

Being and Nothingness: The Reification of Yaşar Kemal's Memed, My Hawk

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of İnce Memed from a person who used to be an ordinary and loser-like village to a warrior that everyone respects. The revolutionary change that İnce Memed undergoes pinpoints his existence defiantly. This change comes from a process that goes from nothing to existence. In fact, this is a positive anarchist war against the inhuman repression of the feudal system. But with such a head-up, İnce Memed may exist. İnce Memed isn't feeding on Abdi Aga's feudal power, nor does he create a symbiotic system that he can survive depending on the others existence. Conversely, he solely relies on his archetypal existence which is ready to lurk out. Therefore, this article purports to confirm that İnce Memed's transformation is affected by extrinsic factors but still fueled by intrinsic instincts.

Keywords: İnce Memed, Sartrean Existentialism, Yasar Kemal, Memed, My Hawk.

Introduction

In addition to the confrontation between Yasar Kemal's İnce Memed and Abdi Aga, the actual confrontation lies inside İnce Memed. By the end of the novel, İnce Memed achieves a solid character development as a result of the characters and events around him. From being a stereotypical character who lacks the fundamental qualities of a hero resulting from experiencing the events around his village and Abdi Aga's feudal sovereignty, Memed turns out to be an anarchist like Achilles or Beowulf. By the end of the novel, İnce Memed has acquired the qualities that can be observed in almost every archetypal hero. Henceforth, throughout this paper, the main focus will be the 'reification' process of İnce Memed from childhood to his adult status as a true hero.

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Yasar Kemal creates such a vivid atmosphere that İnce Memed's struggle to reach his ultimate form raises any reader's interest in the novel instinctively. İnce Memed seems to develop his consciousness by making up his mind about the events that occur around him. Not only do those events lead him to embody the disguised archaic hero in his psychic world, but they also urge his consciousness to come into an effective position to lead him.

In other words, the archetypal hero inside İnce Memed emerges out of the past and steps into the field. Deep down inside of İnce Memed a warrior lies ready to instigate. It can be suggested that İnce Memed depends on such a symbiosis that the warrior inside İnce Memed and his instincts present a unity so that both create a solid hero. By getting his impetus from the ancient archetypal warrior, Memed enhances his endurance against Abdi Aga and other bandits. As Memed takes his power from the ancient archetypal hero, he also transforms, or in other words tames the savage warrior by injecting humanistic values into it. As an illustration, he doesn't sack innocent people's belongings or kills for nothing. Instead, he only kills the people like Abdi Aga or Kalaycioglu, who are totally ruthless towards innocent people. As a matter of fact, not only does Memed create a symbiosis by depending on the ancient warrior but also, he shapes it and recreates the ancient hero in accordance with his rebellious character. This ancient archetypal hero within İnce Memed has palpable resemblances with other familiar heroes like Achilles, Hector, Beowulf, and so on. All of these heroes reach their ultimate mortal heroic manners by creating an amalgamation of their personal peculiarities and the ancient or the primitive warrior inside them. This similarity between Memed and the other heroes can be deciphered as an existential progress to reach the self. This discovery results from Memed's experience of several events that occur around him.

Consequently, İnce Memed undergoes an inexorable haunting process. In this haunting process, he is overpowered by the archetypal hero who silently lies in his mind. That is to say, on the one hand there is the ancient archetypal identity as being the original primitive male warrior inside, but on the other hand, he unveils his ever changing substantial features that he receives from his close association with nature and his villagers. This association helps him to get the velocity he needs to fulfill his 'duty.' This 'duty' is the sacred 'duty' that İnce Memed asserts upon his fate to change ruthless Abdi Aga's feudal government into a communal system.

In order to understand how İnce Memed comes into a solid hero being by trying to change the system, it is essential to analyze his character under the terms of Sartre's existentialism and Jung's definition of archaic man and his psychology. Jung defines the mentality of the archaic man as:

When we speak of man in general, we do not have his anatomy – the shape of his skull or the color of his skin – in mind, but mean rather his psychic world, his state of consciousness and his mode of life. Since all this belongs to the subject-matter of psychology, we shall be dealing here chiefly with archaic or primitive mentality. (Jung, 1933: 125)

Sir Isaac Newton described one of the basic laws' of physics as: "every single action has an equal and opposite reaction." This law of physics can be taken into same account in terms of psychology. Now that the novel talks about a time line that occurs around the early and mid-20th century, it is not possible to talk about a pre-historic primitive man, but another bias would most likely become true that is especially the villagers cause the 'reification' process inside İnce Memed. This process is a progress from an unconscious being into a character who makes his own decisions and acts through his logic. Therefore, it is notable to scrutinize how a 20th century man is able to turn back to his ancient grassroots as an archetypal hero to create an amalgamation of reason and instinct. According to Jung, limiting the archaic character within only the primitive man wouldn't be fair and actually it meant to broaden the debate of archaic psychology:

...it turns out that we have actually widened our theme, because it is not only primitive man whose psychic processes are archaic. The civilized man of today shows these archaic processes as well, and not merely in the form of sporadic "throwbacks" from the level of modern social life. On the contrary, every civilized human being, whatever his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper levels of his psyche. Just as the human body connects us with the mammals and displays numerous relics of earlier evolutionary stages going back even to the reptilian age, so the human psyche is likewise a product of evolution which, when followed up to its origins, shows countless archaic traits. (Jung, 1933: 126)

Just as Jung approaches every civilized man's behavior within the evolutionary process, which dates back even to the reptilian age, it is conceivable to claim that potentially every man has this 'archaic man' deep inside his psyche. Yet, it is not a matter of fact that every man has this 'archaic man' or not, but it is a matter of reification process: how or through what ways a potential character could be turned into 'an existing concrete character.' To get one step closer to the possible suggestions, Jung's interpretation of the human psyche could be another milestone to establish a promising bias since the "...human psyche is the womb of all the sciences and arts. We may expect psychological research, on the one hand, to explain the formation of a work of art, and on the other to reveal the factors that make a person artistically creative" (Jung 1933: 152).

In spite of the fact that whether it is Hatce or the villagers who affect İnce Memed deeply, without his archaic inspiration and his free will, it would

be an amorphous debate to assert that he becomes a legend for his people only because of his people and Hatce. That is to say, it is true that the people around him influence İnce Memed. Nevertheless, if it weren't for his 'existential' core, it would have been awkward for him to develop heroic deeds. More than that, his unstable decisions are directed by his free will. As an illustration, his strong desire to rescue Hatce from the gendarmes or his unstoppable wish to see Hatce by disguising himself from the gendarmes and visiting the prison could be shown as examples of his rising free-will. Though those ventures might seem to be too dangerous, involving within danger is a part of heroism that is natural for İnce Memed. In addition, İnce Memed disregards all objections from his comrade Cabbar and enrolls in any danger with his eyes wide shut. Therefore, although there is a certain interaction between him and the villagers, still in the core of his heart, İnce Memed makes his own decisions. Jung defines this process:

We cannot reach for and borrow anything from outside, from the world, from history: what is significant can only grow from out of ourselves. Consequently, when the White Man is true to his instincts, he reacts with instinctive resistance to everything that others can say to him or advise. And what he has already swallowed, he must eject again as an alien body; for his blood rejects what has grown upon alien soil. (Campbell 2008: 13)

Another discussion can be made through the two opposite poles between which İnce Memed is stuck. As if it were a situation where he might turn his own world from utopia to dystopia or vice-versa, İnce Memed swings from one destiny to the other. This oscillation or dueling between two fates or two worlds utopian or dystopian depending on the villagers' dreams of a communal and equally shared world or a world where they live just to please Abdi Aga. These two worlds or fates seem to be entangled with İnce Memed's own destiny, as İnce Memed appears to trail either what villagers want from him or he follows his inner voice. He makes his own choices, and is not totally dependent upon the others. İnce Memed's situation could be elucidated through Sartrean ontology, as well.

In the Sartrean ontology of 'Being and Nothingness', there are two fundamental asymmetrical 'regions of being' disputed as being-in-itself and being-for-itself assisting as the ground for liberty, creativity, and action. More than that, those regions serve well as a theoretical framework for an existentialist approach to human existence (Audi 2009: 298). Those two essences could be observable within the background of the novel that sets up the characteristics of İnce Memed. Another crucial aspect that marks İnce Memed's actions is also taught by Sartre as 'being-for-others', which might define the very relationship between İnce Memed and his villagers. To some extent, his existence is only meaningful as long as he thinks he is useful for his villagers. He pretends as if he were a kind of 'Messiah' or a 'Savior' for

his villagers. It is more or less like a symbiotic oasis for this one-sided obligation. That is to say, he might be dependent on the villagers' needs in order to get rid of his guilty conscience about Hatce's and his mother's death. In this way, it could be an oasis for him to rescue his conscience. From the other side, he feels proud of himself when he hears heroic manners are attached on him. In this way, İnce Memed throws away Sartrean ontology implies that human beings exist outside of reasoning; in another words, humans exist absurdly or spontaneously in a world into which they are "thrown," condemned to assume full responsibility for their free actions and values which make existentialism a persistent philosophical contest, particularly to ethicists who believe precise choices to be commanded by our so-called human essence or nature. He takes a role inside the existentialist form but most probably he does this by sharing his actions via heroic manners with his villagers. As it is stated above, this could be well illustrated as a form of 'symbiotic'⁴ existence. At the end of the novel, even though there is no meaning left for him after his loss for Hatce and his son, İnce Memed could still have a comfortable life in Vayvay Village. Perhaps İnce Memed never considers this kind of life without Hatce; he doesn't resist against what the villagers' demands of him. For the villagers, if İnce Memed chooses an ordinary but a comfortable life in any village, their reluctant slavery will continue, but İnce Memed does what is expected of him. Sartre states that "many relationships are created by people's attraction not to another person, but rather how that person makes them feel about themselves by how they look at them" (Kaufman 1975: 305-307). This definition suits on İnce Memed, since his coming into existence or forming his heroic manners is directly connected with the villagers' need to have a 'heroic' figure like the legendary Koca Ahmet. İnce Memed's stance against Abdi Aga and his so-called dynasty, which depends on fraternity, makes the villagers have optimistic expectations for the future. This is a state of emotional alienation whereby İnce Memed avoids experiencing his subjectivity by identifying himself with 'the look' of the villagers. The inevitable consequence arises as a conflict. The result stands on a blade. One side is a dystopia and the other side is a utopia. In order to maintain his own being, İnce Memed tries to control the villagers by being a fearful but a trustworthy bandit. Yet, on the other side, he feels himself bound to control the freedom of the villagers as a total freedom or liberty from Abdi Aga's sovereignty. Under these conditions, as Memed survives in a symbiosis where he has to disempower the archetypal hero and transform this savage archetypal hero in accordance with his free will,

⁴ Symbiosis is close and often long-term interaction between two or more different biological species. In 1877, Bennett used the word *symbiosis* (which previously had been used to depict people living together in community) to describe the mutualistic relationship in lichens. In 1879, the German mycologist Heinrich Anton de Bary defined it as "the living together of unlike organisms."

naturally he experiences such a contradiction inside him. However, he overpowers the archetypal ancient hero and makes his personal decisions at last.

This relationship is an intense manifestation of İnce Memed's bad faith whereby he loses his wife and child, so that at the end his free existence is replaced with the villagers' freedom and demands. However, when this relation comes to its utmost point, there can be alienation between the 'hero' and the people around him. This is also observable between İnce Memed and the villagers. Despite the fact that İnce Memed fights for the villagers, when it comes to a clash between his personal revenge and villagers' belongings, İnce Memed completely burns down Aktozlu village to its ashes. This clash becomes so passionate that due to the guilt of being so radically enslaved by 'the look', when İnce Memed hears that he couldn't kill Abdi Aga and İnce Memed drastically misses his own freedom in his deepest feelings of revenge and anger. As a matter of fact, he starts to commit merciless attitudes like killing Abdi Aga without hesitating or wounding gendarmeries, or as it is mentioned above burning the Aktozlu Village completely. Owing to the fact that both İnce Memed and the Aktozlu villagers feels hatred towards each other –though Memed's hatred is actually towards Abdi Aga-, in attempting to overpower the other's look, which they cannot escape because they believe themselves to be so enslaved to the look that experiencing their own subjectivity would be equally unbearable. In other words, without killing Abdi Aga, Memed feels himself entrapped in the eyes of the villagers. Therefore, he loses his control when he tries to kill Abdi Aga and he burns down the whole village. For Memed, whoever helps Abdi Aga is a part of Abdi Aga's feudal system. More than that, what makes Memed annoyed is that the villagers' reluctant hypocrisy. Although almost all of the villagers want Abdi Aga to be defeated, they don't want to risk themselves if under any circumstances Memed fails in killing Abdi Aga. At this point, the difference between Memed and villagers and even the other bandits like Cabbar or Sergeant Recep is visible. Memed has nothing to lose but his freedom and his existence. The others give importance to their belongings and they fight for these belongings. Nevertheless, Memed chooses to be a hero rather than being an ordinary rich man in any village by refusing any voluntarily or reluctantly made decisions. Therefore, Memed's choice proves his solid existence by only depending his heroic manners and personal choices, while the other characters in the novel 'seek their existence' via their belongings.

Conclusion

Although İnce Memed is influenced by the villagers and their demands, he successfully fulfills his own egotistic maneuver by killing Abdi Aga and rescuing Hatce from the gendarmeries. Nevertheless, İnce Memed

accomplishes his reification process completely when he changes from being an ordinary villager to a public hero at the end. He doesn't accept a comfortable village life offered by the Vayvay villagers, and neither does he surrender to become the exact bandit that villagers want to see. Instead, he endures for the sake of his passions and his choice reminds the readers of the words of Hannibal: "I will either find a way or make one." As a matter of fact, he finally locates his own liberty by making his choice and retreating to the unknown, which might remain as an ever changing or a stable river.

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