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THE IMAGE OF ART AND THE ARTIST IN WILKIE COLLINS' NO NAME

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Abstract

Due to the rapid economic transformation and its disturbingly corrupt social outcomes in Victorian England, Victorian literature cannot be detached from the social ills that the Victorian society suffers. Thus, the artist in the Victorian age was expected to fulfil the role of a moral teacher to serve the society for the improvement of the moral quality. Wilkie Collins, in his novel No Name, being fully aware of this function of art and the artist, portrays Magdalen and Norah who are left disinherited by the authoritarian and patriarchal English laws which do not let women occupy a place in man's world. Magdalen's quest for her lost identity will lead her to a reconstitution of a legitimate identity and a social role. In spite of the negative connotations of art and its demonization in the novel, it is clear that throughout art, a legitimate identity is achieved.

Özet

WILKIE COLLINS'İN NO NAME ADLI ROMANINDA SANAT VE SANATÇI ANLAYIŞI

Viktorya Dönemi İngiltere'sinde meydana gelen hızlı ekonomik dönüşüm ve bu dönüşümün rahatsız edecek derecede yozlaşmış sosyal sonuçları yüzünden, Viktorya dönemi edebiyatını, toplumun maruz kaldığı sosyal haksızlıklardan bağımsız düşünemeyiz. Bu yüzden Viktorya dönemi sanatçısından toplumda ahlak değerlerinin niteliğini arttırmak için ahlak öğretmenliği rolü üstlenmesi beklenirdi. Wilkie Collins de, No Name adlı romanında, sanat ve sanatçının bu görevinin farkında olarak, kadının erkek dünyasında herhangi bir yere sahip olmasına izin vermeyen, otoriter ve patriarkal İngiliz kanunları tarafından mirastan mahrum bırakılmış Magdalen ve Norah kardeşlerin hikayesini anlatır. Magdalen'in kimlik arayışı, yeniden yasal bir kimliğe kavuşması ve toplumda sosyal bir konum edinmesiyle sonuçlanır. Romanda, sanatın olumsuz ve kötücül çağrışımlarına rağmen sanat yoluyla yasal bir kimlik kazanıldığı açıktır.

Nothing in this world is hidden for ever. The gold which has lain for centuries unsuspected in the ground reveals itself one day on the surface. Sand turns traitor, and betrays the footsteps that have passed over it; water gives back to the tell-tale surface the body which has been drowned. Look where we will, the inevitable law of revelation is one of the laws of

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> nature; the lasting presentation of a secret is a miracle that the world has not yet seen (Collins, 1994: 25).

The Victorian period in which Wilkie Collins wrote his novel No Name, was the period of dramatic changes that led to troubled times and social ills. Rapid growth of the British economy and England's expanded territories resulted not only in industrial, technological, and scientific development but also in economic distress. It was an age of transition, transition from pre-industrial, agricultural society to an industrial, manufacturing nation bringing with it terrible social conditions and social disturbance. These changes resulted in unplanned and unorganized rapid growth in industry and neither people nor governmental system was ready for this unexpected growth from the point of social and moral issues. Thus, an urgent necessity for the reform flourished as indicated by John Stuart Mill in his "The Spirit of the Age" (1831):

> The first of the leading peculiarities of the present age is that it is an age of transition. Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones. When we say outgrown, we intend to prejudge nothing. A man may not be either better or happier at six-and-twenty, than he was at six years of age: but the same jacket which fitted him then, will not fit him now (Mill, 2007: 53).

Out of these old institutions and old doctrines, social ills such as child labour, prostitution, the absence of safety nets, the lack of an appropriate legal and social infrastructure, limited property rights, poor hygiene or safety regulations, harsh working conditions, financial fraud, inadequate consumer production, unemployment, widespread poverty, an increase in serious crime were born alongside with the unparalleled increases in material welfare (Dunning, 2003: 19). These oppositions and dramatic changes reflected themselves in the Victorian literature which was to a large extent, the product of these problematic cultural and social issues. These problems were addressed to the needs of the age which had grown up within a society seeking adjustment to the conditions of modern life. Though the society tried to reform itself morally, underneath there was a heartless philosophy known as Utilitarianism, a materialism based on the principle of utility. Almost most of the writers reacted against this philosophy. Charles Dickens accused the social injustice of his time, and expressed his deep hostility towards the doctrines of utilitarianism. Utilitarians regarded the novel as a danger to the reader's moral and mental well-being as a form far interior to poetry and drama (Skilton, 1993:17). Against utilitarians' views, the Victorian novel was primarily concerned with representing social reality and the way a protagonist sought and defined his/her place within this reality. Thus, the concept of the role of the artist which the Victorian age tried to impose on its writers was to act as a moral teacher, sage, leader, and a preacher to the society. The duty of literature Matthew Arnold defined thus: "most of what now passes with us for

religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry" (Abrams (ed.), 1986: 933). The role of the artist is, hence, to pursue social duty instead of personal pleasure. When the artist acts as a moral teacher then the function of art should be to be useful, true-to life and moral, i.e. the moral quality of the subject becomes more important than the beauty of expression in art. Plato already considered that poetry is only allowed as long as it serves a functional aim and gives moral lessons to the readers so that they can differentiate the good from the evil. Thus, the artist will fulfil the requirements of the ideal state by serving the objective of teaching positive ethical traits such as courage, morality, motivation and bravery. In his Republic he comments: "The issue of poetry is the main consideration-among many others-which convinces me that the way we were trying to found our community was along absolutely the right lines." (Plato, 2001: 67).

Collins shared the Victorian belief that fiction should be true to nature, and in the "Letter of Dedication" to Basil (1852) he emphasised his adherence to the actual realities of every day (Collins, 1993: 93). His reliance upon experience and, on the one hand, his imagination, extraordinary accidents and events which happen to very few men as legitimate material for fiction, on the other hand, made Collins both the realistic and the romantic. John Ruskin also believed in the social utility of art that can direct people to better deeds: "All healthy and helpful literature sets simple bars between right and wrong; assumes the possibility, in men and women, of having healthy minds in healthy bodies, and loses no time in the diagnosis of fever or dyspepsia in either; least of all in the particular kind of fever which signifies the ungoverned excess of any appetite or passion" (Ruskin, 1993: 142). Like Shelley and Wordsworth, he relied on the idea that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley, 1965: 140) and their works are done with "true taste and feeling" (Wordsworth, 2001: 655).

In Wilkie Collins's novel No Name, the artist challenges authoritarian patriarchal marriage laws that leave two sisters, Magdalen and Norah orphaned and disinherited. Magdalen's quest for her lost identity will cause her to discover that she is very much like the other women who fail to occupy a place in a man's world. Hence, No Name is the story of the pursuit of a lost social identity leading to Magdalen's false quest which culminates in a mental breakdown however, finally leading to a reconstitution of a legitimate identity and a social role. In spite of the negative connotations of art in the novel and its demonization, it is clear that throughout art, a legitimate identity is achieved. Life itself is likened to an amateur theatre: the play The Rivals is performed by a group of amateurs who act out assigned or chosen roles in the novel. However as far as the parallelism between life and theatre is concerned then we see that life includes more complex and dual standards when compared to the theatre as will be discussed below.

In No Name, Wilkie Collins portrays Magdalen as the victim of heartless society and severe, unexpected fate with sentimentalism. Disguise, deception, and legal injustice underlie in the action in No Name, where Collins once again describes a world where reality blurs and changes. The illegitimacy problem is

caused by the cruel English marriage laws that deprive the English wives not only of their possessions but also their children as it does in this novel. The cruelty of the English laws is revealed by the secret deeds of Mr. And Mrs. Vanstone who leave their children with NO NAME and no legacy. What is left from the family is only a music book, a piano and some verses that are written by the mother. They are still connected with art which is demonised and displaced in the text. However, chaos ironically confused by its laws, both in society and also in the family has already been created long before things related to art is left to the children. This chaotic disturbance has already been inserted into the story before the acting process starts thus the real disturbance is not caused neither by the acts of Magdalen nor the artistic skills of the characters in the novel. Mrs. Vanstone's music-book and verses to her husband and Magdalen's acting skills that represent the artistic skills of the characters have no place in a British, at times, Western civilization. Andrew Vanstone's American wife, French Mrs. Lecount, Mr. Pendril's business in India, Frank in Hong-Kong, Noel's Eastern bargains, The Rivals' performance under African heat, the yellow-looking singer in the concert, all represent a non-British world that contrasts. In fact, 'civilized' England does not represent a country that treats its people under equal terms. Thus; art has no place in this kind of civilization. Consequently, the acting process as an art is going to be expelled from the story since it has no place in this kind of civilization that allows no property rights on the illegitimate children of Vanstones. In the novel, art as in the society is not favourably received. Plato also banishes art from his ideal state because in his views, art cannot be the truth, cannot be the source of knowledge in any way. Moreover, corrupting influence of imitative art affects even good people since they cannot resist its power. However, Plato does not banish the artist from the state completely since the flaw lies not in art itself but in the mistaken responses that corrupt the art. Thus, Plato allows the imitator to return if the artist's art is beneficial to orderly government and to the lives of mankind. In No Name, it is not art that is responsible for all the misdoings and evil acts, it is the responses that all the family members give to Magdalen and cruel law system in England that provoke Magdalen.

In the very beginning of the first chapter, the day after the concert Mr. Vanstone complains about his suffering due to the previous night's disturbance:

> They played one piece of music which lasted forty minutes. It stopped three times, by-the-way; and we all thought it was done each time, and clapped our hands, rejoiced to be rid of it. But on it went again, to our great surprise and mortification, till we gave it up in despair, and all wished ourselves at Jericho. 'Norah, my dear! when we had crash-bang for forty minutes, with three stoppages by-the-way, what did they call it?' (Collins: op. cit., 10).

Mr. Vanstone does not have any pleasure in listening to a concert, he says, he "thinks a play will suit me better than a concert" (ibid., 10). Though Mr. Vanstone does not prefer music, Mrs. Vanstone could have preferred it since she has had an interest in music, and kept her music book for a long time. However; neither Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone nor Miss Garth nor Norah take any kind of art seriously. Even when Mr. Vanstone allowed Magdalen to perform her role in The Rivals, he was not really approving the idea of her acting very much like the others.

> Mrs. Vanstone- 'What could you be possibly be thinking of, Andrew, when you gave your consent?.. Surely my silence was a sufficient warning to you to say No?'
>
> Miss Garth- 'A mistake, Mr. Vanstone...Made with the best intentions- but a mistake for all.'
>
> Norah- 'It may be a mistake... But I really don't see how papa, or any one else, could have declined under these circumstances.'
>
> Mr. Vanstone- 'Quite right my dear, ... The circumstances, as you say, were dead against me. Here were these unfortunate people in a scrape on one side; and Magdalen, on the other, mad to act. I couldn't say I had methodistical objections- I have nothing methodistical about me. What other excuses could I make?' (ibid., 38).

Magdalen is totally out of this disturbing conversation that refuses art and the artist since she has been 'in the character of a born actress' (ibid., 44). Moreover, she was not only disapproved by her passionate acting affair but also by "her curious fancy for having her hair combed at all times and seasons," by everybody in the house (ibid., 39). However, Magdalen liked spending hours before the mirror having her hair combed like an artist as if passing through the transparency of the mirror. She was very much unlike other individuals in the house from the point of both character and appearance thus, from the beginning of the novel Magdalen is symbolically left out of the society that does not agreeably receive her artistic talents. Likewise, upon being suddenly orphaned and disinherited of her possessions, she will be really exiled from the society in which she really does not belong to. Thus, Magdalen starts her journey from 'immoral acts' to morality in this society, and moves from the intricate plot to true conditions of a social life. Truth is achieved through a delusive game playing in which financial relationships take the place of love. However, at the end, reversal of the situation full of regressions, regaining of love is emphasised placing Magdalen to the society where she was exiled from. The quest of Magdalen arouses excitement since she assumes the name of the most known person; Mary Magdalen who was one of the most devout followers of Christ, thus, the church recognises the role of Mary Magdalen as a prominent apostle to the church. However, the role of Mary Magdalen remains contradictory just as

Magdalen's shifting roles and her jump into different skins do in No Name: While early Christians called Mary Magdalen as "the Bride of Christ", her later image in Christianity turned out to be a repentant prostitute, afterwards, it was said that she retired to a cave where she lived in solitude meditating on her sins and it was also claimed that through her great sorrow and repentance she regained her virginity which was considered the most important requirement for woman's sainthood, thus; Mary's accomplishment made her a major role model and inspiration for all female ideal Christian life. Similarly; Magdalen in the story of Wilkie Collins, regains her social identity and feminine construction outside and inside the family and society, thus; Magdalen is not a fallen woman any more as her name's connotations has offered. Margaret Oliphant comments on that as follows:

> The Magdalen of No Name does not go astray after the usual fashion of erring maidens in romance. The pollution is decorous, and justified by law; and after all her endless deceptions and horrible marriage, it seems quite right to the author that she should be restored to society, and have a good husband and a happy home (Taylor: 1988, 133).

Besides the negative connotations of her name, we learn that even her name does not belong to her since it is the name of one of Mr. Vanstone's sisters who had died early in youth. Significantly, she has no identity from the beginning of the novel being "out of all harmony with her own Christian name!" (Collins, op.cit., 9). Thus, after the disclosure of the secret she discovers that in fact she has no identity in both under the English laws and also in the norms of the society: "Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's children; and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle's mercy." (ibid., 109).

The loss of the name and the disinheritance from the will upon which the social identity is built, reinforce to pass over the class and gender boundaries assuming different roles in the society undermining the social norms. Thus 'truth as it is in nature' reveals that the sisters are natural children however, illegitimate, there is no natural law to guard them, no family and no social right to guarantee their survival as being females. The sisters endure a competitive and different worlds where they have to struggle for their survival tough the sisters take different paths to earn their lives, Norah, passive seemingly, taking the role of a governess in the life on the other hand; Magdalen, being "resolute and impetuous, clever and domineering...not one of these model women who want a man to look up to, and to protect them" (Taylor: op. cit., 136). However, poetic justice is done by the artist himself by giving the sisters what they deserve in the eyes of the artist. Patience and moral goodness of Norah is rewarded on the other hand; Magdalen's immoral disguise, resolute and impetuous acts are not punished severely as expected, instead she is given a place in the society. This is because she fell into a false quest while attempting to recover the agony upon the loss of her family, being a victim of inequitable common laws of England.

Gradually she learns that she has to control her wicked and subversive feelings that lead her into false quests. During her false quests she jumps from one skin to another in collaboration with her mother's stepbrother, Captain Wragge. Before acting as a female masquerade as Miss Garth and later as Miss Bygrave before Noel Vanstone and his house keeper; Mrs. Lecount, Magdalen's active performing in the theatre allows Magdalen to act the roles that she has already lost: 'A Young Lady at Home' (Collins: op. cit., 191), a play in which she can perform private feminine domesticity. However, this acting skills were not recent skills, she starts her disguising in the production of The Rivals while her family was alive. This play can be considered as a foreshadowing of the roles of two sisters: Magdalen assumed both the character of Julia who will be the representative of Norah's later on, and also the character of Lucy, the coquettish maid which later she will undertake the role of her maid Louisa to be able to get into St. Crux, throughout the course of the events. However, endowed with a natural artistic gift, in fact her assumption of other identities is a terrifying ability which allows her to disclose her being "Nobody's Daughter".

> She dashed at it, with a mad defiance of herself-with a raised voice.. All the artless, girlish charm of the performance in happier and better days, was gone. The native dramatic capacity that was in her, came, hard, and bold, to the surface, stripped of every softening allurement which had once adorned it. She absolutely electrified Captain Wragge (ibid., 183).

Magdalen, while acting out, moves from the reality, however, when she considers the assumed roles consciously, she can excuse the made up identities. When she starts her plans for repossessing the inheritance she writes to her governess: "-my life as a public performer is at an end. It was harmless enough, God knows-" (ibid., 259). She narrows down her life from a public performing into private performing to trap Noel Vanstone and she succeeds in this aim and having the triumph she writes to Miss Garth again in a repossessed identity and inheritance:

> My position has altered. I am no longer the poor outcast girl, the vagabond public performer, whom you once hunted after...Do you know who I am? I am a respectable married woman, accountable for my actions to nobody under Heaven but my husband. I have got a place in the world and a name in the world, at last. Even the law, which is the friend of all you respectable people, has recognised my existence, and has become my friend too! You forget what wonders my wickedness has done for me. It has made Nobody's Child, Somebody's Wife (ibid., 484).

Not by the nature's laws but by the English Laws through marriage, she possesses a name and a social identity now. However, like the illegitimate daughters of Mr. Andrew Vanstone, she will see that the married women in the borders of England will have no claim in the inheritance of their husbands on the condition of their withdrawal from the will. Besides the financial unsatisfactory result of her short-term marriage, the change of the role in Magdalen's identity will not satisfy the emptiness in the life of Magdalen. The inversion of authority from father's to the husband's will not make any difference since the father was ineffectual and benevolent "as if he was a kind of younger brother of hers" (ibid., 11). In the novel, the female characters have more authority than the males however, patriarchal authority and class differences prevent females to act freely. Neither the father, nor Magdalen's weak fiancee Frank Clare and later her husband Noel Vanstone have any significance in her life. Only dominant male character which hinges on trickery, belongs to Captain Wragge's part and later on Captain Kirke whose father saves Mr. Andrew Vanstone from the suicide and this time his son saves his daughter Magdalen from a decline, mentally breakdown, naturally from death. With the Wragge's withdrawal from the stage, Captain Kirke appears to fulfil a final moral resolution upon the fate of Magdalen. Kirke, the name signifies Old Norse name meaning: "church" thus, she gains God's will as well as readers' sympathy towards her. Besides the connotations of his name, there is another detail that reminds his relation to the church: The name of his ship that he commanded: The Deliverance. Thus; symbolically and significantly, the church becomes the saviour of Magdalen in the story. The explicit energy of providence and prominent belief in fate was also given before the rediscovery of Magdalen and long absence of Captain Kirke in the story: "If it was ordered that I am to see her again, I shall see her." (ibid., 286). Those words were uttered by him while he was escaping from the beauty of Magdalen and with this thought in the mind after months and months he meets her on the door of a miserable place and asks himself: "What has brought me here? He said to himself in a whisper. 'The mercy of chance? No! The mercy of God.' (ibid., 579). He could be addressed as the surrogate for the artist, the creator in the story having Godly power at his mercy. There is another character in the story who acts as if an artist moulding a character for herself to manipulate: Mrs. Lecount. In the description of her examining Noel Vanstone, the artist shares his power with her:

> She had carefully regulated the quantity of wine which he had taken at luncheon-she had let him drink exactly enough to fortify, without confusing him- and she now examined his face critically, like an artist examining his picture, at the end of the day's work. The result appeared to satisfy her.. (ibid., 453).

In fact, not only Mrs. Lecount constituted her discourse in the story but also Magdalen and Captain Wragge created some kind of energy of providence but

they are always cut in some way by the artist by the lift of their veils. These three people instead of having a sincere interaction, they are cut out from each other by wicked schemes of each character. The bond which they link to each other is not the bond of love or trust but the money, the dispossessed money by Magdalen, but not only Magdalen but also by Norah. However, Norah is left out due to her patient moral force which allows her to wait and see her turn for the reward by the Providence. Magdalen intentionally leaves her behind when she left the house to fight for her due. She makes a Faustinian deal or an arranged marriage type of deal with Captain Wragge and when she made the deal, she took the "first fatal step downwards" (ibid., 179).

> "I don't want a moment," replied the captain. "Place your departure from York, your dramatic career, and your private inquiries under my care. Here I am, unreservedly at your disposal. Say the word--do you take me?"
> Her heart beat fast; her lips turned dry--but she said the word.
> "I do." (ibid., 181).

Wragge's dominance over Magdalen lies in his social and psychological ability on the people, he is the "moral agriculturalist; a man who cultivates the field of human sympathy" (ibid., 169). In the narrative progress of No Name, he dominates the climax part in which he manipulates, disguises and deceives people. He constitutes a discourse that is apt to him thus he acts as the artist of his part in the novel. After completing his part he disappears from the scene to appear towards the denouement part as a medical agriculturist this time. Their mutual intrigues with Mrs. Lecount, their witty dialogues, plans within the plans increase the tension and their immoral management of the events reach to the level of parodying of the characters, acting as if they are the caricatures of the schemes. Thus; the artist cleverly schemes these wicked characters for the sake of the end of the plot since they are all going to be rewarded, Wragge having a commercial success, Mrs. Lecount achieving to have money through Noel Vanstone's will and Magdalen leaving behind what she has all done, leading a moral, honourable marriage, gaining her social reconstitution and lastly Frank Clare marrying an old however, a rich widow. Thus; poetic justice is done by the artist himself though Mr. Clare in the novel does not fully approve this:

> He didn't deserve your poor father's interest in him-and he got it. He didn't deserve your attachment-and he got it. He didn't deserve the best place in one of the best offices in London; he didn't deserve an equally good chance in one of the best mercantile houses in China; he didn't deserve food, clothing, pity, and a free passage home- and he got them all. Last, not least, he didn't even deserve to marry a woman old enough to be his grandmother-and he has done it! (ibid., 602).

Mr. Clare somewhat criticises the novel's idea of Providence since his ideas of moral progress do not match with the Godly plans of the artist. However, Frank Clare is saved by Kirke in his journey, in other words by the church. Both Magdalen and Frank though taking different journeys in the novel, one is the symbolically moral journey and the other is a real journey from Hong-Kong to London, are both saved by Kirke. This is the choice of the artist, real life as opposed to fictitious life, justice is given by the Godly artist, what the artist narrates in this story is real life turned out to be a fictitious one in the progress of narration which is also emphasised by Noel Vanstone in the chapter one of the fifth scene, (ibid., 447): "It's like a scene in a novel- it's like nothing in real life". This phrase can be taken in accordance with Shelley's views, "Poetry awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes the familiar subjects be as if they were not familiar."(Shelley, 2001: 700). He thinks disguise in disguise, intermingled with intrigues and false quests only occur in fictitious world, however, it is the fictitious world that enables him to lift the veil and discover the hidden truths although Magdalen's efforts to wear a veil for the purpose of not being discovered. Before Noel's learning the truth, the house servant being suspicious of Magdalen's strange acts, comments on the unusual dress of her for the wedding scene: "No wedding veil, and no wedding breakfast, and no wedding favours for the servants." (ibid., 412). No wedding veil, because she knows that if she wears it, with the lifting of the veil, she will be discovered. But In any way, in the narrative progress of the story, her secret deeds manifest themselves through the workings of many peripetias.

In the denouement part in which rediscovered Secret Trust is torn by Magdalen leaving all the marriage intrigues, rivalries, and dual roles behind her, repenting from the false quest, she says: "I will owe nothing to my past life, I have parted with it, as I have parted with those torn morsels of paper. All the thoughts, and all the hopes belonging to it, are put away from me for ever!" (ibid., 607). Since all the hidden truth is lifted and made known by every one, she does not need disguise intrigues any more, she enters into a new life as if she was a newly born child.

The artist uses the subject of quest for the self which is contradicted with the society thus society opposes to art in the related theme, consequently the artist as a hero, or heroine should be the exiled artist. However, in this work, the heroine is not exiled instead is placed into the society in which she can start a new life with her new identity. The writer's situation towards the characters and the moral issues in the novel lies in his acting as a social critic in the very beginning of the novel considering the injustice of marriage laws, focusing on the matters of inheritance. Through the circumstances, his situation remains obscure, letting her protagonist disguising and deceiving people who are related to her father's inheritance. However, in the case of these traps, Magdalen remains innocent, having the sympathy of the readers, her hopelessness arouse pity within the hearts of readers instead of blaming for what she has done for

gaining her legacy back. To have the money she has already possessed and disseised intentionally, meant power, and most significantly a NAME for her. She could not gain her own name and legacy at the end however, she completes her moral journey being victimised due to the results of the social system on the individual nature.

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