

**WITH(IN) IRONY WRITING AS WOMAN:
TANTE ROSA AND CÜCE**

by

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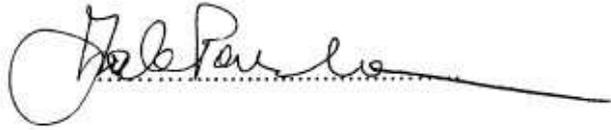
**WITH(IN) IRONY WRITING AS WOMAN:
TANTE ROSA AND CÜCE**

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Anneme

Teşekkürler

Tez danışmanım Sibel Irzık'a yazdıklarıyla ilham verdiği, ortaya çıkan metin üzerine yaptığı zihin açıcı yorumlar ve endişeleri hafifleten tavrı için, Hülya Adak'a kadın oto/biyografileri konusunda ufuk açan dersleri için, Jale Parla'ya kadın yazını üzerine kaleme aldıklarıyla tezin ortaya çıkmasındaki etkisi ve değerli müdahaleleri için ve Meltem Gürle'ye edebiyatın büyüğü dünyasıyla kurduğu o özel bağı miras bıraktığı ve tezin şekillenme sürecinde verdiği değerli destek için teşekkür ederim.

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Abstract

WITH(IN) IRONY WRITING AS WOMAN: *TANTE ROSA* AND *CÜCE*

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Keywords: Romantic/unstable irony, Socratic irony, authorial subjectivity, parody of *bildungsroman*

The aim of this study is to analyze the function of irony in women writers' novels. The initial question is if irony plays a subversive role in women writers' novels in favor of female identity and writing as woman. In this context, Sevgi Soysal's *Tante Rosa* (1968) and Leyla Erbil's *Cüce* (2001) are examined. Different types of irony and their varying applications within the novels are presented, and it is ascertained that Romantic/unstable and Socratic irony are used alternatively in these novels.

As a result of the analysis on the use of irony specifically in these two novels, it is argued that *Tante Rosa* emerges as a parody of *bildungsroman* that undermines the idea of self-development, and *Cüce* points to a rather fortified authorial voice that is beyond the fragmented representation of the selves in the novel.

Özet

İRONİNİN İÇİNDEN KADIN OLARAK YAZMAK: *TANTE ROSA* VE *CÜCE*

Selen Erdoğan

Kültürel Çalışmalar, MA Tezi, 2011
Prof. Dr. Sibel Irzık, Tez Danışmanı

Anahtar Sözcükler: Romantik/belirsiz ironi, Sokratik ironi, yazarın özneliği, gelişim romanı parodisi

Bu tezde amaçlanan ironinin kadın yazarların romanlarındaki işlevinin incelenmesidir. Yola çıkarken sorulan soru ironinin kadın yazarların romanlarında kadın kimliği ve kadın olarak yazma konumu bağlamında dönüştürücü rolü olup olmadığıdır. Bu soru Sevgi Soysal'ın *Tante Rosa* (1968) ve Leyla Erbil'in *Cüce* (2001) romanları özelinde cevaplanmaya çalışılmıştır. Çeşitli ironi türleri ve kullanım biçimleri saptanmış ve Romantik/belirsiz ironi ve Sokratik ironinin iki romanda dönüşümlü olarak kullanıldığı gözlenmiştir.

İki romanda ironinin incelenmesi sonucunda *Tante Rosa*'nın bir gelişim romanı (*bildungsroman*) parodisi olduğu ve *Cüce*'nin parçalı benlik temsillerinin ötesinde güçlü bir yazar sesine işaret ettiği iddia edilmiştir.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Irony has been considered as a distinguishing feature of notable artistic production which encompasses writings from pre-modern to post-modern figures (Booth 1975: 201). It also has been in the service of various fields such as philosophy, visual arts, histrionic art and etc. For our concern within the field of literature the ways to generate irony and its subtypes vary widely, and a single, inclusive or exact definition of it is not possible. Therefore, rather than fixating a certain definition, going over the historical development of the term and choosing the moments that will be relevant to the subject of this thesis will be more convenient.

A. Pre-Modern Irony

The first use of the term *eironeia* occurs in Socratic dialogs as a rhetorical method to reach knowledge. Socrates pretends to be the ignorant one whereas he deliberately allows the other party to express his ideas with confidence to extract the “truth” from his interlocutor. In other words, Socratic dialogs depend on his so called naivety before his interlocutor and aims to contest forms of received knowledge.¹ There is an intended truth which is not directly addressed and it becomes the ironic representation of “truth” or “knowledge” since brought out by his fake ignorance

¹ This first version of irony pertaining to the ancient Greek, is argued to be negative in the sense that it becomes a tool to deceive the other party and prove one’s own right. It serves to mere rhetoric. This negative understanding of Sokrates’s irony prevails until Aritoteles explains it as Sokrates’s modesty that creates contrast with the ignorant party’s arrogance. When the concept of irony meets the Latin world, with Cicero, Socratic irony is thought to serve as a means to present good morality (Güçbilmez 2005: 14-15).

(Cebeci 2008: 87-88). Such pre-modern understanding of irony is based on a belief in the 'good' that is to be reached.

Other than as a practical method used by Socrates, Socratic irony also emanates from the contrast between what is inside and what is seen from outside. He is presented as an ugly figure who has inner beauty and wisdom, and such contrast embodied in the figure of Socrates is the source of irony. Similar to the Sileni of Alcibiades, who possesses two aspects quite different from each other, Socrates represents the condition of irony that creates a tension between the surface and what is deep inside (Behler)². In other words, irony is inherent to Socrates's character.

This position of the ironist is defined with regard to its opposite by Aristoteles. He explains *eiron* in relation to *alazon*. Presenting one's ideas in an excessive, haughty manner is defined as *alazoneia* (like Socrates's interlocutor) whereas *eiron* (the ironist) disguises himself and is rather diminutive dwelling on lacks rather than excesses. *Eiron* is affiliated with modesty where he emphasizes his deficiencies rather than abilities. In ancient Greek comedies *eiron* functions as the opposite of *alazon* and the contrast between them turns *alazon* into an object of laughter (Güçbilmez, 14). *Eiron* is the attitude of the wise person and *alazon* with his arrogance falls into the position of the fool.

With Pyrrho the state of *ataraxia* comes into the picture. It is a state of mind that is to be reached by the wise person who has no conclusive answer in the face of the ambiguities of life and embraces inertia. The aim is to live without having exact

² Cebeci quotes from Behler.

judgments which opens a space for simultaneity of contrasting phenomena (Cebeci, 280). The ironist acknowledges the absurdity of existence and considers ideals such as freedom, justice or religious belief as ridiculous because of the inherent paradoxes of universe (280). Therefore, the ironist's aim should be to reach an ignorant attitude towards the absurd world, namely a serene *ataraxia* (280).

Irony undergoes changes in time and in the hands of thinkers and artists. Although there are obvious departure moments that attach irony differing functions, one can also locate a continuum within the overlapping of certain notions. With Romanticism irony becomes the building block of artistic creation and gift; and emerges as a critique of Enlightenment reason, against its "restriction ... to a universal human norm" (Colebrook 2004: 46). The Romantic challenge was to contest given reality, and praise art and artistic imagination in the face of practical realities of life. In Socratic irony there is the presumption of an ideal truth whereas there is no predetermined truth before Romantic irony (Dellaloğlu 2002: 103). This lack of truth and due stance of the Romantic artist runs with Pyrrhoian state of *ataraxia* which embraces ambiguity. This conjunction will be more apparent in the detailed explanation below.

B. Romantic Irony

a) Ironic Attitude

Ironic attitude, which was the true mode of life for Romantics, became a style of existence rather than a rhetorical figure. It is a form of consciousness and pertains to the artist's attitude towards the world. Romantics acknowledged that human understanding will always be lesser than a God-like point of view and humans will always undergo

this cosmic joke. They recognized that people cannot escape being “dupes and effects of a life with a power well beyond [their] control” (Colebrook, 49-50). This acceptance of the eternal lack is akin to Pyrrhoian *ataraxia*, which understands irony as the mere possible attitude revealing the ridiculous position of the human as well as following any ideal. What remains is a silent smile on the face the philosopher. However, for the Romantic subject such smile is also the harbinger of the lack and distance from an origin.

For Romantics life is not a fall from or the loss of “an original infinite plenitude;” it can already only be finite and incomplete. They inverted the familiar order between origin and effect (48). The presupposition of a paradise before the fall or loss is eliminated. However, the notion of fall is still prominent since art (poetry) “presents itself as fallen” and the self is already fallen but not from an origin (49). Romantics acknowledged the finitude of the fall and the fact that it is the self that creates an idea of origin that is lost (49).

The Romantic consciousness of this finitude and being subjects of a power that is beyond their control engenders their ironic attitude. It is a position that oscillates between the limitations of daily life and the desire to break those limits to reach the transcendental. The consciousness of the limitations despite the desire defined ironic attitude. In other words, irony became the indispensable shelter for Romantics embracing the contradictions and plurality of identity; it became a sincere attitude that incorporates the incoherence of the self (Dellaloğlu, 103-107).

b) Contradiction

Romantic irony is not a mere transference of the opposite of what is said, it is an equivocal utterance, a simultaneous expression of paradoxical viewpoints. It is a manifest contradiction and looking for a “hidden sense” behind the irony means conceding a stable meaning which irony aims to disrupt (52). It rather sets out to achieve a disruption of common sense, communication and an assumed coherence (55).

The stress is on the equivocity and the contradicting positions of the speech. Poems written during the Romantic era are “about the inexpressible, unimaginable or unrepresentable origin of life and consciousness.” Colebrook asks if there is a way to speak about the unspeakable and draws attention to the power of irony to embrace the contradiction of saying that a term is not representable in language is already a presentation of the term “*as* untranslatable.” Maybe not the representation of the unrepresentable but irony comes about to be the expression and espousal of the impossibility of transparent meaning (Colebrook, 59). In other words, Romantic irony calls the moment when the inadequacy of language to fill the gap between infinitude and consciousness was recognized (Güçbilmez, 16). Irony became the mere figure of speech within which this gap is represented.

c) Self-consciousness

In Romantic understanding an ironic text demonstrates an awareness of its own inadequacies. So, it is with the Romantic notion of irony that the idea of simultaneity of critique and self-critique as well as the power of irony to generate multiple point of views and meanings that are in contradiction with each other, come to the fore. Colebrook argues that this stance can be summarized in three major characteristics. First

of all, the texts are not complete and closed entities. On the contrary, they are fragmentary and incomplete which refer to a process of creation rather than an end result. The ironic text reflects upon its own moment of generation. Secondly, a notion of intention or objective is not a part of thoroughly ironic text, ironic speech is “self-undermining and internally contradictory” (65). The third notion is the critical side of irony. For Romantics art is not a beautiful thing any more since it has to reflect upon its own origin which is already distant and different from itself (66). There might be a desire to compose complete works of art, however, Romantics are aware of the fact that such desire is doomed to failure. So, irony “works against its own striving for completeness” since such an attempt has to fail, however, “that failure itself is a moment of partial illumination” (66).

d) The Artist and Subjectivity

The search for truth or its expression in Romantic poetry breaks off from the idea of reaching an origin and fullness, it rather turns to the artist’s inner voice which is already fallen and cannot avoid incompleteness. Romantic irony is the form that can reflect such incompleteness bearing the artists’ inner conflicts, and it is the artist whose privileged position as the source of creation (rather than an origin) is recognized. The novelty of Romanticism lay in this emphasis on the artist’s creation, on its closeness to express the self in a fuller sense in poetry despite its lack of perfection in the face of the loss of origin. So, with Romanticism artistic creation and the subjectivity of the artist (poet) became prominent (Güçbilmez, 15).

The subject was seen as a continuing process of creation rather than a bed rock which comes before judgments. When language is aimed to “reflect upon and know the self,”

the Romantic ironic subject heads for self-undermining along with self-consciousness. The self is transformed from an identity to an “unreflective, spontaneous and open existence” within the language, more of a process that implicates itself within the act of language than a thing that can be represented by language (Colebrook, 51). And the life itself was a *poiesis* which allowed “the fall of life into fragmented, detached and finite productions,” therefore life is a process of creation (51). As well as a rejection of reason, such understanding of life is also a denial of life as an activity aimed for a certain purpose. For Romantics life is not a *praxis* going towards a “functional end” and the outcomes of its creation are exempt from purposeful expression of human intentions (52). Devoid of conclusive purpose and an initial truth the Romantic subject is a process which is against identification even with itself (Dellaloğlu, 103).

For the ironic subject the possibilities are unlimited and such assumed omnipotence pretends a god-like subjectivity. The possibilities are infinite and the subject is unstable and hesitant before those possibilities. Such instability is an emancipatory position which considers other probabilities and endows the subject with both an acting agency and a position of spectator. Thus, the subject opens itself to multiple identities (106-7). Therefore, irony also pertains to the dialectic between the self and the other (101). Because Romantic irony also works within the consciousness of its own inadequacies and incoherence, for the process of self-criticality the subject is both itself and goes beyond itself (101). This endless persistence of irony precludes any identification for the subject whose loss of origin is permanent, thereby engenders the inheritance of the incomplete modern subject.

The Romantic understanding of artist's self-consciousness and the notion of an eternal lack are features that also define the modern artist. The modern artist's major frustration is the futility of an attempt for perfect creation. Knowing that at the outset endows the modern artist with a self-consciousness which is also a defining characteristic of the modern notion of subject. Thus, the modern artist is obliged to self-criticalness which would reflect upon her/his pre-given lack within language that is the impossibility of representing the self fully. However, as Paul de Man points, this resemblance also incorporates a straightforward difference between Romantic and modern understanding of irony: The self is betrayed by language in Romantic irony as well, but it still hangs on to an "inexpressible or ineffable self or subject", whereas modern irony rejects the "possibility of even thinking of such a pure self or ineffable subjectivity" (Colebrook 124). Modern irony eliminates both the idea of origin and creative subject and what is left is the mere productive power of language (124).

C. Irony, Femininity and Writing

The major concern of modern writers is to reveal reality within the perfectionism of art. This hopeless struggle of modern writer is doomed to failure and incompleteness. Soysal and Erbil get their share of the imperfection inherent not only in the status of an author but also in being a woman. As the status of being a female writer comes into the picture, the concern about the impossibility of writing and the fear of failure, which authors such as Kafka and Beckett expressed, should be thought of also in relation to the social category of gender, with which the impossibility of writing is interwoven.

The concept of 'women writers' has been a controversial issue because both an announcement of such category or not taking any notice of it cause problems when the

political significance of writing as a woman is regarded. History of modern literature is figured as the son's oedipal conflict with his father in order to gain his own authority and in this picture women writers emerge as the 'other' of such figuration. Concurrently the phallogentric structure of language endows the woman writers' position with a political value. Similarly in the history of modern political and philosophical thought femininity is defined by exclusion and alterity (Marshall, 1994); and what feminist study did in late twentieth century is to reveal that "categories of reason and knowledge are marked by sexual difference" and reason, knowledge, history, power and man are concepts that reflect the gendered setup of history of theory where they emerge as universal categories (Alcoff 1996: 14). To overcome this gendered set up, a simple claim that women should be added to the sphere of 'mind' and 'reason' would affirm the construction of those concepts on the basis of women's exclusion (16). In 1980s feminists began to affirm methodologies that do not exclude the bodily knowledge from the realm of theory. It is a critical gesture against the binary oppositional configuration of the feminine as sensual in contrast with the rational mind. Feminists attempted to develop their critique regarding the intensive, libidinal forces in order to relocate "the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge" (17). This move introduced the idea that the mind has never been independent of the body and rational thinking subject of philosophy is already gendered and needs to be deconstructed in order for the 'Others' of reason to be rethought (17).

One of the channels of such rethinking in the arena of language is feminist interventions by psychoanalytic theorists. They focused on the negative constructions of femininity within a repressive patriarchal system of language as opposed to the "universal, disembodied and male-identified" consciousness (Pontoriero 2001: 118). French

feminists from the “écriture feminine” (female writing) école, most notably, Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous problematized language as embedded in power systems and as obliged to work as a tool of patriarchal expression. Their feminist deconstructionist works on language and subjectivity, with a common concern of focusing on the processes within language in order to debunk patriarchal order of language, envisioned a “female language” (Humm 2002: 140-141). Because their major struggle is against phallogentric language, they both criticize and use psychoanalysis; and what Lacan’s theory provided is a conceptual framework about the pre-Oedipal experience. That is to say, feminist psychoanalytical critics drew attention to the infant’s attachment to its mother rather than concentrating on the Oedipal relationship with the forbidding father (Morris 1996: 113). Irigaray drew attention to the definition of feminine identity as a lack as opposed to phallic presence that owes its existence to the feminine lack. Helene Cixous linked this binary oppositional reasoning to “a male libidinal economy based on possession and property” in opposition to women’s libidinal economy based on gift. She attributed “giving without calculating return” to femininity which meant an abundance that disturbs fixed identities and categories. Hence she advised her fellow women to use their body to communicate, the language of gift as the foundation of their writing practice (Morris, 119-121).

Such envisioning of a ‘female language’ springing from the realm of the body, the attempt to create a “new” means for femininity within language by praising the female’s bodily attributions has been highly criticized for falling into essentialist ways of thinking. In the context of feminist studies that pursue the ways in which the gendered establishment of history of thought developed and uncovered such ways of thinking in order to abrade them, such celebrations of the body that disregard its constructedness

are also problematic. Attributing a superior position to the feminine, it rather takes us back to a dilemma that feminist writing has initially contested: feminine being defined in its alterity with regard to its natural dispositions. However, the way to define alterity is still a controversial issue. Although such vision appoints women authority as subjects of self-writing and as producers of the knowledge about themselves, it also constrains women to a given biology.

So, how can woman writers form an authorial position in the face of their already injured subjectivities? Do reckoning the circumstances and processes that enabled such position, and having a critical distance help to find a way out for the woman writer from such configuration? How is a redefinition or re-finding of this authority is possible without inscribing the critical subjectivity to the given sex?

Lydia Rainford, in her book 'Irony, Femininity and Feminism', argues that irony, as a means of disrupting settled values and truths, is critical for feminist literature because of its capacity to operate within the structure it questions (2006: 3). She writes that irony has the power to imply the truth beyond expression when the repetition of certain beliefs and values are realized in way to negate them (3). For her irony can reflect women's controversial positioning in writing because of its quality to reveal self-knowledge "without actively positing this knowledge, or claiming authority for it" (3). Since irony dwells within the structure it questions; and inquires and negates the value of this structure by repetition, namely without offering an unbounded, new form of feminine writing, the attempt to provide non-phallographic order or to challenge hegemonic masculinist cultures can trick the risk of falling into essentialist definitions (3). In other words, depending on its expressive power to mean something else while

being the repetition of an ill remark, Rainford attributes irony a power of simultaneously negating hegemonic values and implying another thing. She sees ironic mode as “a form of internalized agency for the feminist” which reflects the feminists’ double relation to the patriarchal structure that is its indebtedness to what it criticizes. With irony woman’s alterity becomes an advantage when used to “negate the terms of prevailing hierarchy” (3).

E. *Tante Rosa and Cüce*

This thesis focuses on the use of irony specifically in Sevgi Soysal’s *Tante Rosa* and Leyla Erbil’s *Cüce* to understand its function in the problematization of living and writing as a woman in these texts. This project asks if irony becomes a means for dealing with problems of writing in general, as well as with the authorial presence of a female writer along with an inquiry of plural identities and incoherent selves. It also aims to understand if irony empowers the woman subject with a subversive position since it provides a multiple layered creation of meaning and a critical quality to it.

Apart from the use of irony internal to the texts, when irony is directed against the author herself or the text itself, the authorial position of the writer and the significance of the text are shaken. However, paradoxically, the authorial position is strengthened at the same time. Self-criticalness (or reflexivity) is an important notion of modern art because as the modern artist is faced with the impasse of perfection in art, self-criticalness and recognition of the impossibility of perfection and impossibility of representing reality becomes a means to deal with such impossibility. In other words, when irony is directed to the self, the author becomes transcendent over incapability and acquires a stronger subject position. Irony becomes the approach to deal with the reality

that the author is not capable of changing, namely a means to survive by writing. On the other hand, the author's subjectivity is fragmented by the arrows of her own sarcastic taste/pen: As irony is a double layered narration technique pointing to plots in contradiction and does not necessarily include a single upcoming meaning or truth, the subject position in question comprises of the bifurcated layers of such irony.

In its Romantic and modern sense irony relates to the concept of melancholia in psychoanalytical terms with regard to the modern writer who lacks perfection of her work and the possibility of expression. Failure is intrinsic to the idea of perfection in creation so the writer is engaged in a search doomed to failure. The loss is not replaceable. In his essay *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud makes a distinction between the two concepts: In mourning the lost object of desire is definite and ego can be absorbed by the work of mourning and replacement of the object of desire. Whereas in melancholia what has been lost is not seen clearly, and as the lost object is unconscious, the sense of lack is internalized. In the act of mourning the outside world is seen as empty and meaningless, while in melancholia it is the ego of the person that becomes worthless. The melancholic sees herself as "incapable of any achievement" and the extent of self-criticism reaches a "delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority" (245-246). Departing from the concept of melancholia, modern writer is contracted with such longing for the impossibility of perfection in art. Such melancholic creativity lives on a never ending search for meaning, although the artist is aware of the impossibility of reaching the ideal truth. It is not an understanding of truth as a representation of reality but a truth despite reality. So, it is not an attempt to create representations of reality, but to revolt and work against present forms of existence. Speaking of women writers, apart from the impossibility of attaining the ideal truth, the fact that a unified subjectivity is

unreachable, is also at stake. The loss of authority and coherence is intrinsic to subjectivity of the woman writer, hence her melancholia.

In *Tutkulu Perçem* which precedes *Tante Rosa* Sevgi Soysal presents a pessimistic and desperate protagonist and it is said that she wrote *Tante Rosa* during her most depressed period of her life when she saw herself as a failure.³ However, the use of irony in the novel undermines the instance of both “being a failure” and “a success.” Rosa’s story is composed of her never ending trials to become “someone” –princess, a nun, a circus performer, a wife, a prostitute. However, the novel is not a *becoming* story; it is rather an ironic approach against the idea of developing into a coherent self.

Author’s daughter Funda Soysal writes that although *Tante Rosa* is not Soysal’s first book, it would initiate the reprinting of all her books by İletişim Publications “because it is the most convenient piece which introduces its writer to the reader” (Soysal 2008: 11). The novel contains autobiographical elements from Sevgi Soysal’s life depending on her family background. She chooses a German context which relates to her maternal side that is of German origin and Rosa can be thought of as a character that is inspired by reflections from her grandmother Rosa and her aunts. Erdal Doğan points to the parallelism between Sevgi Soysal’s maternal family (including herself) and the character Rosa regarding the similarity between them in terms of being women who let go of existences that are built on conjugal grounds (2003: 100). Rosa is constructed as someone who takes the risk of leaving when she needs to, rather than sticking to ‘safer’ forms of existence. In one of her interviews Soysal remarks that with *Tante Rosa* she

³ In the foreword of *Tante Rosa* Funda Soysal quotes her mother’s remark that she began writing the book when she saw herself as a failure, felt her existence meaningless and unable to realize anything in her life (Soysal 2008: 15).

wanted to emphasize the fact that leaving does not necessarily satisfy or glorify the one who goes -regardless of how strongly the left party deserves to be abandoned. I think this remark also relates to how the irony of the fiction intensifies in the contradictory composition of the character Rosa. Contradictory coexistence of awareness and ignorance erases the possibility of a coherent self for Rosa and the irony here (since it points to Rosa's dichotomous manners) implements "a passing from monolithic identity towards plurality" and endows "the subject [Rosa] with freedom" (Dellaloğlu, 107).

Leyla Erbil is a writer known for her "revolutionary grammar" that plays and disrupts the structures of language; and effects of "derogation" in her texts. Predictably her critical approach is accompanied with a sharp tongue endowing her works with a flourishing irony and satire. I chose *Cüce* to analyze in this thesis because it is a text that can be seen as a writer's self-inquiry in the light of her own values and concerns that also reflect upon the complexities and entanglement of writing as a woman and at the same time staying truthful to one's own values. We witness the writer breaking her oath, to whom staying true to her values is the gist of her art. Her submission exposes the burden of authorship within a harsh system as well as writing as a woman inside an insidious culture saturated with hypocritical ethics, and the burden of being degenerate. Erbil relates her subjectivity to her persona as the author and her irony also works against this author persona. There emerges both a story of suffering and method of self-authorization through this suffering. *Cüce* is the most relevant text when Erbil's general attitude is at stake because of its self-critical quality since the claim of authenticity is under attack by the writer's own sarcastic pen. Erbil's literature is built on certain ethical principles of her own and *Cüce* comes about to be a text which attacks its own writer and emerges as a self-interrogation of the writer in the light of those values. In

other words, it is a text that undermines Erbil's authorial persona, which she cultivated through a long-suffering and deliberate withdrawal, yet at the same time it is the mere *expression* of how she constructs her "self." The overarching irony of the text lies in the fact that Erbil mimics herself with the protagonist Zenime.

Chapter II

Tante Rosa: Parody of Bildung

A) Source of Irony

a) Situational and Dramatic irony: Rosa is being mocked

At first sight the source of irony in *Tante Rosa* is the character's foolishness, the irresponsible perkiness and ignorance that leads her to ridiculous conclusions. Rosa is empowered with courage to follow her dreams; however, her bravery is launched by naïve fantasies. She is not glorified as an ideal figure and her perkiness is revealed as the chapters eventually tie up to situational or dramatic irony. Situational irony emerges from the contradiction between the circumstances Rosa finds herself in and the interpretations that she draws from her own experiences, and dramatic irony results from the contrast between the reader's awareness of a situation and Rosa's ignorance. That contradiction is introduced from the very beginning.

The story begins with the chapter titled "Tante Rosa Could Not Become an Equestrian Performer." Rosa is reading *Cheek by Jowl with You*⁴, a weekly family magazine, which is her life-long guide with supplements of romance novels and news about high society. While Rosa is reading the magazine, she sees a picture of Queen Victoria, where the queen is riding a horse dressed in soldier uniforms during her visit to the household cavalry mounted regiment. Being dazzled by the spotlights turned on the queen, Rosa decides to become a performer in the circus, where she ends up as a dung cleaner.

⁴ Sizlerle Başbaşa Dergisi

Subay üniformalarının en parlak, subay aşklarının en dayanılmaz olduğu savaşın ilk yılında, Rosa her gece olduğu gibi çadırın deliğinden at cambazı kızın numaralarını seyrediyordu. Deliği büyütmek için geçirdiği parmaklarının arasından bakıyor, at cambazı numaralarını kendi yapıyormuşçasına kurduğu düş, parmaklarına sinmiş gübrekokusuyla bile bölünmüyordu. İşte hopluyorum; işte atladım yere. İşte yine atın tepesindeyim. İşte kaldırdım bacağı, işte çılgınca alkışlanıyorum. O kim, o en önde, gözleri parlak düğmelerinden de parlak teğmen? Bana bakıyor; bana deli gibi aşık; her gece geliyor; beni seyredip gidiyor; şimdi en parlak numaramı onun için yapacağım. At çok hızlanmasa da taklamı zamanında atabilsem (18-20).

Rosa starts working in the circus following her fascination with the prince and dreams of playing the roll of the princes. However, she is charged to clean circus animals' dung. This strong contrast between the reality and her wishes, the smell of dung in her fingers while watching the performances do not keep her from illusions of a prince that is in love with her. The situation gets worse and Rosa's reaction can be read below:

Birdenbire ansızın bir çatırtı. Çatırtı yayıldı sonra aydınlık. Sonra daha aydınlık, daha ydınlık. Çılgınlıklar en sonra. Sıcak. Çatırtı. Alev. Alevler. Bir düşü sımsıcak ısıtıveren, sarıveren alevler. Rosa alevlerin dört yanı sardığını gördü. Seyircilerin oraya koşuştuklarını, direklerin yandığını, sirk müdürünün sövdüğünü, dumandan tepedeki renkli ampüllerin kararverdiğini, herkesin

kapıya koştüğünü, kapının dar olduğunu gördü. Ama o, cambaza, sevgilisine son numarasını yapan kendine bakıyordu:

Tam kaldırmıştım bacağımı, önce çatırtıyı sonra çığlıkları duydum. Gösteri çemberinin kenarındaki çite çarpan başımın dayanılmaz sancısı arasından atımın ürküp beni fırlattığını anladım. İşte deli gibi kişneyerek deli gibi üstüme geliyor at. Ama korkmuyorum. O en parlak düğmeli, en parlak gözlünün beni şimdi kurtaracağını biliyorum. İşte atladı çiti. Önce asıldı hayvanın yularına. Şaha kalkan at kuzu gibi oldu. Sonra bana koştı. Atın terkesine kucağında benle sıçradı. Çizmelerinin parlak mahmuzlarını atın böğrüne bastırıp dört nala çıktık çadırdan. Ardımızda duman çığlık alev , dörtnala doğan güne at koşturduk. [...] Rosa atın ürktüğünü, üstündeki atcambazı kızı yere fırlatıp deli gibi şaha kalktığını gördü. Yerde yatan kızı göremiyordu ama çiti atlayan teğmeni gördü. Çığlıkların dumanın arasından bir onu gördü. Teğmen çiti atladı. Atı durdurup bindi ve yangın yerinden dört nala kaçtı. Rosa teğmenin atını çıkış yerine sürerken cambaz kızı çiğnediğini gördü. Tante Rosa *Sizlerle Başbaşa* dergisinde Kraliçe Victoria'nın at üstünde çekilmiş resmini gördü ve at cambazı olamayacağını anladı (20-21).

In the above quotation she witnesses that her dreams about the prince are in strong opposition to the real case, where the prince crashes on the princess with his horse rather than holding up and saving her. Yet, her fantasies about an ideal of a prince on white horse are not disturbed. Consequently, she gives up trying to become a circus

performer but still carries on her search for the prince. As Karakaşlı points out, it is not that there is no prince on a white horse that Rosa infers, but that she should better not become a circus performer, thereby leading herself to other vain illusions. (Karakaşlı 2009: 15). We can say that it is Rosa's infrangible daydreamer mood and optimism that the situational irony stems from, but the narrator's presence should be taken into account as well.

At the moment when the circus is on fire, the narrator projects Rosa's thoughts in strong opposition with the situation. Her train of thoughts while she is daydreaming is rendered without quotation marks, and expressions like "İşte hopluyorum; işte atladım yere. İşte yine atın tepesindeyim. İşte kaldırdım bacağımı, işte çılgınca alkışlanıyorum" are conveyed by the narrator with a sarcastic tone as if re-voicing Rosa's fantasy in a mocking manner. Rosa's own utterances are accompanied by the narrator's critical presence, which brings similarities to a -first person point of view- narrator. Such a tone of narration intensifies Rosa's ignorance, which creates a sharp contrast with the real situation and foreshadows the approaching calamity. In other words, the narrator's voice is also a source of irony as opposed to Rosa's fanciful thoughts and by the ambiguity employed in the contradiction between the narrator and Rosa's point of view. Eventually the story will lead to the direct interruption of the first-person narrator.

The next chapter called "Tante Rosa Goes to the Monastery" leads Tante Rosa to a similar reasoning. She gives nuns a hard time and eventually she gets dismissed from the monastery because of her "misbehavior." In fact her monastery adventure upsets her very much, but her interpretation of the later events concerning the monastery leaves her content.

Savaş Tante Rosalar'ın sokağına varmıştı. Yemek odasında, yüznumarada ve tavan arasında savaş vardı. Aile mutfakta, yatak odasında ve bodrumda savaşın eksilmesini bekliyordu. Savaş eksilmiyordu, önce babalar eksildi, sonra ağabeyler eksildi, savaş eksilmedi. Tante Rosa bir sabah, Sizlerle Başbaşa dergisinde rahibe okulunun bulunduğu kentin bombalandığını, okulun yerle bir olduğunu okudu ve prensin öcünü aldığını anladı (27).

Here the way Rosa relates to the bombings is through imagining the prince taking revenge for her without being concerned about the catastrophic effects of the war. From the very beginning the description of and reflections on war has been from Rosa's irresponsible point of view. For instance, in the first quotation above the first year of war is marked with the shiny uniforms which the military officers wear and the dream of irresistible love affairs, during which Rosa watched the performer's tricks from the hole she opened in the circus tent.⁵ It is more bound to Rosa's dream world than the significance of wartime, and we are introduced to Rosa's ignorance of "real" circumstances: "... kendi yapıyormuşçasına kurduğu düş, parmaklarına sinmiş gübre kokusuyla bile bölünmüyordu" (20). The circus as an entertainment that draws people away from the awareness of war is where Rosa's dreams take place and her story begins as a dung cleaner who indulges in fantasies of romance with the prince. She realizes the fire in the tent and that the way out is too narrow for everyone to go out, but she will not refrain from fantasies despite her awareness: "... kapının dar olduğunu *gördü*. Ama o,

⁵ Subay üniformalarının en parlak, subay aşklarının en dayanılmaz olduğu savaşın ilk yılında, Rosa her gece olduğu gibi çadırın deliğinden at cambazı kızın numaralarını seyrediyordu.

cambaza, sevgilisine son numarasını yapan kendine bakıyordu.”⁶ Her ignorance of reality despite the fact that she *sees* the bitterness of circumstances is evident from the beginning. The sentence that opens the circus experience “Rosa’nın yaşantısını en çok etkileyen olay o zamanların en popüler savaşının ilk günlerinde oldu” (20) stands like an anticipating irony pertaining to the matter of the novel.

Rosa is decisive when letting go of duties, roles, comforts, securities. She is assured and able to leave without hesitation. She pursues her fantasies and that is a situation traditionally unexpected and unorthodox in a woman’s life. Her courage to choose to leave is admirable. However, her courage does not make her a heroine since she remains ignorant and without any viewpoint for the catastrophes of her time. War concerns her as far as she can make use of the consequences of it. When she reads that the monastery -from which she had been expelled because she could not kill the self inside her and restrict her appetite- is bombed, she thinks that the prince took revenge for her. As the sales of newspapers dramatically increase during the war, Rosa profits from this increase by making money out of her new husbands’ news stall. And after his death she prepares such a beautiful grave that it stands out among other graves which accommodate casualties of war and then she comes up with the idea of working as a cemetery caretaker. Rosa’s ignorance usually provides the grounds for dramatic irony in these examples: while the reader is mindful of the destruction caused by the war, Rosa is apathetic and minds her own business.

Thus, the conclusions in both chapters, where Tante Rosa’s reasoning about events is unexpected and in contrast with the material conditions, create situational irony. In

⁶Italics mine.

other words, Rosa's incognizances are the source of irony in both cases. One can conclude that there is actually a moral to be derived from Rosa's naïve faith in the prince on a white horse. The degradation of such search by means of irony can be considered as pointing to a definite intention of the narrator for the reader to receive a message, such as there is no prince on white horse. However, such parable like content, the contrast pertaining to the events and Rosa's attitude, is not the mere source of irony. First of all, we see that within the narrative her incognizant habits also have an empowering effect on the character to leave conventional, conjugal ways of existence. Her courage to leave and start again proves to be admirable as well as "foolish." The other issue is the character's self-consciousness which, I think, is mostly manifested through the intermingling of the narrative voice and Rosa's stance. And those are other sources that take irony of the text further and eliminate any possible "moral to be taken" from the story.

b) Self-consciousness

During one of the "prince search" operations, Rosa finds a new husband by a match-making service and on her way to England where her future husband lives, she is thinking: "Bir bardak en iyi tükürükle parlatılır. Bir bardak en iyi tükürükle parlatılabildikten sonra, niçin en iyi evlilik böyle ilanlarla kurulmasın?" (49). Does not this expression by Rosa abrade her naivety and expose her self-consciousness? Does not she imply that even if this adventure ends up ridiculously, it is worthwhile to embark on it and go to England only depending on an advertisement rather than being stuck with insincere relationships? However, at the end of the paragraph, there is another reversal. Rosa misses the right stop and when she disembarks there is no one waiting for her at the station. "İlana cevap verirken İngilizce biliyorum diye atmıştım, şimdi bu enayi

buna inanıp beni karşılamaya gelmedi galiba.’ Oysa damat öbür istasyonda, İngiliz usüli babadan kalma lacivertleriyle, yakasında karanfil bekliyordu. Tante Rosa trenle o istasyondan geçerken adamı görmüş, kerize bak diye gülmüştü” (49). Rosa calls him a fool twice. The first time is when she could not find him in the station, but the reader knows that she got off at the wrong stop. The reader also knows that the “stupid” man Rosa sees and calls a fool is actually her new husband. Eventually, despite the implication to Rosa’s self-consciousness, the reader witnesses Rosa’s subsequent incognizant position. The reader is aware of the situation whereas the character in focus is not and this creates dramatic irony.

As I pointed out before, although Rosa is described to be “the name for all feminine incognizances,” she is not a dismissible character. She cannot be reduced to a fool, who unknowingly finds herself in ridiculous situations, since the character is endowed with self-consciousness and the below passage can be read as implying this unstable position of the character:

‘Tante Rosa, Tante Rosa, I love You.’ Kısık, aptal bir sesle söylüyordu şarkısını Rosa. Eskiciden ucuza kapattığı gitarını dımbırdatarak. Yalnız olmak, işsiz olmak, aşksız olmak, en kötüsü ölü bir noktada olmak durumu üzerinde pek düşünenlerden değildi o, durumunu değiştirmeyi bilemeyenlerdendi. Şimdi kendi için aşk şarkıları söylemeye çabalıyordu gitarıyla. ‘Tante Rosa, Tante Rosa, I Love You!’ Komşu kasiyer duvarı yumrukladı:

- Ne Love’ı be moruk, sen de!” (67).

This part begins with a description of Rosa's undesirable position in life. She lacks the ingenuity to work on and change the unwanted circumstances of her life. However, she is still able to take it easy and love herself. Those are familiar statements from the very beginning of the novel. However, as the passage proceeds, something that has been only hinted before becomes rather obvious: The narrator's voice and the character's intermingle.

Şimdi ağlamalı mı? Anlaşılmamış ince yürekli olmalı mı? Gülmeli mi yoksa? *Tante Rosa aşkı beceremediğini biliyordu. Bu alınyazısı değil, yeteneksizlik, salaklık, bu salaklığa da ancak gülünüür.* Her yeni aşka, yeni bir aptallıkla başlarsan sonunda orospudan beter olursun. O bile olmazsın, aşkı tadabilmek gibi satabilmek de beceri ister. Evde kalmış bir kız değil, ama evde kalmış bir kaltağım ben. Şimdi parasızım ve doğru dürüst bir iş yerine aşkı düşünüyorum. Varoluşunu insanca gerçekleştiremeyen – gerçekleştiremeyen – gerçekleştiremeyen. Para kazanmalıyım. Ne diyor *Sizlerle Başbaşa* dergisinde? 'Hayat bir denizdir, yüzme bilmeyen boğulur.' Kolay mı boğulmak? Boğulmak herkesin üstesinden gelebileceği birşey değildir. Herkesin sadece bir kez boğulma hakkı vardır. Ya ben; boğul babam boğul, sonra yine de yaşamakta devam eder bul kendini. Tante Rosa kendi çapında olan herşeyi teptiğini, ama çapını aşmayı hiç ama hiç gerçekleştiremeyeceğini - gerçekleştiremeyeceğini- gerçekleştiremeyeceğini. Gülünç bir ihtilalim ben, kötü bir askeri cuntayım. Asker olmuş gülünç bir soytarı gibi gülünç bir başkaldırma. Gerillalarım var, ne onlar beni

devirebiliyorlar, ne de ben onların kökünü kurutabiliyorum. Geçmiş düşünmek gibi güç, acısız. Tek aptallıklardır akılda kalan. Her insanın kendi aptallıkları, durmadan gülebilmesi için yeterli bir kaynaktır. Şu halde niçin acı çekmeli? Tante Rosa hiçbir zaman acı çekmedi denebilir. Ama yaşamak zorunda olmak, sürdürmek, ısrar etmek. Bu Tante Rosa demektir. Gitarını bıraktı, kasiyerin duvarına nanik yaptı. ‘I love you’ ya ne sandın? Bir kendime I love you! Sevebileceğim tek aşağılık, tek salak kendimim – kendimim – kendimim. (67-68)

The overarching narrative voice that has been telling Rosa’s story with a facetious tone gives way to Rosa’s and it is Rosa who describes herself as constantly failing to fulfill her existence decently. She defines herself as an insistence to live despite the inability, and for her this is an absurd endeavor. As she thinks over her life retrospectively, the remaining memories are only the ridiculous ones, and Rosa sees those memories about one’s own incognizances and foolishness as an abundant resource to make fun of. Rosa self-consciously contemplates on herself and asks why one should be in pain because of failures when those failures can also be a source of fun. Thus, she explains her undeveloping self and how she considers her incognizances as opposed to painful experiences one might have to go through in order to improve oneself. Such self-consciousness neither leads to facing her incognizances nor collecting experiences in order not to fail again. On the contrary, she prefers laughing at failures in order to avoid pain. She performs “a ridiculous revolt of a ridiculous clown.” The life that the character leads is not narrated as an exemplary one, it is rather ridiculous. However, she is an unconventional figure. Therefore, one cannot reduce Rosa to a foolish type being

constantly ridiculed in the hands of the narrator. She is rather a self-critical character who makes fun of herself and such self-criticalness even goes further.

Before going into to the extremity of self-critical utterances, I want to put an initial emphasis on the accordance and difference between Rosa's ignorant attitude and Phyrronian concept *ataraxia*. As explained in the introduction Phyrronian ironist considers worldly occasions as nonsense and sees into the ridiculousness of existence. Such stance entails a silent ignorance as a state of wisdom. Rosa's position includes a similar ignorance in the form of laughter. The notion of living without having any judgments and final decisions are characteristic features that are attributed to Rosa. However, as being also the source of irony herself, she is not incorporated as a wise figure standing above and beyond all occasions. Her wise criticalness is turned against herself, especially stressing her incognizances pertaining to being a woman. What disturbs the state of *ataraxia* is actually what engenders her unconventional characteristics with regard to her ability to reject conjugal ways of being. What I want to stress is that on the one hand Rosa has such an *ataraxia* as the aim of the ironist to reach a wise state of being. On the other hand, when and because the issue of being a woman is central to the text, irony has to have a double –or maybe multiple- bind function that cuts across the ironist as well. In other words, being the target of irony, womanly incognizances do away with the status of being above and beyond any judgment.

As irony intensifies in such a self-conscious and self-undermining manner, its non-judgmental side becomes clearer and it is done without any implication of a superior position. The below quotation exemplifies this intensification and is used to introduce

the unstable quality of irony. While Tante Rosa is walking on the street in her fur coat and high heels, a car splashes mud on her and she shouts:

- Hayvanođlu hayvan!

- Özüř dilerim Kontes.

Kontes dedi bana. Alay etti, ama kontes diye alay etti. Kocakarı, ya da muşmula deđil de kontes. Bir papađan alırsam, bana yönelen alaylar kontesten altese yükselir. Herkesle alay edilebilir. Ama kendi alaylarını yönelmek yüceltmek elindedir kişinin. (84)

Here the character/narrator is even being sarcastic about one's self-consciousness of being ridiculed and being ridiculous. She is glad that she has been ridiculed with an ironic approach and assumes that she can raise her state of ridiculousness even more. Rosa preaches that one can manipulate and elevate mockeries about oneself. This is an ironic statement within itself which even turns such state of self-consciousness into a parody. Thus, let alone inferring the narrator's intention which could be the pointed meaning, the reader is not able to grasp any meaning other than the irony itself. At any rate any intended meaning escapes comprehension and what makes this constant negation possible is irony. Thus, the text rather becomes a negation of any elevated position or identity. So, what kind of irony is that?

c) Romantic/Unstable Irony

In his book *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth examines numerous examples of irony in works of literature. His major distinction among other subsets of irony is between stable and unstable irony. He defines stable irony as not contingent, but

“intended, *deliberately* created ... to be understood by a certain precision by other human beings” and “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (Booth 1975: 5-6). Therefore, the meaning is rather structured and the author’s control denies certain readings as misleading (242). On the other hand, unstable irony is far from guaranteeing the reader an intended meaning, and it is rather difficult to argue that the writer has a certain attitude. If one can mention any affirmation, it is only the affirmation of negation, which gives way to ironic play (240). Any affirmation is there to be rejected infinitely. Every statement is “subject to ironic undermining” and is suspected of not meaning what it says (240-241). At this point, it is pertinent to call upon the notion of Romantic irony, which is very much in line with Booth’s definition of unstable irony. If we recall Claire Colebrook’s description, romantic irony is not a mere transference of the opposite of what is said. It is rather an equivocal utterance, a simultaneous expression of paradoxical viewpoints as a manifestation of contradiction. Therefore, looking for a “hidden sense” behind the irony means conceding a stable meaning that irony aims to disrupt (2004: 52).

It can be said that the overarching irony of the text carries the promises of Romantic irony. First of all, there is no intended truth or moral to be taken from Rosa’s experiences. She is rather endowed with an incoherent self that demonstrates contradictory traits. Her self-consciousness, which is manifested with the intermingling of her stance and the narrator’s –to be discussed in detail below-; and self-criticalness that becomes apparent when she Rosa finds herself in ridiculous situations and she laughs at herself together with the reader, are engendered by the use of unstable irony. She claims a power of ability to manipulate one’s own ridiculousness rather than

engaging in an endeavor to “correct” and “improve” herself which binds up with the Romantic rejection of purposeful activity for an end result. There is no pre-determined truth or intended meaning, it is rather paradoxical situations that irony leaves for the reader to witness instead of any moral to be taken from Rosa’s incognizances. Her unexpected, adventurous behavior empowers her and provides a rather rebellious and subversive subject position. So, she is neither praised as a heroine figure endowed with Phyrronian *ataraxia*, she is rather made the source of irony. She is more like the figure of Silenus in whom contrasting traits are incorporated and her representation in this manner is achieved with the unstable/Romantic irony.

The fact that Soysal does not offer an ideal female figure and she builds up Rosa as an unconventional, rebellious character is prominent and this double-bind built up of the protagonist is achieved with Romantic notion of irony.

B) Parody of *Bildung*

Tante Rosa is a character who does not (refuses to) take lessons from her experiences and does not (refuses to) learn. She forgets what she learns and her life is composed of constant trials since she has always avoided making substantial choices. For instance, on the last day of the war Rosa is wandering among the ruins and she is thinking about the fact that she lost her home:

Tante Rosa bir kağlumbağa –evini sırtında taşıyan hayvan- buldu savaşın bittiği gün, evler yıkılmış. Evini sırtında taşıyan hayvanı yıkıntıların orada buldu, sevdi evine götürmek istedi. Evlerinin yıkıldığını, Bombardımanlardan Zarar Görenlere Yardım

Derneği'nin, Gönüllü Pembe Melekler Halkla Elele kampanyası sayesinde yaptırdığı lojmanlardan birinde kaldıklarını hatırladı ve evini sırtında taşıyan hayvanı sevmedi. Evin kişiden ayrı, yıkılabilir bir nen olduğunu, olması gerektiğini o gün anladı. Sonra yalnız kedileri ve yırtıcı, özgür, orman hayvanlarını, ıraktan sevdi.

(29)

Rosa will not preserve those discernments about the experience of home and she will be forgetting them. She will like “dogs who suppose that protecting their masters and masters' houses can be the mere reason of their existence” better than cats, who do not care about their masters. “Bütün evcil hayvanları ve evlerini sırtlarında taşıyan kaplumbağaları sevdi. Oysa evin kişiden ayrılabilir bir nen olduğunu öğrenmişti Rosa. Ama unuttu”. (30)

When we look at the novel as a whole we come upon a narrative that rejects an understanding of individual self-achievement and progressiveness. Such a building of the character is against the description of the individual as autonomous and rational, which is essential to the Enlightenment understanding of the individual. We have already seen that the criticism of the concept of the “rational” individual permeates the whole narrative, and in the passage below there is a rather explicit inter-textual playfulness regarding Enlightenment literature:

Geçmişte hiçbir acıklı ya da sevinçli olay yaşamamış olduğunu sanabilir. Bütün bunlar bıkkınlık değildi, yorgunluk değildi. Bir insan gün boyu hela kapısının yanında pineklersen ne yorulur ne

bıkar, bunlar yaşayanlar içindir. Tutamıyordu beynini, cümle yapmaktan alıkoyamıyordu. Arada sırada usanıyordu o da, pineklediği yerde düşünmekten. *Pinekleyerek düşünmek gerçek düşünmek değildir biliyordu. Düşünce eylemlidir, bir eylem sonucu, ya da öncesidir, yok böyle bütün gün pineklerken düşünmediğini biliyordu.* Yine de cümleler yapıyordu beyni. Bir Hristiyan gelse de beni kurtarsa. Bütün Hristiyanlar, bir olup hela temizleyicilerini kurtarsalar. Hristiyanlar elele veriniz ve burada, kadınlar helasında, gölzerinizde yaşlarla ‘Kutsal Gece, Ruhsal Gece’ şarkısını söyleyiniz. (64-65)

Tante Rosa begins working as a restroom servant and spends her days thinking and sitting all day long in front of the WC. As she is bored of slumbering she argues that thought should be accompanied by action since the act of thinking while sitting and doing nothing in front of the WC is useless. This statement becomes a direct manifestation of a critical stance against Rene Descartes’s famous statement *cogito ergo sum*⁷ which is obviously being mocked.

Descartes is a figure who influenced Enlightenment philosophy substantially and his famous statement can be considered as constitutive of Enlightenment rationality and the understanding of the rational subject. Enlightenment thought was critical of ecclesiastical tenets and celebrated human reason as the condition of freedom. One of the primary texts of the Enlightenment Age is Immanuel Kant’s “What is Enlightenment,” in which Kant commands the subject to “dare to be wise” and to “have

⁷ “I think therefore, I am”

courage to use [one's] own reason" (83). He defines Enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage" to be able to use one's own reason freely, without any power that directs the individual. So, the idea of rational, thinking, free individual is an essential element of Enlightenment ideology and "men" should rest on reason in order for progress.

Rosa's train of thoughts points to the sarcastic approach to trusting one's own reason to accomplish freedom and Rosa's story does not proceed with courage to be wise, but courage to leave and to take action. So, here the stress is on the idea that the *ratio* is futile without action. Immediately after such a critical statement, Rosa wraps herself up with ignorance to wish for a Christian –most likely Christ as a prince figure again- to come and save her. The character's demand to be saved from rational thinking by a representative of religion, against which the Enlightenment thought built itself, is not a coincidence.

This state of being against reason and progressive ideology blended with the intense irony endows the text with a quality of being a parody of the *bildungsroman*. The novel begins from Rosa's childhood and finishes when she dies, similar to the features of the genre in question. However, from the very beginning with the title of the first chapter the text announces that it will proceed through stories of the protagonist's inabilities: "Tante Rosa Could Not Become an Equestrian Performer." It will not tell a story of maturation or moral growth.

Jale Parla gives the headline "Tarihçem Kabusumdur" to one of her articles in which she emphasizes that the becoming stories written by women writers in Turkey

unsurprisingly end in low spirits. What women write in Turkey are marked by the “fiend” culture that flop down on them and the *bildungsroman* genre that mostly men wrote in the West, turn into women’s anti-*bildungs*, stories of self-development that end up unhappily in Turkish literature (Parla 2005: 181). What Sevgi Soysal does in Tante Rosa is something different: With irony she does away with the idea of self-development as well as building up a criticism of political apathy (which can be read as a precursor of Soysal’s future political commitment), and she transfers this becoming story to a German context in a rather cheerful but still critical tone. The story neither reaches an ending with successful self-fulfillment nor establishes a tragic decay for Rosa.

Parla draws attention to the use of dreams in women’s texts that even go back to 17th century in Asiye Hatun’s writings. She points to the significance dreams for the women to face with their history since dreams are suitable motives that reflect social processes standing behind personal histories (185). In other words, narration of dreams play the role of facing with the collective painful history of women and Parla offers a reading of dream scenes in Turkish women writers’ texts as a revolt against sexism.

There is a chapter called “Tante Rosa’s Dream” towards the end of the novel. Rosa is entering a tunnel in and as she comes across the tunnel, her fears are charmed away. She smiles into the tunnel and the make up she is wearing sinks into the wrinkles on her face. She enters the tunnel with a younger appearance, like a wood nymph. At the end, Rosa will be seeing herself as a young nymph and the hole in the tent will have become a tunnel, an even wider hole in which she can stay totally ignorant of the world: “Bir köstebek deliğiyle rahatladılar. ... Bulmuştu hep aradığımı, hep aradığımı, bir köstebek

deliği bulmuştu en koygun ormanların en geçit vermez sıklığında.” (89). The prince she has been looking for will be in the tunnel with her and that mole hole will hide her from the “real” world. Finally Rosa’s inability to choose and her lack of memory will be emphasized. I think her reluctance to choose a man can be read as a metaphor of adhering to any side during the war. The man with her in the tunnel is anonymous: “Peki ama hangisi bu? Hans mı, değil? Birinci, ya da ikinci kocası mı? Kocaların kaçınılmaz boynuzlarını takanlar mı? Düşlerindeki prenslerden, kontlardan biri mi? Hitler mi? Stalin mi? Napolyon mu? Hiçbiri olamaz, çünkü hiçbirini *seçmiş* değildi Rosa” (90). Hitler and Stalin as the two major commanders of the Second World War go beyond standing for Rosa’s admiration for powerful man and connote that those names are present in her fantasy world rather than as architects of a catastrophe. Her reluctance to take any stance relating to the reality of the context she is living in and to choose a political side is emphasized rather harshly in the following sentences:

Biz *unutmak* için, kaçmak için soyunanlardandık, kaçmak için. Oysa *hatırlamak* için soyunulur, *hatırlamak* için, yüzyıllardan beri unutulmaları *hatırlamak* için. Neyin olmadığını, neyin olamayacağını hatırlamak için, yeniden başlamaya gücü olmak için, *seçim yapmak* için, seçim yapabilecek açıklığa kavuşmak için. Hayır demek için, evet demek için, *başkaldırmak* için, yakıp, yıkmak için, *barış* için soyunulur, soyunulur. Tante Rosa daha bir kez olsun bunlar için soyunmadı, bunlar için soyunulabildiğini düşünmedi, *görmedi, bilmedi.* (90)

Rosa's dream begins with her life time fantasy of the "prince" and turns into a nightmare that she is left alone inside the tunnel from which she cannot find the way out. The "men" of the war time are caricaturized in Rosa's fantasy world, however, the way she ridicules those figures is also the what engenders her failure/nightmare: Her apathy towards the realities of the time she lived. Regarding Parla's emphasis on dream scenes, Rosa's nightmare sheds light on another enemy: Rosa's ignorance and insensitiveness to the time she is living in and to the catastrophe, her apolitical and naïve position is at the center of the dream scene. None the less, she will wake up by saying "Oh!" and till the end she will continue to be the object of irony with all the questions she failed to ask. So the non-judgmental attitude prevails until the end of the text. It has been clearly argued that the critical power of irony is not targeted to offer consequential inferences or intended meanings; and that how the character of irony (Romantic/unstable) is crucial to or constructor of a certain kind of narrative (parody of *bildung*). However, the recurring theme of war and Rosa's positioning within that theme is also indicating another point: Even if there is no explicit call for women to shout for their freedom and peace, maybe Sevgi Soysal, who endowed Rosa with a clumsy rebellious manner, is also hinting that without an awareness of political value of their struggle the nightmare scenes will not cease to exist.

Chapter III

From a Distance Projections on Zenime

Cüce is the novel in which Leyla Erbil problematizes her own anxieties and concerns on authorship in relation to the role of media in the literary field and there are certain parallelisms between the author and the protagonist. However, one point needs to be clarified from the beginning. The way in which the text is organized also engenders Erbil's distanced stance towards the protagonist and together with the critical approach developed towards the reporter figure, *cüce*, there emerges different layers of irony. The first constitutes Erbil's ironic approach towards Zenime (the protagonist); the second is revealed in Zenime's struggle with herself, in her controversial position with regard to how she relates to media and her self-undermining utterances that criticize such controversial position; and the third level is Zenime's despising stance for the media. These three different layers will be examined in order to understand what the function of irony is in woman writer's text that deals with the authorial anxieties.

A) Erbil distances herself from Zenime

Cüce is organized in two parts, which entails an initial division between the writer and the protagonist. Leyla Erbil shows up as a character in an introductory note Erbil writes which is about the protagonist and her text. The protagonist Zenime is a woman who has decided to lead a secluded life in her old age. She lets into her house only three people, two of them being her maid 'Hatçabla' and her son. Erbil is the third because she has read the only novel which Zenime had written years ago and found it interesting, thereby earning Zenime's trust. So, Zenime gives Erbil her last pieces of writing, which she wants to be printed. We learn these details in the introduction that

the character Leyla Erbil has written. More precisely, the text is separated into two as such: 1- The character Leyla Erbil's introductory note about Zenime and her novel that Zenime has turned over to Erbil for her to get it printed 2- Zenime's novel which is edited by Leyla Erbil. Although in Zenime's part one encounters anxieties that are similar to and reminiscent of the issues that Leyla Erbil has usually raised in her essays and novels, the initial note draws a rather complex picture which entails a separation between the author and the character. Let me first concentrate on the introductory part in which Zenime is delineated by Erbil.

Zaten sık sık, anılardan nefret ettiğini, anı yazmak kadar ucuz birşey olamayacağını, gerçekse yazılanlar geçmişini satmak anlamına geldiğini, gerçek değilse ki mutlaka yalanlarla doluydu anılarımız, insanlığa yararı olmayan özlem ve özentilerden, böbürlenmelerden başka bir şey değildi. [...] Söylediğine göre, Dame de Sion'u burada bitirdikten sonra, bir ara bazı sol gruplara yataklık ettiği iddiasıyla cezaevinde yatmıştı; uzun süre tecritte hücrede bırakmışlar, koltukaltlarına kızgın yumurtalar oturarak ağzından laf almak istemişler ama konuşuramamışlardı Zenime Hanım'ı. Hayatının belki de kendisini bile şaşırtan en kutsal anısı o olmalıydı. Her karşılaşmamızda yinelerdi bu hikayeyi. (3-4)

After mentioning writing memories in a degrading manner, Zenime tells Erbil her most interesting experiences as a political activist. She despises using one's own memories; however, she does not abstain from mentioning about them to Erbil. Regarding that

Erbil is the person to whom she asks for her last pieces of writing to be printed, one can perceive that Zenime is building up a presentation of herself in the presence of Erbil who will make her product visible. As Erbil realizes her wish and gives an account of Zenime in the introductory part, Zenime's dual desire to both despise and confess the need to be recognized and appreciated is revealed. It is the character Erbil who reveals Zenime's controversial utterances by this introductory note. Such conflicting duality is the central issue in Zenime's text and is firstly expressed by this note. This emphasis on Zenime's contradictory position also asserts Erbil's distanced stance towards Zenime.

Bana, bilimin ve insan istencinin insanları mutlu etmeye yetmeyeceğinden, herkesin bir inanca gereksinimi olduğundan söz etti. 'Allah'ın varlığına inanmıyorum ama inanmışlar gibi yaşamak rahatlatıyor beni,' dedi. Sanki ben 'Olmaaaz!' demişim gibi, 'Rahatlıyorsam neden olmuyormuş?' diye söylendi. 'İnsan zayıf bir yaratık olduğu için eline kiliseyi, camiyi, havrayı vererek onları öbür dünyayı boylayana kadar oyalıyorlar biliyorum ama biraz da iyileştiriyorlar onları, cahil cühela takımı bunlar; inanıyorlar işte, çaresizler; bir amacı oluyor hayatlarının!' dedi. Bütün bunları sormadığım halde, başını örttüğü için benden özür dilerce sıralıyordu. Ben hiç ses etmeden dinledim. Birden öfkeli bir tonla, mutluluğun ve dünyanın esrarını çözdüğünü, bir roman yazmakta olduğunu, bunun yayınlanmasına yardımcı olup olmayacağımı sordu. 'Elbette, elimden geleni yaparım' dedim. Böylece de söz vermiş oldum Zenime Hanım'a. (5-6)

Here Zenime's inconsistent ideas and illusions are presented. She greets Erbil with a headscarf, makes claims about having found the mystery of life and is writing a novel about it. Such illusions of grandeur, Zenime's claim of having found the meaning of life and writing it, show how far-fetched Zenime's claims are and they remain extenuated by Erbil. The writer character Leyla Erbil gathers the pages that were scattered on the ground of Zenime's living room and takes the pile with her. She just scans the pile without ordering them and when they are talking on the phone one month later, after Erbil's fake remark about the pile that they were wonderful things, Zenime furiously states that she is waiting for her to come and hangs up. Here again Erbil's ignorant attitude towards Zenime is salient. Although she promises to help Zenime to get the novel printed, later until Zenime commits suicide she is not very much interested in the pile Zenime handed her.

Kapıyı korka korka çaldım, ne ki yazdıklarından söz bile etmedi, Kaban'ı (köpeğini) özlediğini anlattı. ... belki de bu saçları zapt edemediği için başörtüsünü denediğini düşündüm. O ise peş peşe, 'La-rahatei-fi-didünya, La-rahatei-fi-didünya' diye beş on kez yineledi. Ben gene büyüklerine saygılı bir kadın olarak, ses etmeden önüme bakıp dinledim düşüncelerini, Kaban'ın ölümünden, Metin Göktepe'nin katillerini saklayan devletten, gazi kıyımından, Sivas olaylarından *akıl almaz yorumlarla delice* sözler etti! 'Kötülükle başa çıkılmaz! Dünyayla baş edilmez! İnsanlara acımayacaksın!' dedi sonunda. 'İnsanların ne günahı var ki,' bile diyemedim. [...] Bazı kimseler karşılındakinin hiçbir konu

hakkında düşünemediklerini sanarak hep kendilerini ortaya koyarlar. Ben bu insanları da çok ilginç bulurum ve hiç alınmam hallerine, işte Zenime Hanım da onlardan biriydi. Zaten ben de yaşlandıkça insan denilen aciz varlıkları olduğu gibi sevmeyi ve kabul etmeyi öğrenmişim. Kabul edilemeyecek kadar zor ya da alçak olduklarına inandığımda görüşmezdim onlarla; Zenime Hanım asla öyle değildi; iyi dürüst, onurlu bir insandı bence.⁸ (7)

Zenime's claims to have found the essence of life, her ideas about recent and previous political turmoils, her contradictory and sardonic remarks about belief, religion and humanity are outlandish ideas according to Leyla Erbil. However, she remains as an interesting character and Erbil also sympathizes with Zenime's haughtiness against herself and assumes an understanding attitude rather than a resentful one. A similar attitude is adopted within the narrator voice in *Tante Rosa*. Rosa is both mocked and loved; criticized and glorified; and although the unstable irony of the text creates an effect of alienation to Rosa's incognizances, at the same time one also relates to Rosa's womanly incompetence. In both texts judging and undertaking attitudes create multiple positions within the text; however, there are basic differences in terms of the formation of irony. The source of irony in *Tante Rosa* is the contrast between the protagonist's and the narrator's position in the beginning and irony intensifies through the play between those two. In *Cüce* the protagonist is self-narrating her story and the inclusion of the writer as a character creates a different tension as she distances herself from the protagonist, because there are also profound parallelisms between Zenime's and Leyla Erbil's concerns.

⁸ Italics mine

B) Parallelisms between and Separation of Erbil and Zenime

Nurdan Gürbilek's comprehensive essay on *Cüce* includes an overview of the recurring themes in Erbil's previous works and her analysis shows that *Cüce* is an examination of Erbil's own authorial past. She describes the literary essence of Erbil's works as a drift that arises from the tension between the self and the other. She defines this drift as dual heartedness and argues that a similar dual consciousness becomes the core issue in *Cüce*. A writer whose literature is nourished by a very sharp tongue turns against herself and renders such dual heartedness the central issue of her last novel. According to Gürbilek Erbil "directs her novelistic humor against her noble protagonist and her own work" (2004: 240).

Gürbilek argues that from the very first stories Leyla Erbil's main concern has been to express how hypocrisy, calculative thinking and struggle for dominance condemn people to restricted identities and prevent them from remaining true to themselves (215). Erbil's oeuvre reflects her critical approach, which targets the insincere facets of intellectual literary circles and the relationships between writers and the marketing sector that are tightly coupled with each other. She disapproves of an authorial visibility inside the literary field that requires goal oriented behavior on the side of the author. She positions herself in opposition to a utilitarian endeavor that leads to the erosion of the "free self". However, since such a negation entails the rejection of fame and of the opportunity to be read and understood more, this is a costly sacrifice for a writer.

According to Gürbilek, the writers who dwell in the field of literature are faced with a severe dilemma: choosing between collaboration with the market or taking the risk of being forgotten. Departing from this dilemma, Gürbilek emphasizes the point that

capitalism, as well as inflaming the desire to be seen, also sharpens the aggressiveness against the ones on the scene and the wounded pride of the ones behind the scene (224). Fueling both of these sensibilities, capitalism creates “a swirl of desire” as well as a contest of devaluation and ensures its own existence. Gürbilek states that in recent years critical essays have not only given in to superfluous praises, but are also nourished by the pleasure of devaluing certain works and finding mistakes (224). In other words, the capitalist bedrock of the literary field might curse the authors who position themselves in opposition to it in a way that fuels a desire to criticize ruthlessly. I think Gürbilek wants to question how we can understand the author’s rejections and retreat from fame in favor of authenticity, especially within such context. In other words, if retreat from the showcase has become part of the dynamics of the showcase, how can we understand the self-inquiry in *Cüce*? In fact there is an implication in this question: Media is a tool which helps to emphasize the value of the author as an important artist and to fortify the author’s value as such in the minds of the readers. And the “authentic” author criticizes media’s superficiality and its functional relation with the sectoral requirements as well as contemporary trends that are outcomes of the market. However, refusal of a mediatic visibility or existence and making this a life long issue is also a deliberate emphasis on her own originality, difference from the others and eventually her own importance. In other words, such withdrawal carries a similar desire with what urges a complicit behavior with the media. At this point the use of irony becomes prominent in *Cüce*. The question is if the irony enables a different position of authority that self-consciously reflects back the author’s own desires. Before trying to answer these questions, the parallelisms that can be established between Erbil and Zenime should be clarified.

[İ]şte burada kapının önünde hiç istemeden ama seve seve bekliyorsun onu gerilim içinde; siste evi bulamazsa diye kapı önlerine çıktığın da yalan, meraktan yiyor içini için, yüreğinin birine gizli bir koro kum yağdırmakta, çalınacak kapın yılların ardından ya geçiriyor kılıçtan seni şu tasa: neler soracak, neler yazacaktı söylemediğin kim bilir senin ağzından okurlara hınzır adam!, sen ki biliyordun artık seni: İngilizcede I am, Zimmer’de ama-maya diye geçen, Hinducada ah-am, Asya’da es-em, Mısırca’da t-ama (kitap), Vedalarda aum, Kuran’da en’am olan, insanı doğuran, tüm harflerin hecelerinin sözcüklerin içinde barındığı ilk canlı nesneyi kitaba çeviren Ben’i; T’ama, Amen, amentü... “M” ile titreşen saf sesini ilk doğanın. (17)

Zenime is waiting “unwillingly but pleasantly” for the reporter. For her he belongs to the dark flock of sheep which represents the corrupt culture of her country to which one is bound to. That culture is the ‘other’ for Zenime to whom she is compelled to in terms of recognition. She feels the need to be seen and recognized, however despises that corrupted field. Zenime’s part is knitted with a tone of self-alienation which is the result of consciousness about the significance of the reporter. He represents Zenime’s urge to be recognized by the media, press or in other words the “power” which she has been rejecting despite an awareness of its force that enables a persona for her that is visible. Although she is very much suspicious about the way he will process her persona via an interview, the desire to be seen is very much present, makes her wait for the reporter in a mood with conflicting emotions. She “knows herself” and she is aware that such self

which “vibrates with a pure voice of the initial nature” will be disrupted within a representation that cannot and will never correspond to what she knows as herself.

Erbil displayed a determined attitude of not utilizing methods that might serve her to become more visible and the problem of “presentation-advertisement-marketing-packaging-selling” within the literary field has always been Erbil’s concern. Although Zenime gives in to her desire to be seen, the fact that the reporter’s concerns will never meet her priorities goes in line with Erbil’s critical views. The reporter becomes a lying cog in the media machine that could just produce misrepresentations of the self that “turns the first living thing into a book within which all the letters, syllables and words dwell” a self that can only be known by itself and vibrates with the pure voice of initial nature.

Beyond the parallelism between Zenime’s despising attitude towards the reporter and Erbil’s thoughts about media sector, Zenime’s helpless act of contacting the press relates to the writer’s fear of being forgotten. This fear relevant for Erbil, too, who has refused to send her novels to competitions, in which old-boy networks rule; and who has preserved her works from the interventions of market and media at the cost of a long biding and being read less. Therefore, Zenime’s calling for recognition reveals Erbil’s reckoning of her own resentments engendering a latent double connection between the two.

[Ş]u at hırsızdı dedelerinden kalma ve Pisa Kulesini andırsa da hiçbir yıkılma belirtisi göstermeyen bu hımış evde onların duacısı olarak, üne de, paraya da, dünya nimetlerinin tümüne de sırtını

çevirmiş, çevirdiği sırtında ise sözümona ‘übermensch’ kazılı
arması uzaktan okunabilen bir kamlumbağa gibi sürüklenip
giderken otların arasında geldi o telefon işte: ‘Dünya çapında savaş
muhabiri, röportaj ve fotoğraf sanatçısı’... Sanki bunca çileyi bu
telefonu beklemek adına çekmiştin, hemen buyur ettin! (66)

The writer negates fame and ironically at the same time she seeks a heroine position due to her dignified act of withdrawal; Zenime is not unaware of this paradox since she belittles herself by making fun of the eremitic blow that announces an “übermensch” existence. She accepts the fact that turning her back to worldly pleasures also incorporates her desire to become and recognized as superior. Although Zenime is a writer who rejects fame and due conduct just like Erbil herself, her desire is to enjoy the reputable position of such negation. I think here the use of verbal irony (a monk wearing a cardigan with the sign “übermensch”) becomes the unique means for the author to express the contradiction in construction of her very self because it embraces both a self erasure and re-empowerment of the authorial position.

Uzun süre direndin bu kültüre. Ünlü olmak, bu toplumda yer kapmak, seçilmiş üçten beşten sayılmak, medyatik arma olmak hepsi sana yabancı hepsi başka biçimde, ne var ki istememektesin tümüyle yok da sayılmak altı üstü kara kaygı mezarlığı olan bu ülkede istememektesin seçkinliği; değil tepelemek için başkalarını ama *kendin için olmalısın kendin tartılıp biçilmeden*; bakın ne cevher var burada ‘ama-maya, amentü, amen’ bir cevher ki kendi benliğine ait opal, kristal ve

topaz bir taş atımı uzaktayken herkesin erişmek istediği neden insanların çıkarılması öne, bırakılması arkada gider bu kadar gücüne? Çünkü, ANCAK BU YOLLA DOĞANIN ADALETİNE HİZMET EDEBİLİYORUM, amentüsü baykuş olan yeryüzünün GERÇEK ruhuyla sende var olan şeytanılain, kaçınıcı ölmen bu hain diye kalkışan ve yüzülen derisi gerçek bir elmas olmak istersin gitmeyen pul paraya levaya yeşile ve çeyreğe florin ve drahmiye tam böyle değilse de seçimin senin buna benzer şeylerdir nasıl anlatsan hakikate olan büyük aşkını bilememektesin insanlara, uymuyorsa da bu çağın hırsları hırslarına sanırım sen ilerde (çağın gerçeğine varmak için daha ilerde), dönüp bakılacak bir motif olmak arzusu içindesin? (İlerde, gelecekte; artık kabrine az gelen karıncalı toprağında çürürkene;) kendini bozduktan kalmış bir kadavra, paraya mülke erkeğe üne takıya aldanmadan ve tümünde akli kalmış olarak uyurken karıncaların yönettiği ebedi istirahatgahında, bir hırka bir lokmayla Hatçabla'nın getirdiği... (Hatçabla'dan mutlaka söz etmeli sızlayan vicdan, hicran ve vatan borcu olarak demiştin zaten.). (26)

'Existence for the self' and authenticity are relevant concepts for Erbil's literature. In a recent interview, she states that she uses authenticity in existentialist and ethical terms and explains it as taking on the responsibility of the 'other' whereas avoiding reducing her own sense of art and ethics to the values of the society to remain dedicated to her

art.⁹ Ambitions of gaining more readers, success or material earning are rejected with a suffering retreat. However, in this quote there is a confession that such obsession with authenticity turns into a two-facedness since that obsession also carries the desire to become unique. Avoiding ambitions of the era becomes another ambitious search for the self to be recognized as it is, in its authentic existence, as a ‘diamond’ standing beyond the whole fiend culture. Here the reader witnesses Zenime’s confession that her game of erasing the self carries a desire to be remembered as a unique motif. Despising fame and avoiding media turns into a vain attitude which points to an inconsistent and artificial stance rather than an authentic one. Again, Erbil’s anxieties as an author come into being through Zenime’s bilateral drifts that are expressed by verbal irony such as being a pure, not derogated corpse but rotting self; or sleeping in her tomb as a long sufferer who could not be deceived by material gain, fame or men though wrapped up in them.

Authenticity in the sense of being true to oneself is what Erbil found most important for her writing. Such authenticity is accompanied with negation of values and norms of the bourgeois society and culture and it carries a promise of rejection of every authoritarian institution as well as hypocrisy. This can be thought in relation to the modernist artist figure where certain principles such as devoting oneself to the ideals and values of art; devaluing and not surrendering to the opportunities that media and the market offers to the artist; and avoiding to reduce one’s artistic production to the taste of the readers.

Kendini ciddiyle düşündüğünde ise –ki siz de bilirsiniz, kendini ciddiyle ele alanın ne berbat biri olduğunu-, sorsan ki,

⁹ Leyla Erbil Söyleşisi. Söyleşi: İsmail Ertürk. *Yeni*, Winter 2011.

“kaybolmak, unutulmak isteyen bir yazar” denebilir mi sana? Sevgili okurlar (nereden sevgili oluyorsanız), bu soruya sizler de metnin tümünü okumadan veremezsiniz karar ama, unutulma peşine düşmüş, kendine bir ‘unutturuş oyunu’ kurmuş bir yazara ne dersiniz? Eeh! Evet biraz, ama tam değil. Ya da bir ‘hiç yazar’ olmak isteyen biri? Bilemiyorsun ki, nasıldır ‘hiç yazar’? Hayır hayır sen değilsin! Karşılaşmış mıyızdır bir hiç yazarla? Sanmam: senin uydurduğun bir tipti bu gençlik yıllarında, Amerika’da duyduğun yabancılıkla uydurduğun; bir ilk doğuran ‘Ma’ olarak ki resimle karşılığı dişi baykuşmuş ‘Ma’nın yukarıda sözünü ettiğim, ‘hiçlik’ üzerine çok düşündün sen, kitap yazdın! Ne var ki dünyada yoksa da bir örneği, modeline rastlanmamışsa da ‘hiç yazarın’ milattan öncede ve sonrada, sandığımızdan da çoktur onlar, halkların ‘hiç halk’ olanları gibi ve değillerse mezralarda, işkencede, dağlarda bayırlarda, ya da toprak altlarında beklemektedirler günlerini unutmayan, giderek devleşen bir bilinç gibi; küllerimiz, düşlerimiz ve karıncalarımız karışmış olsa da birbirine, onlardan da değilsin sen, sen hiçbir yere ait değilsin, aitsiz kimliksin sen, ‘Aitsiz Kimlik!’. (29)

Here Zenime confesses that a writer’s desire, pursuing to be forgotten, is inevitably directed to achieve to come to be known as a non-writer and that is an endeavor which is doomed to fail. This is the writer’s confession of an endeavor to manifest a unique authorial backbone via negative course, just like Leyla Erbil’s rejection to participate

contests with her novels. The ideal of non-writer dies at the moment of the expression of such desire.

Another issue is that irony functioning against the self purports to a self-consciousness that the claiming of authenticity is itself artificial; and self-consciousness or confession of giving in to artificiality does not necessarily entail an authentic self for the author. In other words, the writer who plays the game of living down does not become a non-writer. Awareness that despising fame so rigorously is itself an arrogant and artificial gesture that leaves her high and dry with a non-belonging identity.

Zenime expresses that impossibility herself as she states that one cannot come across with non-writers since they are the unknown ones who died away according to her made-up story. She cannot tie herself with that line. Then there remains an identity or self for the writer which cannot be related to any ancestral line. It becomes a non-belonging identity and the idea behind calling of the protagonist as zenime, which means degenerate, implies to that impossibility of building bounds with the unknown names of non-writers. On the other hand, the issue of non-belonging self for the writer also denotes to a multiplied degenerateness when Zenime's claim to be a 'woman of literature' is taken into account.

Nurdan Gürbilek refers to Harold Bloom's concept of *anxiety of influence* that points out the tension between writer's desire to create unique pieces and *his* inevitable connection with previous writers. Bloom develops this concept as an oedipal conflict between father and son: The desire to be like the father is accompanied with an urge to separate from him in order to gain the authority himself. Bloom argues that creation of

original work is the epitome of such anxiety. Figured as such the woman writer is an orphan in this picture and the impossibility of a genealogical discovery for the woman writer on the retrospective line is in question. As Gürbilek explains in her essay “Çiftkalpli Yapıt,” Zenime repeatedly refers to feminine ancestors of humanity and is in search of a maternal line as a non-belonging identity. The major frustration of the modern writer for not being able to express *himself* within language is multiplied in the case of being a woman writer: The loss in the author’s self is accompanied with a loss of public authority and the more the lack is the severer become melancholy that the author suffers from. Erbil’s distanced stance towards Zenime and Zenime’s constant belittling utterances for herself make up the multi-layered character of irony and emerge as symptoms of this harsh melancholy.

Gürbilek applies Rene Girard’s concept of “negative course” to explain Erbil’s approach. It is a search for approval in the negative sense as reluctance for fame and rejection of admiration by the readers (229). However, such negation does not necessarily reinforce author’s authenticity but might dwell within the dynamics of the system that it stands against. Erbil’s existence within the literary field entails a rejection of the literary market, however such stance also feeds from an emphasis on a unique self which demands recognition within this negative course. Gürbilek describes this dual bearing as a strong insistence on and anxiety for the ego and to become an individual is predominant in Erbil’s literature. The author believes her authenticity depends on how much she can separate herself from the ‘other’ and become individualistic. This desire is simultaneous with the author’s consciousness that the “self” is only possible in the existence of the other.

Gürbilek argues that negation of fame, power and “sultanate” that media offers for the author is problematic in Erbil’s literature. It is problematic because such negation ignores the predicaments of the stance of the writer as an “individual” (225). Gürbilek writes that what Erbil tries in *Cüce* is to understand the promises of the deceiving mirror of the media for the author (225). What makes *Cüce* exceptional among Erbil’s other pieces is that it focuses on the “self” inflamed by the media rather than the media itself (225). In other words, Zenime’s bilateral drift, the concurrence of her retreat and desire; resentment and demand of recognition; negation of fame for uniqueness deal with the author’s self and its image in the face of its own ethics. *Cüce* is the manifesto of this conjunction and the ruling verbal irony enables the writer to express her aporia.

In her essay called *Medya-Media* written in 1998, Leyla Erbil explains that according to her media is a power in the hands of private capital holders which cannot be controlled and whose desires are unchallengeable. She sees media as a tool under the service of wild capitalism which functions with the support of bourgeois state. Enmeshed in the rules of capitalism, media grows wider and wider and longs for more profit and power. It becomes a monstrous entity that is subject to those rules (2010: 98). Therefore, for a writer who builds her own literature against the sanctions of a capitalist world system, her relationship with media will be always contentious.

Erbil’s concern is to be able to adopt an individualistic stance free from the sanctions of media in the field of art. She thinks that one can ignore the opportunities that media offers to the artists and in fact ‘a real writer should be ashamed of fame’ because s/he is aware of the remorselessness of the system that offers such fame and power. One can

wait to be discovered and she asks if one could risk to be forgotten and die away in this corner.

Erbil makes a distinction between journalists who are promoted despite their lack of talents and the honest ones who deserve to have posts in the media sector. However, media is described as such a monster that it needs those honest journalists in order to show a cleaner face (103). Erbil mentions names of some writers who ended their lives in their early ages and asks if media played a role in their suicides. She questions the meaning of becoming more visible and mourns for the ones who preferred not to (104). So criticizing and standing against manipulative and destructive power of media is a core issue in Erbil's writing; and in Zenime's text the reporter emerges as the representative of those negative values.

In one of the interviews done with Erbil after the publication of the novel, Erbil emphasized the difference between how she sees the cüce figure and Zenime's relation with him:

Zenime Hanım benim gibi düşünmeyeceği için bu cüceyi sevimli bulmuyor, kabullenemiyor, için için pek bir küçümsüyor aslında, çünkü Cüce aynı zamanda medyadır; hayatınca kaçtığı, evine sokmadığı medya. Bunu kendisine itiraf etmek istemez, tersine onunla yatarak kendisini cezalandırmış da olur; öylesine hiçliğe düşmekte ki”¹⁰

¹⁰O iki Kalp Simgesel Bir Şey, Çok Yüreklilik de Olabilir, Kimbilir!. Söyleşi: İdil Önemli. *Varlık*, March 2002.

Cüce is the media that Zenime has been avoiding throughout her life and from which she is alienated but the encounter turns into a description of how she gives in to the sultanate of media. As Erbil states she even punishes herself by having sex with the reporter who is the combination of all the reptile features that she understood as the anti-thesis of the values she endowed herself with.

Zenime's text can be read in two parts: The first part being the anxious anticipation of the reporter that is presented to Zenime as a great artist of photography and interview with many prizes. As argued before that anticipation is accompanied with Zenime's alienation from the process that leads her calling for the reporter and the repulsion she feels for him or more precisely the media that he represents. In second part Zenime meets the reporter and it becomes rather apparent what the reporter stands for.

'Söyle bakalım şimdi? Ev bu! Bahçe bu! Öyle mi? Malzemem bunlar demek?'[...]

- Ben öyle çalışmam, anlarsın şimdi, yarıda kaldı sözüm, anlatıyordum, benim başarım sana, seninki bana bağlıdır. Ah anlıyorum seni canım! O kadar heyecanlanma, bir şey yok! Başlayalım: heyecan tazeyken başlarım çalışmaya, sen bana aldırma... Çık şu masanın üstüne, çık ve tavana bak, hadi hadi kaçmasın esin, kaçmasın hadi, sandalyeye bas da çık, çok güzel, müthiş bir esvap bu, bu kıyafetle yerde kalamazsın, hadi sıçra sıçra yaparsın, başlıyoruz bir efsanesin sen aslında biliyor musun? --Sen, yazar sadece yazınından sorumludur, tanıtımına düşmemeli

kendinin, diyormuşsun değil mi? Yazdıklarını başkaları değerlendirmiş? ... Ne saçma! dedi, üzerinde tartışmaya değmez! Kimse kimsenin değerini bilemez, başkası neden uğraşacakmış seninle? Değerini, sen kendin biçeceksin kendine; kafalarına sokana dek ısrar edeceksin, yorulmak, çekilmek, beklemek olmaz! Kendini teslim edeceğin biri mi var? Bu konuda ısrar etme bir daha aleyhine oluyor!.. (69-73)

The reporter is an extreme embodiment of what Zenime has been arguing against. He sees Zenime and her surroundings as mere materials that will be reified in his work to achieve a facet of Zenime that will be exhibited by the media. His abrupt claims of having understood her, calling her a legend, encouraging her to ‘leaping’ towards a representation of success are such gestures that turn Zenime’s encounter into a caricature in the light of her values that were previously presented. She constantly remarked the repulsion she feels towards media and its corrupted make-up. However, in the end her urge not to die away in her corner and to gain some visibility makes Zenime an object of irony.

Dünya edebiyatı bunun aksine örneklerle dolu, bile diyemeden ona, ah beni kimse anlayamaz, kimsenin harcı değildir anlamak beni diyemeden, içimde tanımadığım yepyeni bir kırgınlık; gene de bu duygular daha çok kendime acıdığımdandır kuşkusıyla biriktirdiğim gecemi aydınlatan tırşe gözlerimi ya tutamazsam derken... [...] Merdiven altından portatif merdiveni aldım uslu uslu, gelmişti üzerime iyicene o baş eğmişlik ve

vurdumduymazlık insanlardan değil Kaban'dan öğrendiğim ve hiçbir dilde adını bilemediğim sanırım Türkçede de olmayan; öfkeli acımayla hınç dolu sevecenliğin, kandırma ve avutmayla sadakatin karıştığı merhameti de andıran, yasaların, etiğin önündeki tüm riskleri de karşılamaya hazır olduğuna dair bir im; başkalarının suçlandığı, senin hiç katılmadığın ters bir işi seve seve üstüne almayı andıran, belki ancak o yolda olgunluğun artacağı beklentisi taşıyan bir duygu... (73-74)

Following the reporter's orders Zenime bit by bit complies, without being able to express the impossibility of her self to find a representation, she gives in to a probability of such expression, though not believing in that probability but letting herself to be deceived. In the face of her ethical values she surrenders to such deceitfulness, lets in the flock of black sheep which she ran away from throughout her life.

Erbil distinguishes herself from Zenime in her remarks in the interview, and Zenime becomes a part of the parody in her encounter with the reporter by giving in to his commands. Erbil states that Zenime is different from her because Zenime despises cüce and she does not find him cute. However, Erbil herself presented her judgmental attitude towards media. So, cüce being the ultimate other for Zenime as a combination of the corrupted bourgeois culture, a flock of black sheep, people who are fishing with cheap calculations, is also a representation of what Erbil defined her authenticity in opposition to. Neither Zenime's dual thoughts that emerge while waiting for cüce nor Erbil's remarks about the media present a fully sympathizing or despising attitude.

What both stances emphasize is the manipulative and caustic power of media and its insincerity as well as its due impact on the writer which is being criticized. So, in the part in which Zenime encounters the reporter the indication of the parallelism between Zenime and Erbil intensifies.

Despite the fact that the deadlocks that emerge in Zenime's encounter with the reporter are very much in line with Erbil's concerns with the media, Zenime becomes a part of the parody. In the end, when she offers coffee to the reporter, his reply that every day he drinks tea with his wife at this time of the day is ironic. Zenime cannot help thinking that the reporter is a miserable bourgeois (88). However, she becomes the abject herself because of playing such game of decadence knowingly. The irony in Zenime's narration of this self-destructive play emerges from her self-betrayal and obedience to that "poor bourgeois". The parallelisms between Zenime and Erbil's concerns show that there is not a direct separation between them.

Until now I tried to show that Erbil's inclusion of herself in the text has a bilateral effect which creates an ironic division for a text that reveals her dilemmas and inquiries about herself as a writer. On the one hand, Erbil puts stress on the differences between Zenime and herself by turning Zenime's self inquiry into a parody of decay in addition to stating their different attitudes towards the reporter figure. On the other hand, this division is also a harbinger of the parallelism between the two. In other words, such a gesture that aims to differentiate the writer's self from the protagonist cannot escape denoting the writer's projection of authorial anxieties to her own protagonist in the existence of the author as herself within the text.

C) *Eiron* as Fortified Authorial Subjectivity

If *Cüce* is an allegory of Erbil's dilemmas as an author, how can we read Erbil's inclusion of herself in the text? One cannot claim that either Zenime or the character Leyla Erbil singularly corresponds to Leyla Erbil's self or her authorial persona. Rather the very division(s) between the selves indicates both the impossibility of accurately and exhaustively representing the self in writing. So, this ironic gesture, which appears in favor of the division of authorial persona, can be read as a means of expression of impossibility of representing the self in its full essence within language.

It is not possible to think of the subject without the language it speaks despite the inevitable gap and discrepancy between the subject and its spoken language. Language as a form of representation of the self will always be engendered at the cost of a lack of the self. Deriving from here Derrida's deconstruction looks into not only what narrative directly signifies but what is absent within the narrative. His concept *différance* refers to an inevitable surplus of the meaning of a text. In other words, the marks that enable the language also have an excess beyond senses of the self as a whole (Colebrook, 101). For Derrida the structure of the narrative is a part of the text as opposed to structuralist methodology, therefore the reading of the text must involve the unintentional, coincidental "moments that exceed all organization or active intent" since a text is empowered by the forces that exceed their intent (103). This approach enables us to see the countercurrents in *Cüce* that complicate the irony directed against Zenime. While the irony which works to distance both the character Leyla Erbil and the author outside the novel from Zenime, a deconstructive reading can locate in the text the ways in which all these subjectivities merge in order to produce a contradictory but also more powerful authorial/feminine self. In this context, textual irony works not only against

Zenime, but also against the assumptions and ideals of monologic and unified authorial positions.

Although *Cüce* emerges as a text in which the writer reveals her won desires that are conflicting with own values or a search for hypocrisy within the self is realized, it still puts forward morals of authorship, principles of an ideal ethics for the writer. In this context, one can argue that it is the classical sense of irony that calls upon a Socratic “good” to be achieved which goes in line with a fortified authorial self. Here it is pertinent to call upon the Aristotelian concepts *eiron* and *alazon*. With a rough projection Erbil can be thought as playing the role of *eiron* in contrast with Zenime’s supercilious claims of writing a novel that reveals the mysteries of life. Zenime’s *alazoneia* goes as far as asserting a pretentious announcement of having found the expression of ‘truth’. Zenime’s *alazoneia* is her illusion of having overcome the discrepancy between the sign and meaning as if the self’s representation in language is without any lack. *Eiron*, that is engendered by Erbil’s distanced and silent position or through the separation between Erbil and Zenime, becomes the thematization of the impossibility of such act and therefore the thematization of the difference itself. In other words, the impossibility of representing the self is thematized via the division of the authorial persona within the text which is supported by Erbil’s remarks in the interviews. This thematization of difference points to an authorial subject beyond the text and irony is the mere tool that enables the expression of this difference and evoking an authorial subjectivity beyond the text. The writing subject, whose agency is suspected or injured, claims her subjectivity through inertia and irony becomes the expression of this inertia with its cynical quality. More precisely, Erbil’s inclusion of

herself within the text in a disapproving tone serves to Erbil's *eyron* that is the authorial subjectivity beyond the text.

Zenime's submission to the representation of media is also a submission to the phallogentric language. It is her expression of the feminine self that she has been seeking within the representation system that derogates her and Erbil seeks for an outer position by returning to Socratic irony. The irony of the text that cuts through different directions, the irony that is not restrained with a controlled lampoon against Zenime thematizes the impossibility of this representation as well as its probability within the text. A deconstructive reading enables to see this potential and the symptoms of this thematization. There reveals the textual layers of this irony: Zenime's self-criticalness against herself, Erbil's distanced approach towards Zenime and Erbil's self-criticalness at the moments when Zenime and Erbil overlap. Irony working against both realizes a catharsis for the outer authority and enables the emergence of the text as an expression of this catharsis. Together with the melancholy in this tri-partite layered sharp criticism the self of the author is fragmented and the loss in the author subject, woman writer's loss through her appearance in media, by her entrance into the symbolic realm merges.

Another point is that the irony that works in favor of a more powerful/feminine authorial self is in line with the Romantic sense that values the uniqueness of the artist's inner voice. Also the multiplied and self-undermining character of irony falls into the Romantic understanding. Although the textual irony in *Cüce* cannot be assumed as unstable, the implication of an outer authorial subjectivity through the work of multiplied irony fits in with the Romantic notion of the uniqueness of the artist.

D) Irony and Writing as a Woman

Being a public figure is introduced as a contradictory position for a writer in *Cüce*. There emerges the dilemma of being a player in the game or to risk being forgotten. In the case of women writers this position entails other dilemmas. For a feminist political struggle, it is functional to make oneself heard and threatens perceptions on women that are adopted in a patriarchal culture. However, it also entails reductionist labels such as “women writer” as well as giving in to representations of the author’s self that are deceptive. In *Cüce* Erbil expresses such dual function of becoming a public figure with the use of irony and she dramatizes the collaboration with the media as opening the woman’s body to its penetration. The loss of authorial purity proceeds over the writer’s body and Erbil narrates this concession as the loss of bodily integrity. So, again it is the use of irony -with its power to question the structures that the writing dwells in by negating the value of those structures via repetition- that enables women writers’ struggle in the literary field. In other words, ironic mode is a means that reflects women’s double relation to the patriarchal structure that is its indebtedness to what it criticizes.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

In this thesis I tried to understand what the significance of irony is in women authors' artistic production by concentrating specifically on *Tante Rosa* and *Cüce*. Although it is not possible to give a comprehensive account on this relation by only looking at two novels, I believe this thesis introduces the idea that irony may function significantly in narratives on womanliness and on the position of writing as woman which bear a twofold character.

The first chapter presents the definitions and deliberations on different understandings of irony and the relevance of irony to feminist approaches.

The second chapter clarifies the features of ironic narration in *Tante Rosa* and it is shown how the unstable/Romantic character of irony serves to the formation of a parody of *bildung* in the novel.

In the third chapter the first part aims to explain the parallelisms between the protagonist's and the writer's anxieties as well as the need for the division of the authorial persona in relation to writing as a woman. Then, the Socratic features of irony are presented in order to show the presence of a fortified authorial subjectivity beyond the text which is also in line with the Romantic emphasis on the uniqueness of the artist's creative production.

There are clear differences between the use of irony in *Tante Rosa* and *Cüce* which, I think, when presented comparatively, clarifies my main arguments on the novels. Firstly, either derogatory or supporting the irony of *Tante Rosa* works against the protagonist which brings forth a parody of *bildung*. However, in *Cüce* the abrasive character of ironic approach is processed towards the text itself, the author herself as well as the protagonist, thereby engenders a narrative focuses on the problematization of writing.

In *Tante Rosa* since irony is processed against an idea of self development, the rationality of the subject is also abraded. On the other hand, womanly incognizances, impulsive choices are also the target of the ridicule. Whereas in *Cüce* on the last leg of a life that has been lived within a frame of ethical values and willpower, there is a turning back to the sensual, a search pertaining to desire. There is a longing for the pure feminine and irony enables the expression of such controversiality.

The unstable character of irony is predominant throughout the text in *Tante Rosa*. Towards the end in the dream scene Rosa's ignorance to the realities of life she leads is criticized. At that point irony stabilizes for a moment and Rosa's political ignorance is expostulated. It is not possible to define *Cüce's* irony as unstable, however, it is distinguished from a clear satire due to its self-undermining negativity that works towards the protagonist as well as the author.

In *Tante Rosa* the unstable character of irony serves to incoherence within the self. The merging of the narrative voice and Rosa's stance also shakes the reliability of the

narrator. However, in *Cüce* what Erbil's inclusion eventually intensifies is the authorial subjectivity.

The textual irony in *Cüce* cannot be assumed as unstable, however, its multiplied and self-undermining character working against the author and her double falls into the Romantic understanding of irony. The implication of an outer authorial subjectivity through the work of multiplied irony fits in with the Romantic notion of the uniqueness of the artist. On the other hand, in *Tante Rosa* the overarching irony that creates constant contradiction, the simultaneous utterance of paradoxical viewpoints suits the character of Romantic irony.

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