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The Problems and Intentions of Structuralist Theory: The Mathematics of *Mahur Beste*¹

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Abstract

Berna Moran points out that structuralism is not only a literary theory but also a method which can be applied to various disciplines like anthropology, psychology and sociology. (Moran, 2008, p.185) Actually, this theory has gained importance with the publication of notes of the lecture by Ferdinand de Saussure and their effects on radical changes in the field of linguistics. On the other hand, because the theory aims to search out deep structure of the elements of communication that we experience any time in everyday life, the application of this theory in social sciences is not surprising.

It is possible to think that using structuralist theory in literary texts means to ignore the literary side of the text. It is because, the literary text is usually written with feelings, not mathematical reasoning. On the other hand, it might be described as a problem that structuralist theory focuses on only a text, and it neglects the writer and the social, cultural or economic conditions that create a text. Nevertheless, the structuralist theory offers many data about deep/basic structure of the text.

This paper examines the troubles and utility of structuralism led by linguists and literature theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson. After this examination, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novel, *Mahur Beste* is analyzed with the theory and the mathematical side of novel is found out. By this way, it is shown how the structuralism is used to reach the deep structure of literary text.

Keywords: Structuralism, Literature Theory, Literary Criticism, Linguistics, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar.

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Introduction

Terry Eagleton states that literary structuralism improves as an attempt to apply the methods and opinions of Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of the modern structuralist linguistic, in 1916 with his linguistic courses. The primary change that Saussure brought about in linguistic world through structuralist theory is to present language as a social system although main objective of traditional linguistic is to explain the changes over language since its birth with historical theme. That is to say, Saussure suggests using the terms of “sign”, “signifier” and “signified” in his explanation of the nature of linguistic signs, and he puts attention to the arbitrariness between these terms and the elements composing the language. Thus, he implies the need for community to define the language and to provide it to gain acceptability and utility. Individual himself does not have the capacity to coordinate such a system.(Saussure, 1990, p.649) Hence, Saussure states that, because of the existence of arbitrary link between letters that compose language and linguistic structure, it is necessary to analyze language systematically, separating it from external world (1990, p. 650).

Saussure’s attitude above mentioned affects Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson who are the pioneers among Russian formalists. Thus, Jakobson benefits from the issues of diachrony and synchrony that are applied on language by Saussure.³ First Saussure, then Jakobson believes that making historical inventory is not necessary to examine language. On the contrary, they thought the recent time was enough for analyzing the structure of language. If so, language is examined by itself because it makes arbitrary contact with external reality, and it is not in need of a historical theme. This linguistic view also led Jakobson to analyze literary text separately from external factors. (Jakobson, 2001, p. 1255) Although this kind of analyzing method resembles New Criticism technique,⁴ Jakobson examines the literary text linguistically and culturally, not as an individual creation, contrary to New Criticism. This situation explains the fact that new criticism examines the text with a humanistic and artistic view whereas structuralist theory approaches to the text professionally with the scientific acceptances.

Saussure’s opinions about linguistics lead especially to the research of poems linguistically by Jakobson. After Jakobson, Shklovsky tries to understand the deep structure

³ For more information about the terms “diachrony” and “synchrony” please look at Berna Moran, “Yapısal Dilbilim,” in *Edebiyat Kuramları ve Eleştirisi*. And Terry Eagleton, “Structuralism and Semiotics,” in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis and London, 1994):91-126.

⁴ Both are against reading of text with the author’s biography and trying to understand the text by thinking about author’s intention.

of literature in the light of structuralist theory, and he thinks that art can be examined technically the same as language. Shklovsky mentions the difference between the language of poem and ordinary language. He indicates that, because of the language of poem is metonymic and metaphoric, it is related to imagination and so it can be explained as specific way of thinking (Shklovsky, 1998, p. 717-718). Together with this feature, art has a capacity to provide a new awareness about automatic meanings for economical usage in ordinary language that are created through algebrization. The technique of art is to provide *defamiliarization* towards objects and, this way, to draw attention to the artistic feature of objects, not to objects themselves. (Shklovsky, 1998, p.720) Shklovsky who implies especially the term of defamiliarization, explains this term with the examples from poems and proses. He manifests the capability of poetic language by remarking the artistic capacity of poem.

Structuralism defends that the link of both the language and literary text with external reality is arbitrary. Saussure explains this situation by stating that the sounds creating the name of an object do not tell any specific feature of that object while both Jakobson and Russian formalists explain the same situation with the theory of self-sufficiency of text and its independency from external world., structuralism that tries to understand the deep structure underneath of the text is rather mechanical because of excluded elements in its application on texts, especially in terms of artistic works. Turning the literary text into a simple equation by mathematical procedures means ignoring external factors such as artist's power of imagination and his genuine expression, his creativity and the effect of his life story on his creation. In this way, when the structure and basic meaning of literary text is too much focused and tried to understand, its artistic sides are ignored. The radical changes in linguistics, analysis of the language synchronically, the elements of sign, the function of language related with the elements such as addresser, addressee, context, message and code are revolutionary in terms of understanding and defining the communication. On the other hand, although literature is a product of language, it cannot be exposed to such a mechanical procedure that is implied on language. Hence, art is meaningful with the feelings changing constantly and with its context, not only with some mathematical codes.

On the other hand, although revealing the deep structure of a literary text and getting scientific data are mechanical and exclusionist, these methods can be sufficient in terms of the simplification of the complex relationships among main subjects of the text and understanding the main objection of the text in this way. When the literary text is thought independently from external effects such as artistic anxiety, the emotional world and memories of artist and

the environment and conditions that are valid for the writing time, the causation in the system of literary text helps understanding the text. Thus, text can give much more meaning by solving the plan of writer rather than making it the scientific analysis area. With such a utilization idea, in the second part of this article, the novel *Mahur Beste* by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar is analyzed taking into consideration the principles of structuralist theory.

Mahur Beste

Mahur Beste is a novel which was started to serialize in 1944 by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. As well as there are a lot of aspects that connect this novel with writer's another books, there are also some aspects that make the novel different and unique. The novel bears the title "mahur beste" which is an almost cursed leitmotiv that interconnects this novel with writer's other novels, namely *Huzur* and *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*. In addition to this, because of this novel is intertwined with absolute complex but rich network of relationship, it is suitable for many different reading methods. The novel does not progress with event; it progresses with only characters and their connected sides so this situation breaks the perception of classical, predominant event-centric novel. This kind of breaking of perception is also provided by unfinished and interconnected narration of characters. Thus, the feeling of incompleteness is aroused in readers. The life stories of characters are derived from Behçet Bey's story and they are told with all details in the novel such as his wife, father, father-in-law, wife's grandfather and grandfather's wife and even the servants.

From Plurality to Unity or Thanks to Behçet Bey: Search for Behçet Bey in the Deep Structure of *Mahur Beste*

In *The Dictionary of Psychology*, O.A. Gürün defines the term "conflict" as a contentious situation that occurs through two opponent and equivalent motivation affecting the same organism at the same time. (Gürün, 1996, p.29) His example for this article to clarify its meaning is important in terms of being the basis of the subject of this paper. In the involving example, Gürün puts attention to the possibility of an instinctual tendency to come into conflict with environmental orders or the possibility of two wants originated from different emotional sources to come up against, and he finishes his explanation by stating that choosing one of these two tendencies has an important role in the formation of personality. In addition, according to French thinkers Maire de Biran and Réne le Senne, subject in a conflict is divided by itself and it conflicts with its contrast. Moreover, pain is the emotional product

of this conflict. (Hançerlioğlu, 1988, p.82) The fact of shaping the thesis to come up with through all these explanations and examples in terms of the novel *Mahur Beste* brings out an interesting result.

The novel progresses by centering the conflict that is hidden within the deep structure of the text in terms of both the personal conflicts in the inner world of characters and the conflicts between those characters. Moreover, concerning conflicts that are going to be analyzed relative to the thematic and fictive contexts bring the readers to unity from contrasts, meanly to Behçet Bey.

In the letter which is at the end of novel, Tanpınar wrote these statements below:

“Well [...] if I did not write your story, which reason would you use to take care of yourself so much? Your life was like a closed box. I opened this box for you. Maybe for only you... (Tanpınar, 2005, p.145)

As it is understood, this story is written by Behçet Bey with many people who are shaped by his directives and, again, only for him. The attitudes, actions and selections of characters in the novel are judged by Behçet Bey, and they are narrated at his choice. Ultimately, all characters exist due to Behçet Bey, and they are active as he wants. Nevertheless the dominance of Behçet Bey in the construction of novel conflicts with his weak character. His father’s opinions about him prove this situation:

“Poor Behçet... He will never feel superiority in all his life and everything he knows will own him. He will live as a little, a very little thing under the absolute reign of the objects and time, within the curls of the emotion of despotic hiding despite everything” (2005, p.31)

As it is understood from this quotation, Behçet Bey who has the most effective role in the plot of the novel has a personality like loser and twerp despite all his fertility and that he pulls all the strings of all characters. As it is stated in the beginning of the article, personality construction is closely related to the choosing of one of conflicting tendencies. However, although he is in between the conflicting tendencies, Behçet Bey does not have an intention to choose anyone. With his being twerpy and isolated, he finds his real personality. That is, Behçet Bey represents the best example of the aspect of “personal conflict” of the novel. On the one side, he accepts “to live as a little, a very little thing”, on the other side, he thinks that he is so powerful with his own. (2005, p.60). He thinks his political position and he boasts about this situation:

“Nobody could write the official digests that he wrote... He knew very well that this mass mill was working so well because he was in it...” (2005, p.60)

In addition, it is also possible to see that Behçet Bey's narcissistic sides are in conflict with his twerp character as it is clear in the novel:

“Sometimes, he assumes that he would be more satisfied if he finds his wife as more ugly and older. And sometimes, because he believes that his wife cannot be as perfect as she looks, he thinks that she has some weak sides in fact and searches for her characteristics. With these adverse thoughts, he looks an animal which went slowly into its shell.” (2005, p.59)

“You want the universe to turn around you. However, you don't think that life threw you out its circle...” (Tanpınar, 2005, p.152)

It will be suitable to mention Atiye who got married to Behçet Bey accepting her destiny. It is because, it is an important point of conflict that a character like Behçet Bey is married to a tenacious, beneficent and generous character like Atiye. It is possible to see in the novel that Atiye's life after the marriage to Behçet Bey is full of conflicts. Especially, on her first day of marriage, this conflicting situation can be seen clearly:

“Rather than a bride, she was like a victim that falls into fortune's arms to do a cruel oblation.” (2005, p.54)

Also, Atiye endures Behçet with a home-loving and modest behavior although she believes that her marriage is totally a disaster and an unfortunate incidence. It is proof of this endurance that while her sisters are trying to convince her to divorce, Atiye does not accept it by thinking that Behçet would be badly affected of it. She also loves her husband's little habits and tenacity. On the other hand, the marriage to which Atiye supposes she got fully accustomed conflicts with her feelings after she saw Refik Bey's picture.

“She was preoccupied with many other thing at that time, a coil spring moved inside her suddenly and it revealed a lot of old things, a mass crowd of emotions that she assumed they had died from a very deep inside her hearth.”(2005, p.99)

As it is seen, the coil spring that Atiye supposed it moved suddenly inside her involves one conflicting situation with another. Hence, her husband, that she accepted although their personalities are exactly opposite to each other, and her relative Refik Bey who is a talented, friendly, understanding, confidant and romantic medical student are in conflict. While all the attributes that she wants Behçet to possess are valid for Refik, of course, this conflicting situation is inevitable.

Other characters of the novel taking attention with their personalities and with binary conflicts of their attitudes about some social and political issues, and, also with their personal conflicts are İsmail Molla (Behçet's father) and Ata Molla (Atiye's father). First of all, İsmail

Molla will be mentioned. His biggest conflict is absolutely with his son despite their direct genetic links. İsmail Molla assumes Behçet does not fit to Molla's power and nobility and he is obliged to be ruled because of not resembling his father:

“He does not like this disabled boy being smaller at least 40 cm than himself and having weak shoulders, he understood that any aspects of his fearless, venturous, outgoing and true gentleman-like life will not maintain with this boy.” (2005, p.28)

This clear conflict between father and son manages to smash Behçet when he was just an “egg” as it is mentioned in the letter at the end of the novel. Moreover, with this “super identity” İsmail Molla has also a conflict with Ata Molla, not only with his son, Behçet Bey. This situation is manifested in the novel:

“These two men whose era that they live erased them like a chalk eraser differentiate from each other by their personalities. Everything goes towards excellence and power with İsmail Molla. Seeing him like a huge plane tree does not require looking with Behçet's eyes to him. Ata Molla was the opposite of him. He liked person who grovels sneaky on the ground and who bites his opponent from there, suddenly.” (2005, p.39)

It is undeniable to mention the personal differences of İsmail Molla and Ata Molla. That is, İsmail Molla “is a kind of those who use people around them like a slave without their notice, in other words, who make them accustomed to obedience of being a slave. (2005, p.27)” However, besides his character of attracting people around him, Ata Molla's being quarrelsome, , and his interest of gossip make him the most unreliable person of his time. (2005, p.39) Moreover, İsmail Molla accepts that he is congenitally a kind of “conquerer” (2005, p.30), and he shows this self-confidence with his actions. On the other hand, Ata Molla accepts congenitally a schemer, weird and cruel like his grandfathers who had stuck on national treasury like a leech. Even he boasts of his past (2005, s.39). Other than these, İsmail Molla's quiescence and stability, and Ata Molla's hating of these attributes are stated in the novel (2005, p.46). In fact, Ata Molla has an unstable and active personality of searching for gossips every time.

In addition to these, Ata Molla has also personal conflicts. First of all, he has conflicts with his era and statesmen. He does not like his era and complains about the difficulty of living in this era. He goes mad about what this era brings. Thus, although he is one of wheels of mechanism that governs the state and even he is included in most of meetings of sultan, the fact that he hates his era is a conflict, too. On the other hand, although he loses most of his

properties for a plenty of financial enterprise, he cannot abandon his rich lifestyle. This situation is Ata Molla's other personal conflict.

Regarding the other characters of the novel, it is noticed that their lives are built on binary conflicts rather than personal conflicts. For example, Sabri Hodja, who he was a forgotten child even by his family, becomes a prominent person making a close contact with many well-known people in İstanbul. Although Halit Bey is meek, understanding and calm man at daytimes, because he usually returns his home as drunk at nights, his such positive personality changes. He lets out yells and makes resound in neighborhood. After the disaster that he lived in Nerkiş Ayşe's house, Halit Bey's father Nuri Bey changes completely. He considers all money affairs that he is involved as earthly affairs, and he becomes a member of a religious order by abandoning them. Other than these characters, it should also be pointed out that there are another binary opposition between Adile Hanım and Buyidil. They are two slaves in the palace and they are friends. Buyidil is a very beautiful girl whereas Adile is not. Because Adile is not as beautiful as Buyidil, she does not see any possibility to be with the sultan. Therefore, she wants to realize her dreams with Buyidil. However, when the sultan rejected Buyidil, Adile's dreams do not come true.

Conclusion

As a result, as it is mentioned at the beginning of the article, when all these conflicts and oppositions are considered as duality, it can be seen that plurality brings the reader to the unity, especially to one person, Behçet Bey. All characters exist in the plot of novel thanks to Behçet Bey. Involving conditions can be understood from the table below:

The characters having personal conflicts:

Character	1. Situation (x)	2. Situation (x')
Behçet Bey	1) He is the protagonist of the novel 2) Being aware of his power, he is proud of himself 3) He is a narcissist and thinks that he is powerful himself	1') He is extremely twerp and isolated 2') He accepts to live as a little thing 3') Many times, he realizes he is born to be governed
Atiye	1) She believes that her marriage is a disaster 2) She realizes her mismatch with	1') She is home-loving and modest 2') She loves Behçet for his little habits and she does not want to divorce

	Behçet 3) She loves Behçet and endures him	despite pressures 3') With doctor Refik, her emotions that she never feels about Behçet emerges.
Ata Molla	1) He is a statesman and an ordinary member of sultan's meetings. 2) He loses many of his properties and suffers from it.	1') He hates state and government. 2') He never gives up the rich lifestyle.

And conflicts among characters;

A)	A')
Behçet Bey	Atiye, Refik, İsmail Molla
Ata Molla	İsmail Molla
Adile Hanım	Buyidil

Then the final situation can be summarized as below:

A, A': Characters

A': Character that A is in conflict with.

x, x': the situations of characters' personal conflicts

A is not A' because it cannot achieve being A'

A' is not A because it does not want to be A

A and A' are in conflict because x and x' are in conflict

x and x' cannot exist without A and A'.

A and A' cannot exist without Behçet Bey.

IF THEN the terms of x, x', A, A' exist together with or thanks to Behçet Bey.

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