

Kültürel Çoraklıkta İkililik: Batılı Gözler Altında

The Duplicity in the Cultural Wasteland: Under Western Eyes*

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma Joseph Conrad'ın Batılı Gözler Altında eserinde Conrad'ın ikili anlatım yöntem denemelerini ideolojik ve kültürel ilişkilerin bir yansıması olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Romanın geçtiği yer ve sosyal çerçevesi sadece Rusya değil, aynı zamanda İsviçre'nin Geneva kentidir. Romanın anlatıcısı kendisini Batı dünyasının bir ürünü olarak takdim eder ve ayrıca da Rus dünyası için bir alternatif olarak görülebilmektedir. Roman ikili bir anlatım tarzı sergilemektedir. Romanın kahramanı Razumov, Genova'da yaşayan ve romanı kendi bakış açısıyla birinci ağızdan anlatan bir İngilizce öğretmeni olan anlatıcının çifti olarak görev yapmaktadır. Conrad'ın Doğulu gözlerin karşısı olarak Batılı bir anlatıcılığı tartışmalı bir şekilde kullanması Batı'nın 20. yüzyıl politikasının belirgin bir özelliğidir. Algılanamaz bir dünyada insanlığın ikilemini ifade ederken, Conrad Batı'yı çorak kalmış bir yer olarak tartışmaktadır. Conrad'ın Batı kavramını ele alış biçimi Batı konusundaki politik düşüncelerini ifade ediş biçimi kadar karmaşıktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İkili Anlatım, Batılı Gözler Altında, Kültürel Çoraklık, Doğu, İdeoloji.

Çalışmanın Türü: Araştırma

ABSTRACT

The present analysis is intended to shed light on Joseph Conrad's experiments with double narration in Under Western Eyes as a reflection of ideological and cultural relationship. The social context of the novel is not simply or primarily Russian, but Western, English as well. The narrator introduces himself as a production of the Western world and can also be seen as an alternative to the Russian world. The novel produces doubling narration. Razumov acts as a double of the first person narrator, an English teacher of languages who lives in Geneva. Conrad's controversial use of a narrator, Western as opposed to Eastern eyes forms a characteristic feature of twentieth-century politics of "the West". Conrad, while expressing man's predicament in an incomprehensible world, argues the West as a wasteland. What the narrator implies as the "inscrutable" other is also true about himself. Conrad's conception of "Western" is complex enough to expose Conrad's political ideas about the West. The duplicity, a certain doubleness characterizes Under Western Eyes. The novel invites its readers into its complex narrative body and confronts them with a series of shifting perspectives through duplicity. The text is composed of interdependent duplicities. These duplicities create many question marks in the readers' mind. They force reader to develop new perceptions and points of view. The duplicity in narration can be attributed to Conrad's own split personality. This split in his identity shows its existence in his novels through narrative technique. His personal perspective of the things Russian gives us some clues about his disturbing and ambivalent feelings about Russia and the Russian people. Conrad makes use of a narrator as a tool for explaining this dichotomy which is the main source of the complex and complicated narration in the novel. Such kind of scrutiny requires a narrator through which the author will be able to constitute a process of self-knowledge. The idea of the other is a tool in identifying the writer's suppressed feelings. As a self-conscious writer, Joseph Conrad is aware of the dichotomies in his own nature which divide his nature. His usage of the narrator, an elderly Englishman, an unnamed teacher of languages, who has a very limited perspective, and who depends upon some documents, creates some type of alienation and detachment. Through such detachment, Conrad is able to direct his criticism of "cynicism", "mysticism", and corroding "simplicity". The reader of the novel comes across double narration which comes from not only Razumov's diary but also the narrator's reflections and ideas, which blunders the readers' minds. The reader is offered a Russian story which is filtered through a Western consciousness who claims to have a limited point of view. The duplicity in the narrator is much more perceptible when the narrator functions as if he were an omniscient narrator. The narrator's dichotomies, inconsistencies, reservation are indications of duplicity in his mind, which is closely in line with many dichotomies, inconsistencies in Conrad. The narrator explicitly functions as Conrad's spokesman in order to expose the duplicity in his own mind. The hero of the novel, Razumov has many things in common with the first person narrator, an old English language teacher. Not only the first person narrator but also Razumov are lonely figures who are reticent and who have an affinity with the West. Razumov who is a diary writer is the double of the narrator. Both of them, Razumov and an old language teacher can be seen as the writers of the fictional worlds, such as the novel and the diary. Razumov's diary is the main source of the narrator's fiction. It functions as the double of the novel just as Razumov is the double of the narrator. The narrative doubleness in the novel is proof the doubleness in the writer's nature. While Razumov's diary is the only medium through which we learn something about him, the novel is the only medium the readers will be able to learn something about the author. The narrator serves the double function: on the one hand he narrates Razumov's diary and on the other hand, it is possible to learn his observations and comments which inform the reader about the existence of two perspectives of Razumov. The narrative is composed of two interdependent narrations, inner and outer narrative circles. Through these two narrative circles, Conrad catches the opportunity of viewing life from two different perspectives. Conrad's narrator points out the dichotomy in Conrad's split personality. The fragmented nature of narration is a clear indication of the fragmentation in Conrad. Duplicity as one of the major

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themes of the novel indicates the fragmentation as a major theme of the twentieth century. The fragmented nature of the narrator, the fragmented narration and the fragmented characters in the novel are great obstacles in understanding the novel and in creating wholeness in the minds.

Keywords: Double Narration, Under Western Eyes, Cultural Wasteland, East, Ideology.

The Type of Research: Research

The Duplicity in Cultural Wasteland: *Under Western Eyes*

The present analysis is intended to shed light on Joseph Conrad's experiments with the double narration in *Under Western Eyes*. Part duplicity and part indeterminacy, part Western and part Eastern, *Under Western Eyes* is one of the most enigmatic novels, which presents the reader not only with a fictional narrative but also with an exploration of the medium of narrative, that is, double narration. The duplicity, a certain doubleness characterizes *Under Western Eyes*. The novel presents different perspectives of duplicity whose power to affect arises from the author's experiments with the relationships between human cognition and narrative. *Under Western Eyes* invites its readers into its complex narrative body and confronts them with a series of shifting perspectives through duplicity. To explore the connection between these perspectives is to uncover the relationship between author, text and reader. It is possible to suppose that the novel's presentation of various views of the nature of duplication is a medium for representing the elusiveness of the text. It is a text whose meaning is difficult to pinpoint. Conrad's friend Edward Garnet remarked that "its last page leaves us almost as much in the dark as the first. We can only feel sure that certain actual facts have been presented, and that there is probably an explanation of them if we could only hit upon them." (Stape, 1996: 123)

The text is composed of a succession of interdependent duplicities which develop new perceptual skills and processes that enable the reader to read in a new perspective. The amazingly different critical approaches to the narrator of *Under Western Eyes* are of particular importance in connection with Conrad's own split identity. The main source of this duplicity can be found in Conrad's own words. He wrote: "Both at sea and on land my point of view is English, from which the conclusion should not be drawn that I have become an Englishman. That is not the case. Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning." (Najder, 1983: 240) His dichotomy about his identity is of crucial importance in his creation of a novel which is composed of duplicities. Conrad's discussion of things Russian as opposed to the Western includes his private and personal and his national past. He seems to be stuck between his origins, which involved things Russian and his being at that moment a fiction writer in English. His search for a discourse through which his double life will be filtered and rendered has much to do with his protagonist, Razumov's function as a double agent. Conrad's personal perspective of the things Russian which is in close line with the 'Western eyes' by means of which the narrator could express his disturbing and ambivalent feelings about Russia and the Russian people reflects his political point of view. Conrad's usage of a narrator for his personal point of view and attitude towards the things Russian makes the novel a complex and complicated narration. At the centre of the novel, there stands an author who is sitting to resolve the enigma of his personality. Thus, the narrator acts as a mask through which the author speaks. In this sense, the author's artistic creation of the narrator constitutes a unique process and a quest for self knowledge. Behind the story of the narrator lies the divided nature of the author. Thus, Conrad and his protagonist share the same fate as the other. The duplicity which stems from pretending to be someone he is not can be captured in the telling phrase by Helmut Plessner: "Ich bin, aber ich habe mich nicht [I am, but I do not have myself]" (Armstrong, 1998: 41). As Penn R. Szittyta remarked:

The old language teacher is a patent masquerade by an author pretending loudly to be someone he is not. All novels, especially naïve first-person narrations, are masquerades or counterfeits in this sense, but *Under Western Eyes* pushes the masquerade into the foreground more insistently than most by all sorts of techniques of language like irony or reflexive reference to itself. (in Billy, 1987: 147)

Joseph Conrad was self-conscious about the contradictions and conflicts in his own nature concerning his identity. The dichotomy in his own nature must have found its best medium in his own narration when he made use of a narrator who speaks of a character in *Under Western Eyes*. As Thomas F. Walsh pointed out, "almost any story which seems to be about one character and is narrated by another character

is a story of the double in which the subject character is the double of the narrator.” (in Billy, 1987: 144) Conrad must have needed the old narrator for multiple purposes. In this sense, Paul Holywood remarked:

Conrad needed the old teacher of languages as a way of comment on Russian affairs...He also needed the old teacher, as a rational and sceptical voice to connect with the ‘Western’ reader and to define the novel against the marginalizing and dismissive charges of Eastern, ...as he had changed the dominant subject of his fiction matter from the sea to things political. ...A product of neither East nor West but recognizing the ultimate blindness of both and the impossibility of any final or all-inclusive revelation of truth, Conrad had to place the old teacher’s “Western Eyes” in the same ironic frame as the Russian characters.” (in Orr and Billy, 1983: 205)

Conrad’s choosing an elderly Englishman, an unnamed teacher of languages residing in Geneva is due to his wish for keeping some detachment in the novel. In order to escape and to be understood, he created a shrewd old teacher of languages, a narrator through whose narration Conrad is able to express his criticism of “cynicism”, “mysticism”, and “corroding simplicity” (1980: 67, 104) The narrator has the right of having some documents and is, at times, an observer or a participant. He claims that his story is based upon a “document.” (1980: 3) The information in the diary by Razumov and the narrator’s reflections and ideas about the protagonist confuse the reader’s mind. His inconsistency is functional in his doubleness. It is a Russian story for Western ears but a Russian story filtered through a Western consciousness that frequently protests its own inability to understand the Russian nature. The story is narrated through the ‘Western Eyes’ of the old teacher of languages who is unable to understand Russia and the Russians. He has a very limited perspective. Despite his deplorably limited sense of the eastern, the old teacher attempts to capture the very soul of the things Russian:

Words...are the great foes of reality...To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much wonderful than a parrot...I had a rather extensive connexion in Little Russia at that time. Yet I confess that I have no comprehension of the Russian character. The illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, the frequency of the exceptional, should present no difficulty to a student of many grammars; but there must be something else in the way, some special human trait – one of those subtle differences that are beyond the ken of mere professors. (1980: 3-4)

On the one hand, he makes use of the perspective of an omniscient narrator, and on the other hand, he tries to draw the attention to his restricted knowledge of the characters and to his limited Western capacity and vantage point, which is the core of the duality in the narrator. The narrative indeterminacies of the old language teacher stage for the reader the contradictions and the duplicity in his own role as an omniscient narrator. That duplicity in his own nature makes his identity problematic not only for himself and but also for the reader. Ambiguity and conflict in his narrative characterize his identity:

This is not a story of the West of Europe...It is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov’s situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. ...This is but a crude and obvious example of the different conditions of Western thought. (1980: 25)

The old teacher of languages narrates his story which is based upon Razumov’s diary from the vantage point of his otherness. What he says is limited to his Western viewpoint, a structure of negation. Although he disclaims his knowledge of the things Russian, he claims different traits of the Russians such as mysticism, lawlessness and cynicism:

In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom sound like a form of debauch, and the Christian values themselves appear actually indecent. (1980: 67)

His “occidental” (112) vantage point and outlook negates Russian characteristics as different and hostile, creating the opposition of ‘us’ and ‘the other’. His contemptuous Western Eyes lead him to despise Russia, its autocratic regime and its people’s cynicism. He repeatedly proves the existence of two opposing voices, showing himself as “mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under

my Western Eyes.” (1980: 321) The clash and the tension between the East and the West is the main source of the double perspective in the novel. As Tony Tanner observes:

The introduction of a narrator makes possible the challenging interplay of two frames of reference, two schemes of values, two worlds of experience. ...The narrator tries to impress on us the remoteness, the alienness, the regrettable primitiveness of his material. He will represent the virtues of decency, moderation a sort of polite if bemused tolerance of what is unusual, plus an uncompromising belief in the bourgeois-liberal tradition of the West: he is, to use one of Conrad's terms, an image of 'befogged respectability'. To make such a reasonable man recount to us some deeply irrational occurrence, to make the nightmarish material pass through the complacent filter, to make the Western eye strive to get into focus some seemingly unwestern form of experience –this is to achieve a double irony...The narrator may convince us of the undesirability and remoteness of his material, but his material may convince us of the inadequacy of the narrator's complacent virtues. The frame delimits and places the picture, but the picture can challenge and even ridicule the frame.” (in Goonetilleke, 1990:165-166)

The narrator's dichotomies, inconsistencies, reservation and his generalizations cause the readers to feel something is wrong in some way, so that they are not sure what to believe. His intellectual wisdom, integrity, consistency and the supremacy of his Western culture are questioned in the minds of the readers. “Far from being a superior vantage point of reason, individual autonomy, and freedom, the West becomes a wasteland of sterile proprieties and impotent grief.” (Vulcan, 1991: 122) The narrator is explicitly Conrad's spokesman for his ideas as a way of expressing his own understanding of the duplicity in his mind. Accordingly, it is possible to find out many similarities between the first person narrator, an old English language teacher, and the protagonist of the novel, Razumov.

Razumov who is the illegitimate son of a nobleman, Prince K. who refuses to acknowledge his son publicly and sends him money privately is an intelligent student whose main concern is with his work, his studies and with his own future. Razumov's hopes are disappointed by the coming of Haldin who has just assassinated a Minister of State. His carefully laid plans about the silver medal, the prize of an essay competition are terribly shattered with Haldin's arrival for his help him escape: “There goes my silver medal!” (1980: 21) Haldin who stands for a threat to Razumov's existence disrupts not only his peaceful and comfortable life physically, but also destroys him psychologically. He is suddenly captured by the feelings of anxiety, anguish and predicament. By “giving him up” (1980: 38), he thinks that he will be able to get rid of the problem, which will lead to his split personality. The result becomes much more burdensome than expected, which results in breaking his character to pieces due to the guilt-ridden consciousness. The betrayal's immediate effects upon his soul create a terrible spiritual breakdown. For the sake of his self interest, self possession, he betrays Haldin, which is the main source of his duplicity. Having been sent to Geneva by the authorities to spy on the revolutionaries, Razumov who is known as “man of unstained, lofty and solitary existence” (1980: 118) is totally immersed in his duplication. He is bound to identify himself as a Russian. There is no place he can belong to. He is forced to make a choice between the warring forces of autocracy and revolution. He prefers autocracy, claiming that “I am reasonable.” (1980: 89) It indicates the struggle between reasoning intellect and mysticism. His sense of guilt in his soul, his infinite solitude, and his alienation not only from the outside but also from himself are the symptoms of his psychological dilemma. Razumov cannot bear the conflict between what he seems to be and what he is. It is just as if there were two opposing characters in him which alternately replace one another. He has two voices: one to the revolutionaries, one to himself. To use Tony Tanner's words, “Life for Razumov changes into a grotesque pantomime, a hideous farce, a monstrous puppet show, a nightmare, anything but normal reassuring reality.” (qtd. In Goonetilleke, 190:166) The gap between his public and private sphere becomes greater and greater, and his suffering comes to a point he is unable to bear anymore. By betraying Haldin, Razumov betrays himself, and he is turned into someone he is not. His inner conflicts constantly haunt him. The inner struggles of a psychologically tormented personality are at the centre of the divided nature of the protagonist. Razumov suffers terrible pangs of remorse.

Razumov's betrayal of Haldin drags him into his own fictional world. His otherness as a fictional identity attracts the attention to the author's fictional world. Although, at first sight, the old language teacher and Razumov seem quite different from each other, they share many traits in common. As

pointed out by Daphne Erdinast Vulcan, “both of them are lonely and reticent and yet have the gift of inspiring confidence in others, both were born in Russia and claim an affinity with the West and particularly with England, both are, of course, in love with Nathalie Haldin.” (Vulcan, 1991: 121) Both of them can be accepted as the writers of the fictional worlds such as the novel and the diary. Razumov’s diary is the main core of the narrator’s fiction, namely the novel which functions just as the double as is Razumov the narrator’s double. The significance of the diary is stressed by the narrative doubleness in the novel. The diary is the only medium we can get information about Razumov who is in dire need of exposing and communicating his hidden feelings through his diary. The narrator’s narrating of Razumov’s diary and his own observations in Geneva expose two sides of Razumov or two perspectives of Razumov’s identity, creating a double image of the protagonist for the reader. Razumov who is “a man who had read, thought, lived, pen in hand” (Conrad, 1980: 301) has his own aspirations of being famous and successful as a winner of the reward of the essay writing. Not only Razumov but also the narrator who narrates Razumov’s story has efforts to establish some meaning through their narrations, which will help them construct their identities. The narrative is composed of two interdependent narrations, one of them is at the centre, namely Razumov’s diary and the other one is at the outer circle, namely the novel which is narrated by the old language teacher. As pointed out by Hollywood:

Razumov, then, clearly enacts one of the possible identities and ways of being available to his author: another literary man born a “Russian subject”, but bound to forge his identity and aspirations in loneliness. He is, obviously, the embodiment of Conrad’s awareness that, had he remained in his native cultural milieu, he could not have become a literary artist: that in Poland the claim of his personal attachments, his national and familial loyalties, would have been too strong for the necessary negation. Like Razumov he would have become a ‘personage without knowing anything about it.’”(qtd. In Orr and Billy, 1983: 198)

The double vantage point which stems from Razumov’s diary and the external observations of the narrator allow Conrad to view life from internal and external perspectives. The duplicity in the novel results from the split personality of the author. The narrator functions as a “safety valve” (Eagleton, 1986: 21) for his dichotomy. As Penn R. Szittyta remarked, “Writing about the invented world of *Under Western Eyes*, with its double narration and conflicting points of view, Conrad was at least in part writing about himself behind the veil of fiction.” (Billy, 1987: 155) As Carl D. Bennet pointed out, “This mildly eccentric Englishman, in telling his ‘Russian story for Western ears’, provides Conrad with the means of projecting his own prejudices as well as his insights.” (1991:107)

Set in the sinister landscape of czarist autocracy, *Under Western Eyes* is structurally one of Conrad’s most complicated works. His narrative method is complex and multi-faceted, and multiform in style. Duplicity as a major medium helps Conrad create a fragmented narrative. As Penn R. Szittyta expressed, “as the major theme of the novel is duplicity, the characteristic feature of its construction is doubleness or duplication.” (in Billy, 1987: 143) Doubleness, duplication, duplicity are the embedded themes in the novel. They affect the narration. The novel is about fiction. The narration becomes mirrored in its own subject. The concentric narrations, an inner and an outer, reflect not only the shadowy spirit of its author, but the shadowy politics of the period as well. The duplicity in the novel itself is the object and the subject matter. Conrad widened his circle from himself to *Under Western Eyes* and achieved to write a fiction about fiction. While writing fiction about fiction, Joseph Conrad wrote about himself with its double narration and duplicity. Duplicity is used as a means for showing not only the fragmented construction of the novel in terms of narration through many contradictions but also the fragmented nature of life in the 20th century. Due to its fragmented structure and narration, the real difficulty lies in the reader’s creating and capturing of a total picture of the narrator, the protagonist, the characters, and lastly the novel. Conrad assaults and attacks the notion of totality through duplicity.

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