based on a discursive and linguistic level. To put it another way, the physical body is perceived as a “gendered body” by Butler (2008, p. 221) which is constructed by cultural/ discursive means. Therefore, in order for people to be a subject of their lives, they need to refuse the body, which is produced according to the heterosexual matrix, and reconstruct it on a new discursive level.

Butler’s efforts to denaturalize the established heterosexual matrix and replace it with a discursive/cultural body concept contribute to the discussion of gender concept and its so-called essentialist basis. This approach intends to shed light on gender discrimination and disparities which are fed and endorsed by the biological gender discourse and the gendered body categories. In other words, for Butler gender cannot be regarded as a concrete/solid entity, nor the distinction between gender identities can be seen as fixed and constant. On the contrary, these distinctions are completely discursive and linguistic.

In a similar vein, Berger and Luckmann underline the constructivist aspect of the gender concept by arguing that the “reality” of male and female is produced with the subjects’ own meaning construction process (1991, p. 181). This process ultimately leads to a “naturalized” understanding of the gender categories which in return creates the illusion that established gender forms are a consequence of an objective and universal knowledge.

SUBJECT, LANGUAGE, AND POWER

It is inevitable not to discuss the surrounding forces of gender and its mutual interaction with power from a constructive point of view. Contrary to the classical subject-power relationship which presents the subject as a subordinate in the face of a dominant power, Butler rather focuses on the subjection and dependence between the two. She argues that the dependence of the subject is not only a process of becoming a subaltern, but it is also an indication of the subject’s becoming a subject (2008, pp. 9-10). To put it differently, in order for the subjects to remain coherent and comprehensible, they need to owe obedience to power and carry the conditions of a subaltern². In this regard, Butler considers the concept of subjectivity and gender intertwined and she refers to the term “intelligibility” to explain this relation. In Butler’s theory, the matrix of intelligibility refers to the process by which identities become intelligible and stable. Therefore, the heterosexual matrix which determines the gender norms also becomes the matrix of intelligibility or the main framework of the intelligibility concept.

sexuality are employed to regulate and control individuals, contributing to the formation of a “bio-politics” where bodies are governed in elaborate ways.

² It is a term which Spivak has problematized in postcolonial theory to describe people who are exposed to the hegemony of the ruling classes. In her acclaimed essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (2008), Spivak approaches the category of the subaltern by closely investigating the gendered subjects and of Indian women, particularly.

According to Butler's gender identity concept, individuals' gender gets produced as they repeat themselves. In other words, they become subjects through repetition. These repetitions or "doing" constitutes the identity and language plays a pivotal role as "it produces the discursive possibilities of performance" (Jackson, 2004, p. 680). However, this repetitive process should not be interpreted as an action in which subjects behave as automatons, repeating themselves endlessly. As Butler clarifies her point by saying that "...the compulsion to repeat is not necessarily the compulsion to repeat in the same way or to stay fully within the traumatic orbit of that repetition" (2008, p. 124). Therefore, neither the repetitive process nor being socially constructed dismisses the agency of humans. Butler explains human agency with the help of the "psychic excess" concept. The psyche facilitates the potential to compel or subvert repetition; thus, it urges "both repetition and the possibility of disruption" (Jackson, 2004, p. 682). Furthermore, discourse constitutes a great part of our agency and it is not possible to stand outside discourses that shape us. However, there is a possibility to obtain agency from within those discourses as agency "is implicated in what it opposes" (Butler, 2008, p. 137).

As far as agency and the subject are concerned, Butler makes a distinction between being *determined* and being *constituted*. On the one hand, to be determined signifies that a subject already exists; in other words, it is stable and never changes. In this model, there is no agency. On the other hand, to be constituted functions as the precondition of agency (Butler, 2008, p. 12). To put it differently, the fact that subjects are invariably reproduced is an indication that there is always space for resisting and reworking.

ANALYSIS OF "THE RAINBOW"

In the opening passages of the story, some introductory information is given about how Ayşe, the protagonist, spends or is forced to spend her day, namely by weaving at home by herself. Feeling unhappy and tired, she longs to go out and act like boys and perform so-called male activities such as riding, wrestling, shooting, and playing in the streets. When it comes to her physical appearance, she is described as "wrestler Ayşe" because she is strong enough to carry out a "body slam", in other words, lift and throw someone away. Even though she is quite fond of these activities which are mostly and conventionally attributed to the male gender, she feels compelled to abandon them. As she grows up, the pressure around her to wear a hijab increases. At this point, it would be of significant help to list the conventional gender roles narrated in the story:

Table 1. Female and Male Roles

Female Roles	Male Roles
Doing the house chores	Doing outside work
Weaving at home	Selling products outside
Mostly domestic life	Mostly outside the house
Not free to choose her life partner	Free to choose her life partner
Forced to cover herself at a certain age	Free to wear what they like
Restriction of her liberty	Free to carry out his liberty
Being exposed to oral and physical violence	Free to ride horses and shoot

Being under strict control	Free to obtain and use guns
Living according to patriarchal norms	Free to go to war and carry out heroic deeds

(Seyfettin, 2019, pp. 479-491).

Just as Butler describes performativity based on repetition and ritual, Ayşe performs conventionally male-attributed activities over a period of time, and since she reaches puberty she is enforced to abandon these activities. In other words, what Ayşe has done is not a singular act but she has maintained them continually. The activities that she has engaged in change; however, the accumulation of these can be regarded as a form of habit. It is clear that what Ayşe carries out is not performance as it assumes an already existing female subject. However, Ayşe resists performing the expected female gender activities from her. Instead, by repetition and recitation she chooses to structure her own gender identity.

One of the most significant social pressures comes from the village imam³ who is a clear representative of patriarchy. As a religious figure and a respectable elderly, the imam ensures that the conventional norms are maintained and the heteronormative structure of societal institutions and figures is preserved. Even the name of the village imam, Kurt Hoca, which means “wolf” in Turkish, has certain connotations in relation to gender issues. The word is associated with meanings such as “a large, wild animal, a man who makes advances on women, destructive person or thing, devouring” (Collins Dictionary). In the opening section of the story, Ayşe comes across Kurt Hoca in the street and she is exposed to his severe warning and intimidation: “Ayşe, tell your mother to cover yourself. Your walking uncovered in the streets is not permissible by our religion” ⁴ (Seyfettin, 2019, p. 479). She is not only forced to comply with the ecclesiastical rules but she is also reminded to follow the established gender stereotypes in the society.

Weaving at home all day long and covering herself when going out, which will be a rare occasion from now on, would seem like torture to Ayşe. She would have to abandon all male-associated activities she has been accustomed to performing. At this desperate point, she wishes she would turn into a man. Becoming a male individual would facilitate acting out heteronormative rules and complying with cultural norms. Even though she does not refuse her body and its beauty, the only way to actualize her dreams is first to deconstruct her current body and then reconstruct it along with discursive/cultural means. “Oh, I wish I were a man” (Seyfettin, 2019, p. 152) is the first apparent articulation of this discourse.

Ayşe’s desire to turn into a man is neither an instantaneous wish nor an ephemeral design or imagination. She first dreams of being the best wrestler in the whole town. Then, becoming an “efe”, which is the leader of Turkish irregular soldiers and bandits, is set as the next target. In addition, she is willing to get married to one of the prominent girls in the town. Her other aspiration is to maintain and even diversify male-associated activities. For instance, attending military operations, obtaining awards and praise, crossing the mountains, hunting wild bears, and gaining recognition as one of the most courageous youngsters in the town. It can be suggested that all these aspirations are strongly connected to rebuilding a body image which will allow the protagonist to experience

³ Someone who leads Muslim worshippers in prayer.

⁴ All translations from the short story are made by the author.

her desires. At this point, Butler's argument about gender's changing pattern would be necessary: "Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? (2008, p. xxxi)". Even though Ayşe is engaged in "manly" hobbies, which are not only repetitive but also habitual, she is not allowed to perform her gender freely. The phallogocentric worldview, which is embodied in the personality of the village imam and the rest of the men, imposes a biological female version of the protagonist. This biological perspective is heavily criticized by Butler as it overlooks the cultural aspect and the changeability of the gender concept. As can be seen in the opening section of the story, Ayşe shows resistance to this biological gender perspective by not only dreaming of becoming a man but also having attended male-associated activities and enjoying them.

In the midst of her desperation and the unfavorable conditions surrounding her, she notices a rainbow after a drizzle. According to the story, there is a folk belief which promises that whoever goes under a rainbow changes their gender:

She became pale when she saw it. She wondered whether that belief was true. Was there any possibility that it was a lie?... She had never seen a rainbow such close. It was behind the village road of shrubbery and teazel which was followed by a dried river...Her heart started beating faster and faster. If only she was able to go under that rainbow which seemed so close...she would turn into a man! (Seyfettin, 2019, p. 480)

Apart from its modern-day connotations, "the rainbow" image in folk belief has a superstitious understanding which suggests that it connects the material and the spiritual worlds (Özakın, 2021, p. 102). The rainbow image symbolizes an open door of the Heavens which people feel close to God and it is the place where wishes may get accepted and twists of fate can be actualized. "This open door appears for a short time, then it vanishes. That's why, the person who wants to go under it must hurry" (Kalafat, 2018, p. 1143). Never has doubted this folk belief, Ayşe goes out and starts to run in a frenzy mood. Despite the rain, the hilly landscape, and the thorny bushes she manages to get close to the rainbow breathlessly. Finally, she is able to go under the rainbow.

The protagonist's alarming haste and effort to go under the rainbow derives from the desperate belief that there is no easy way out for her to change her current bleak and suppressed life other than a miracle or a supernatural event. What seems to be an optical illusion would become Ayşe's last resort to transform her gender identity. "The rainbow" image can also be regarded as a metaphor which indicates the challenge and the unattainability of a mission in the story. However, despite all hardships and rumors about its unapproachable nature Ayşe chooses not to give up on her hope.

Butler's question "Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests?" (2008, p. 9) becomes the focal point in this section. Ayşe's performing her conventional gender role as an "angel in the house", not interfering in male-associated activities, and obeying the most important patriarchal figures such as the village imam would definitely serve the heteronormative structure of the society. This will make sure that the long-established heterosexual, male-dominated mechanism will

continue to encapsulate and incorporate anyone who tries to subvert it. Ayşe's struggle to construct her gender identity and her effort to reconstruct her body is one of the subversions the heteronormative structure wants to destroy or make invisible. While the heterosexual matrix expects Ayşe to display a fixed, consistent, "unified and internally coherent" (Butler, 2008, p. 22) female gender identity, she fails to conform to the gendered norms of society.

After going under the rainbow and feeling exhausted, Ayşe lies down on the shrubbery. When she wakes up, she is stunned at her transformed gender and appearance. Now, she is much taller and has a mustache. Although she has turned into a man, as she has always dreamed of, she notices that she is wearing female clothes. She goes home and puts on her brother's clothes. After getting the rifle hanging on the wall, she goes out in the streets where she hears the drums of a wedding ceremony. When she finds out that the bride is actually Gülsüm, whom the protagonist has been planning to get married to, the new Ayşe loses her temper. While the whole villagers watch her with unfamiliar eyes, Ayşe lets out a yell like an "efe" and challenges the youngsters of the village to confront her. When she beats the rival wrestler one after another, the local people start to wonder about this new young man in their village. Ayşe finally declares that she is from their village and reveals her identity as Ayşe. As local people look unconvinced, Ayşe narrates her story and how she has turned into a man after the rain. When Ayşe finds out that Gülsüm is getting married to Hasan, she asks for her biggest rival and the village imam to come to the front:

Ayşe said: "Hasan, you will divorce Gülsüm!" Hasan rejected by saying I won't. All of a sudden, Ayşe lifted him up and said: "Divorce her or I will throw you and crash your brain!" Hasan obeyed his order by saying "I'm divorcing her." Ayşe turned to Kurt Hoca and asked him to perform a marriage ceremony between Ayşe and Gülsüm. The village imam rejected this order. When asked the reason, he replied: "This is not permissible by our religion." Ayşe protested Kurt Hoca's answer. "I don't care whether it is permissible or not. You will do as I say." Kurt Hoca insisted on his negative answer. Having no choice, Ayşe lifted the village imam up and threatened the same way he did to Hasan. However, Kurt Hoca was being obstinate by saying "I won't do it!" several times. (Seyfettin, 2019, p. 483)

In this fierce struggle between the transformed Ayşe and Kurt Hoca, the village imam does not use his consent for the marriage and declares that "the male Ayşe" is actually a female: "Hey, villagers...You should know that this is not a man. It is a she. We should put her under the veil" (Seyfettin, 2019, p. 484). Despite the male Ayşe's physical appearance and her endeavor to marry Gülsüm by performing a male-associated show of strength, the village imam prevails in convincing the public about Ayşe's gender. Kurt Hoca's male dominance as well as his religious authority has contributed to this decision. After the village imam's incessant protest against Ayşe's wishes and her gender identity, the local people walk up to Ayşe with whatever piece of clothes they find and descend upon her. The new Ayşe fights back by throwing people around and yelling at them. When she looks for Kurt Hoca, she realizes that he is standing on the minaret of the mosque. Having climbed up the stairs, Ayşe finally confronts Kurt Hoca one more time. She lifts him up and orders him to carry out the wedding ceremony. While Ayşe is grasping Kurt Hoca in the air, the minaret balcony collapses and Ayşe falls down. At that moment, Ayşe opens her eyes and realizes that her father is beating her head. Being soaked wet and surrounded by her parents, brother, and some

other neighbors, Ayşe is being questioned about her escape. It is later revealed that after Ayşe goes missing, the whole village starts worrying and launches a search and rescue team. Her father's pressing question "What have you been doing here?" goes unanswered by Ayşe. Going back to a life where she cannot perform her desired gender identity and male-associated activities urges her to cry sobbingly. Kurt Hoca's last words at the end of the story "You should put a veil on her; her wandering around without a veil is inappropriate" echoes the same patriarchal and heteronormative pattern which we see at the beginning.

The village imam's repetitive words can be taken as a leitmotiv which in turn triggers Ayşe's dream of transforming her gender identity. Even though she fails to actualize her transformation, she cannot be considered to be someone who succumbs to conventional gender roles easily. Ayşe experiences her masculinity in her dream, which gives her the opportunity to take independent decisions and act in a non-submissive way. Hence, she is able to bypass the inactive, dependent, and compliant female role and become capable of conducting male-associated activities. In order to maintain her favorite outdoor interests, pursue her dreams of marriage and become a respectable member of the community in the village, she knows that she needs to transform her gender identity. This daunting process requires confronting her family and the whole community she lives in. Ayşe seeks to imitate the dominant male figures so as to fight against the male archetypes and consolidate her new position in the eyes of the public. In her dream, Ayşe not only gains the power of a male individual but also acquires societal strength. When she turns into a man, she realizes that the whole village community shows their admiration and respect for her. Her transformed male body has given her the competence to act freely and without reservation. Her newly constructed male body gives her the chance to come up with a different discourse that facilitates performing in a masculine way.

Ayşe's transformation is not merely a physical one in the story. It also echoes the progress from being an ordinary suppressed female who is forced to carry out domestic duties and stay in her domestic sphere throughout her life to an independent individual who can step out from her pre-determined sphere and take her own decisions about her future. As the protagonist's subjectivity process manifests that "we, as subjects, are never complete and coherent but are always changing, then we can persistently critique ourselves as a way of life, an endless questioning of power and the mechanisms of oppression" (Heckman, 1990, p. 179), her performativity contests the foundations and origins of stable identity categories.

No individual is capable of "becoming a subject" without experiencing a dependency, according to Butler (2008, p. 18). This formidable journey can be interpreted as a way of building a discourse that generates the pillars of becoming a subject. However, this process does not take place in a vacuum. It must be developed through social interactions and confrontations. The character Ayşe who remains to live in a pre-determined domestic circle and be a subaltern will not be able to become a subject of her own. On the other hand, the character Ayşe who steps out of her domestic sphere, confronts the most iconic patriarchal figure and challenges her opponents will be able to raise her own voice in society.

When it comes to the critique of Seyfettin's text in terms of its finale and praising tone of male dominancy, the following remarks can be suggested. At the end of the narration, Ayşe has to wake up from her dream through her father's brute force and is expected to return to her former self. In other words, her efforts to rebuild her gender identity are inhibited and the protagonist's transformation remains incomplete. Even though Ayşe's attempt to unsettle gender categories and to challenge the heteronormative norms have gained significant ground in terms of rebuilding gender identity and women's roles in society, the dominant authorial male voice and its practices seem to preserve the established norms at the end of the story. Despite all its criticism against the end and its tone, Seyfettin succeeds in pointing out the social/cultural conditions of women, their search for individual choices and freedom, and the endeavor to build a gender identity. By taking into account the time when the story was first published, the writer was bold enough to put forward the difficulties women faced in rural areas of Türkiye. Furthermore, his raising the topic of gender transformation and confronting heteronormative norms, even from an implicit level, is something to be appreciated.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that Ayşe's gender identity in the story can be explicated through Butler's *performativity* concept. Her keen interest and practice in outdoor activities; in a similar vein, her reluctance and discontent with domestic chores are the first significant indicators of Ayşe's repetitive and habitual actions which form her performativity at the beginning of the narration. The second crucial indication of her performativity takes place in her dream which can be taken as the protagonist's subconscious and her suppressed desires. Her transformed male body and strength, to be able to wrestle with her opponents, and finally to marry her dream girl are compatible with Ayşe's former self and her daily activities. In short, what Ayşe has carried out throughout the story, whether in her daily activities or in her dream, can be regarded as a construction of her gender identity through performativity.

Through her actions in real life and in her dream, Ayşe manages to unsettle the stabilizing gender categories in her community. Being a misfit who cannot maintain regular house chores determined for women and having a transformed male body which defies the heterosexual matrix shows Ayşe's gender fluidity and her efforts to rebuild a gender identity. The "wrestler discourse" she applies, the confrontational language she adopts against the village imam, and her male-oriented vocabulary can be regarded as fundamental components of her gender constitution on a discursive level.

For Butler's defining gender as something we do rather than we are, the portrayal of the protagonist and her transformation throughout the story clearly resonates with this feature. Ayşe's repetitive outdoor activities and her dream to marry Gülsüm constitute or create "her". She does not choose the deed of performativity. Her gender gets produced as she repeats herself. In other words, this is how she expresses her gender identity.

Contrary to other women's passivity, submission, and subordination, Ayşe insists on displaying her agency through actions and dreams. She manages to build this agency not only

through a physical transformation but she also achieves it on a discursive level. Her confrontation with the village community including the respectable Kurt Hoca is a striking reminder of the fact that gender identity is not a complete, fixed, unified process. The village imam's refusal to conduct the wedding ceremony between the transformed Ayşe and Gülsüm is another evidence of the protagonist's disruptive and destabilizing potential against the heteronormative rules. A male body wearing female clothes and later a transgender opposing the whole community and asking to marry another female character are surprisingly brave attempts of the main character.

In conclusion, Ömer Seyfettin's "The Rainbow" can be hailed as a precursor of the transgender narratives in Turkish literature. This short story's leading role in the early Turkish canon is twofold. The first one is that the main character challenges the stereotypical gender roles and the established heterosexual matrix through her actions and subconscious. Even if in a dream, Seyfettin shows the possibility of what it would be like to be a transgender in the countryside and how the authorial male power would be undermined or shaken despite a heavy price. The second one is to illustrate how gender identity can be a social construct rather than a biologically determined existence. Through our repetitive actions, habitual performances, and various discourses we are capable of rebuilding our gender identity.

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Melek İlayda Sarı

Türk Romanında Bilimkurgu

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Günce Yayınları

Oktaç Yivli

Öykü Nasıl Okunur

modern öykü ve yöntem

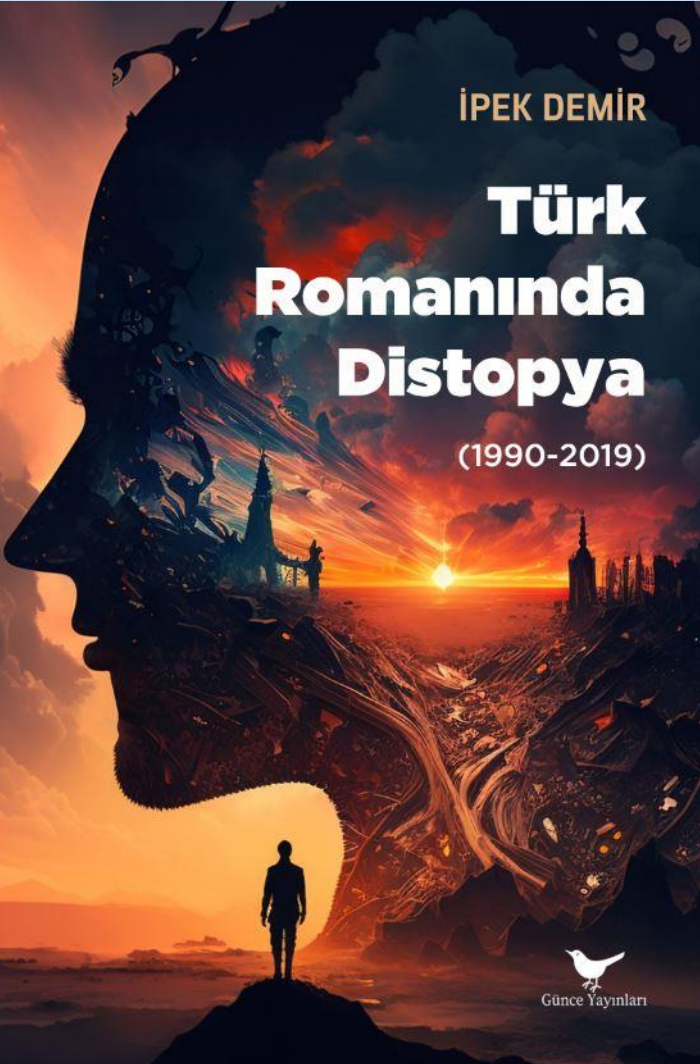


Günce Yayınları

İPEK DEMİR

Türk Romanında Distopya

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Günce Yayınları

Yazma Sanatı

Türkçe Doğru ve Etkili Yazma Teknikleri

Prof. Dr. Önder Göçgün



Günce Yayınları