

## Yusuf Atılgan and “Ticking of the Clocks”

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Born in 1921 in Manisa, a former agricultural town in Aegean Region of Turkey that developed over time into a city, Yusuf Atılgan studied Turkish literature at Istanbul University during World War II. Following his graduation, he briefly worked as a teacher in a public school, although his time there was cut short due to his communist affiliations. At different points in his life, he was a farmer, translator, and literary consultant. Atılgan made his debut as a fiction writer with short stories that he began to publish in 1955 but achieved critical acclaim as the author of two novels. He published his first novel, *Aylak Adam* (The Loiterer), in 1959, followed by his second novel, *Anayurt Oteli* (Motherland Hotel), in 1973. Published fifteen years apart, these two novels earned him a reputation as one of the notable figures of modern Turkish literature. Both novels remain relevant today and continue to receive critical attention. *Aylak Adam* has been translated into Italian, Dutch, French, Spanish, and—most recently, in 2019—German, but has yet to be translated into English. *Anayurt Oteli* is available in French, German, and English translations. The novel was also adapted into a movie by the eminent Turkish director, Ömer Kavur, in 1986.

The story we translated at the workshop, “The Ticking of the Clocks,” comes from Atılgan’s collection of short stories, *Bodur Minareden Öte* (Beyond the Short Minaret), published in 1960. The story is told in the first-person by an unnamed narrator who, as later becomes clear, is an author. Intrigued by a newly-painted sign drying outside a signboard shop that says “A. Yayladan, the Watchmaker,” the narrator crosses the street towards the watchmaker that he believes commissioned the sign, deciding along the way that he wants to write this man’s story. The story begins as if it will consist of the narrator telling the story of a watchmaker. However, it instead quickly devolves into a series of interior monologues as the narrator thinks of how things would go if he were to try and tell the watchmaker’s story. Overcome by fear at failing in this task, he continues to find fault with the details he imagines about the watchmaker’s life. These instances of metanarrative commentary draw attention to the text’s own fictionality, as they also produce challenges in translation. The narrator switches between tenses often, as he reminisces (past), states an opinion or fact (present), and speculates (conditional) about what the watchmaker might think or say. While translating, we preserved Atılgan’s choice of tense, as it provides the narrative with a stream-of-consciousness effect.

The story ends with the narrator deciding not to tell the story of the watchmaker after all. He grows fond of the character he conjures up in his mind and is worried that the reality would fall short of his imagination. Eventually, his fear of failing as an author overtakes his initial inspiration to write. While passing by another shop in the vicinity, this time that of a cobbler, the narrator notes that he cannot see what is inside the shop. The darkness inside hints at the beginning of yet another cycle of attempts at storytelling, this time a story revolving around a cobbler. The narrator-author’s never-

ending attempts and subsequent failures at storytelling can be seen as a reflection of autobiographical cues. A hopeless perfectionist himself, Yusuf Atılgan has revealed in his interviews that he had torn up a few of his unpublished novels when he felt dissatisfied with his style. “Of course, I regret it now,” he would say.

Because our workshop’s focus is on producing translations as a group, discussions on how to translate lexical items can get very lively and prolonged. One of the issues we came across in this story that was the source of much discussion was regarding the job titles of skilled professionals and their social status. In Turkish: “saatçi” is a tradesperson who makes and repairs both watches and clocks, forcing us to choose between “watchmaker” and “clockmaker.” We also discussed the translation of “tabelâcı dükkânı” at length before settling for “signboard shop,” as referenced above. This word in particular offered its own challenges, as, since this particular trade has become increasingly rare in the modern age, we were not sure about what the most commonly used term for someone who makes signs by hand would even be.

Additionally, there are cultural differences that may not be immediately obvious to the modern-day audience reading this story in English. The story alludes to how someone like the mayor would never have their watch serviced by someone in a neighborhood such as this, opting instead for a brand name store somewhere on the high street. In a modern-day city in a place like the United States or Canada, going to a specific brand’s store in a shopping mall may well be the cheapest and most convenient way to have a watch repaired for many people, while seeking out an independent craftsman with decades of experience—like the subject of our narrator’s musings—would be associated more with luxury, custom-made goods.

## REFERENCES

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## The Ticking of the Clocks

Yusuf Atılgan

Translated at the University of Toronto Workshop in Literary Translation<sup>1</sup>: Turkish-English

by

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In front of the signboard shop, there were two wet boards resting against the wall to dry. One of them read “A. Yayladan the Watchmaker.” I was overwhelmed by a moment of melancholy. It belonged to the watchmaker across the street. I knew that for a fact as if I had asked around. I would feel the same melancholy every time I walked past this small shop. Like I was the one sitting there all day. The shop was located at the end of the bazaar where the houses began. It was very narrow. It must be dark inside, I would think. I wanted to write the story of the watchmaker.

I crossed the road. I pressed my nose against the glass of the shop door and peered inside. It was dimly lit. The watchmaker was sitting behind a desk. He was wearing glasses. I was surprised he didn't have a moustache. I had imagined him with one. He was staring at me over his glasses. This pleased me. I stepped back. If I were someone else, maybe I would go into the store, take off my watch and say “Sir, this loses three minutes every day.” As he was setting the watch, I would explore the ins and outs of the store. I would also ask him a few questions. From the very beginning, the plot of the story would be ready in my mind. Every time, it would go like this: The mayor sends his errand boy to the shop with his watch. The watchmaker polishes each piece. As luck would have it, he drops one of the gears. It falls through the cracks between the floorboards. The watchmaker is ready to pay for the watch, but the mayor has already made an enemy of him. His every move is cause for offence. Eventually, the mayor forces him to close the shop.

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<sup>1</sup> Launched by Nefise Kahraman in January 2015, the University of Toronto Workshop in Literary Translation: Turkish-English runs weekly and is attended by those who are interested in translation and literature at the University of Toronto. To this point, the workshop has translated several short stories as well as poems by prominent Turkish authors and poets, such as Refik Halit Karay, Aziz Nesin, Gültan Akın, Ferit Edgü, and Selçuk Baran. The workshop is currently working on publishing a collection of short stories by Turkish authors.

I do not like this kind of story; it feels unrealistic to me. Why would the mayor even send his watch to this shop all the way at the end of the bazaar? He would instead send it to the shop of whatever brand with green bars on the windows, on the grand avenue across from the newly opened bank. That store wouldn't have rough floorboards, but hardwood. If a gear fell, it would be found. That watchmaker who polished the librarian's watch for four lira would ask two from the mayor.

I don't feel the need to ask the watchmaker any questions, either. I know he would lie. If I asked, "How's business, sir?" he would look over his glasses suspiciously. He would think, "Who is this guy? Why does he keep asking questions? What if they've sent him to raise my taxes?" He would say, "not good, not good at all." What would I even ask him? I would already know that he was married, that he didn't have kids, that he didn't even want kids. Like all daydreamers, he was also a bit selfish. And what would there be to see in the shop anyway? It is enough for me to know that there are clocks on the walls, ticking constantly. I don't want to know his name either. The contrast between his surname, Yayladan, meaning someone from a mountain pasture, and the narrowness of his shop upsets me. I think of the hyena at the Izmir Fair. The concrete floor of its cage has been worn out from its walking around. The worn-out area was the longest path in the cage. I am afraid to learn his name. It says "A. Yayladan" on the board in front of the signboard shop. I think to myself, "A. must stand for either Ali or Ahmet." Should I ask someone? I don't. If they said "Abdülkerim," I would get upset.

Tonight, the watchmaker would think about me in his bed. "Today a man came by, pressed his nose against the glass of the door," he would say. It would be dark in the room. His wife's breathing would remain unchanged; she would be asleep. (How quickly she fell asleep!) As if talking to himself, the watchmaker would say in a lowered voice: "His nose pressed against the glass. I stared at him. Why? I don't even know. Now I regret it. I'm thinking I should have called him in and spoken to him."

I suddenly turned back. I was going to go talk to the watchmaker. I barely managed to hold myself back. The night had not fallen yet. He was not how I had imagined him to be. Besides, there was one more important thing I needed to learn to write my story. I could not ask him for it. I would ask one of his neighbors. But who? The shopkeeper across the street? No, I don't trust him. He sees people from his own point of view. If I ask him, "I want to have my watch fixed at the watchmaker's across the street, what is he like? Do you think he would swap out a valuable part for a cheaper one?" "Eh, I haven't heard anything, but who knows. He's human after all," he might say, making me suspicious for no reason. I might as well ask the signboard painter. He was, after all, a type of artist. You could take him at his word. I kept walking. The same freshly painted signboards were still out on the sidewalk. Suddenly, some signs with Thuluth-style calligraphy in the display window of the shop caught my eye. *Bismillabs*, "Put your trust in God," and "Those who work are loved by God" were all there. If only there was one "In the name of love," the one with tears coming from the eyes of the letters. How could I trust such a man? I turned back. I was going to ask the cook. 'Cooks are good people. They feed everyone, even giving leftovers to the needy,' I thought to myself. I looked through

the shop door. Sitting at the table was a young man peeling potatoes. It was early in the day. There was no one else inside. He must have been the kitchen hand.

“Hi!” I said.

“Hi.”

“My watch broke. I want to get it fixed at the watchmaker’s across the street. I thought I should ask. What’s he like? I want to make sure he wouldn’t steal a part.”

“No, mister,” he said, “He is not such a man. Don’t worry.”

The lad had long, dirty nails. It was clear that a razor had never touched his face. In place of a beard, he had soft-looking, longish hair. His face was plumb yet yellowish, with bright eyes. I believed this lad; he would not lie. I was relieved. “You’re at his mercy, mister.” If he had said that, would I have believed him? How would I know? After all, he didn’t say that. I thought about asking someone else. Next to the cook’s shop was a hardware store. I didn’t ask. I went to a coffeehouse and sat down. I ordered tea.

Now, the watchmaker must be getting tired of being surrounded by the ticking of the clocks. (I too feel the same here). He must have taken off his glasses and put on the loupe, looking for where the watch was broken. As if there was a connection between the ticking away of his own patience and that of the watch. This never-ending ticking is like the order of the world. It never changes. Maybe if it stopped, his weariness would go away. But he brought this weariness onto himself. Winding each clock is the first thing he does every morning when he walks into his store. He does this with disdain. What if he didn’t wind them? Impossible! Otherwise, he would stop being the watchmaker, being himself. It must be done. Just as every night he goes home, eats, sits down, and goes to bed, he winds the clocks. Even Sundays have their own routine. Going to the coffeehouse, playing backgammon. Lying in bed with his wife at night. In the winter, when they toss and turn in their sleep, the duvet slides off, and they get cold. They cannot sleep in separate beds. Reluctantly, occasionally, they cuddle out of obligation, that’s all there is to it. “I should raise a rooster for fighting,” he thought last night. This rooster would be a true source of excitement. But there’s no space at home for a coop.

The shopkeeper across the street calls out to the coffeehouse owner for two cups of tea. “He is going to rip someone off again,” the watchmaker thinks to himself. Then, he turns back to the clocks. Most of them are made in Switzerland. Based on what he has heard, it is apparently a mountainous place. And there is snow on the mountains. A sense of yearning grows within him. “One day, I won’t wind these clocks,” he says. He shivers, as he feels his confidence grow.

I know that one day the watchmaker just won’t wind the clocks. He will storm out of the shop. “To the place where the clocks are made!” he will shout. People in the neighborhood will catch hold

of him tightly; they won't let go; they'll say he's gone mad. All this I will hear from the kitchen hand, whom I will ask why the watchmaker's shop is shuttered. There will be no trace of sadness or pity in his face. Nor in mine...

Now I feel a deep fondness for the watchmaker. It's so deep that I wouldn't even meet him and wouldn't even go to his shop if my watch was broken and would instead take it to the shop of that brand lest my thoughts about him should change. I'm not going to write his story; I changed my mind. I'm afraid I would fail and tell it wrong.

I left the coffeehouse. I realized that I needed to go to the washroom. I started walking to a public one. I turned towards the street and saw a cobbler shop to my right. It was dark inside.

## Saatlerin Tıkırtısı

Yusuf Atılgan

Tabelâcı dükkânının önünde yaş yaş, kurusunlar diye duvara dayanmış iki levha vardı. Baktım birinde “Saatçi A. Yayladan” yazılı. İçimi bir hüznün bürüdü. Karşıdaki saatçinındı bu levha, sormuş öğrenmiş gibi biliyordum bunu. Küçücük dükkânın önünden her geçişimde hep aynı hüznün kaplardı içimi. Bütün gün orada oturan benmişim gibi. Yolun çarşılığında kurtulup evlerinin başladığı uçundaydı dükkân. Daracıktı. İçi karanlıktır diye düşünürdüm. Saatçinin hikâyesini yazmak istiyordum.

Karşıya geçtim. Saatçinin kapısındaki cama dayadım burnumu, içeriye baktım. Loştu. Saatçi bir masanın ardında oturuyordu. Gözlüklüydü. Bıyaksız oluşuna şaştım. Kafamdaki bıyıklıydı. Gözlüklerinin üstünden dik dik bakıyordu bana. Hoşuma gitti. Çekildim. Başka biri olsaydım belki dükkâna girer, saatımı çıkarır, “Usta, günde üç dakika geri kalıyor bu derdim.” O saati ayarlarken ben dükkânın girdisine çıktısına bakardım. Birkaç soru da sorardım saatçiye. Hikâyenin olayı daha baştan kafamda hazır olurdu. Değişmezdi bu: Belediye Başkanı, onarsın diye saatini gönderecek odacıyla. Saatçi parçaları silecek. Aksilik bu ya, silerken çarklardan biri elinden düşecek. Tabandaki tahta yarıklarından aşağı girecek. Saatçi saati ödemeye hazır; ama başkan düşman kesilecek ona. Sağa baktın suç, sola baktın suç. Sonunda dükkânı kapattırarak saatçiye.

Sevmem bu çeşit hikâyeyi, yalanmış gibi gelir bana. Belediye başkanı saatini hiç bu çarşı ucundaki saatçiye gönderir mi? Büyük caddede, pencereleri yeşil demir parmaklıklı, yeni açılan bankanın karşısındaki bilmem ne acentası saatçiye gönderir. O dükkânın tabanı tahta değil, parkedir. Düşen çark bulunur. Genel Kitaplık memurunun saannı dört liraya silen o saatçi başkandan iki lira ister.

Ben saatçiye soru sormak gereğini de duymuyorum. Yalan söyleyeceğini biliyorum. “İşler nasıl ustam?” desem gözlüklerinin üstünden kuşkuyla bakar bana. “Kim bu herif? Neden soruşturup duruyor? Vergimi arttırmak için mi gönderdiler bunu?” diye düşünür. “Kötü, kötü” der. Ne soracağım ona? Evli olduğunu, çocuğu olmadığını, çocuk istemediğini de biliyorum. Bütün uyanık düş görenler gibi o da az bencildir. Dükkânın içini göreceğim de ne olacak? Duvarlarda durmadan işleyen saatler asılı olduğunu bilmek bana yeter. Adını da bilmek istemiyorum. Soyadıyla dükkânı arasındaki zıtlık içimi burkuyor. İzmir fuarındaki sırtları düşünüyorum. Kafesinin beton tabanı çepeçevre aşınmış; gezinmekten. Aşınan yer kafesin en uzun yolu. Adını öğrenmekten korkuyorum. Tabelâcının önündeki levhada. 'A. Yayladan' yazılı. “Ali ya da Ahmet'tir” diyorum içimden. Birisine sorsam? Sormam. Abdülkerim deyiverir de üzülürüm.

Bu gece saatçi yatağında beni düşünecek. “Bugün bir adam geldi, kapının camına burnunu dayadı diyecek.” Oda karanlıktır. Yanında yatan karısının soluk alışında bir değişiklik yok; uyumuş. Başını çevirip bakacak karısına. Sıkıntılı acıyan bir bakış olacak bu. (Ne çabuk uyumuş.) Saatçi daha alçak bir sesle, kendi kendine anlatır gibi anlatacak: “Burnu camda yassılmış. Dik dik baktım yüzüne. Neden? Ne bileyim. Şimdi pişmanım. Çağırıp konuşsaydım onunla diyorum.”

Birden döndüm. Gidip saatçıyla konuşacaktım. Güç tuttum kendimi. Gece olmamıştı daha. Benim kendisini götürdüğüm kıvamda değildi o. Hem hikâyemi yazmam için öğrenmem gereken önemli bir şey daha vardı. Bunu ondan soramazdım. Komşularından birine soracaktım. Ama kime? Karşiki bakala mı? Olmaz güvenim yok ona. Kendi açısından görür insanları, “Saatımı karşı saatçiya onartmak istiyorum. Nasıl adamdır? İçinden değerli bir parçayı değiştirir mi dersin?” diye sorsam, “Eh, hiç duymadım ama belli olmaz. Kişioğlu bu” falan deyip kuşkulandırır beni yok yere. İyisi mi şu tabelâcıya sorayım. Ne de olsa bir çeşit sanatçısıdır o. İnanılır sözüne. Yürüdüm. Deminki yaş tabelâlar gene kaldırımın üstündeydi. Birden camın ardında vitrine asık, sülüs yazısıyla yazılmış levhalar takıldı gözüme. Besmeleler, “Tevekkeltü al-Allah”lar “El Kasibü habibul-lah”lar vardı. Hiç olmazsa bir tane “Ah, minelaşk” olsaydı aralarında, hani “he”nin iki gözünden iki damla yaş akan soyundan, yoktu. Nasıl güvenirdim böylesi bir adama! Döndüm. Aşçıya soracaktım. “Aşçılar iyi kişilerdir. Kişi oğlunu doyururlar, yoksullara parasız artık yemekler yedirirler, diyordum. Dükkânın kapısından baktım. Bir delikanlı masanın önünde oturmuş patates soyuyordu. Erkendi. Başka kimse yoktu içerde. Bu çocuk aşçının çırağı olacaktı.

\_\_\_ Merhaba! dedim.

\_\_\_ Merhaba.

\_\_\_ Saatim bozuldu da. Şu karşiki saatçiya yaptırmak istiyorum. Bir sorayım dedim. Nasıl adamdır, ha? İçinden bir parçasını çalmasın?

\_\_\_ Yok abi, dedi, öyle adam değildir o. Korkma.

Kirli uzun tırnakları vardı çocuğun. Yüzüne ustura değmediği belliydi. Yumuşak, uzunca tüyler vardı sakal başlarında. Yüzü toplu ama sarımsı, gözleri parlak. İnanırım bu çocuğa, yalan söylemez o. İçim rahatladı. “Ocağına düştün abi.” Deseydi inanacak mıydım ona? Ne bileyim ben, demedi işte. Birine daha sormak geçti içimden. Aşçının yanında elektrik araçları satan bir dükkân vardı. Sormadım. Gittim bir kahveye oturdum. Çay istedim.

Şimdi tıkr tıkr işleyen saatların arasında saatçının canı sıkılıyordur (Ben de sıkıntılıyım burda.) Gözlüğünü çıkarmış, gözüne büyütkeni yerleştirmiş, bir saatin bozuk yerini arıyordu. Saatların tıkırtısıyla içinin sıkıntısı arasında bir ilgi vardır sanki. Bu durmayan tıkırtı dünyanın düzeni gibi bir şeydir. Değişmez. Dursa sıkıntısı geçecek belki. Oysa bu sıkıntıyı yaratan kendisidir. Her sabah dükkâna girdi mi ilk işi birer birer bu saatları kurmaktır. İğrene iğrene yapar bu işi. Kurmayıverse olmaz mı? Olmaz? O zaman kendi kendisi olmaktan, saatçi olmaktan çıkar. Zorunludur bu. Nasıl her akşam eve gider, yemek yer, oturur, yatarsa bunu da yapacak. Pazar günlerinin bile bir kurulu düzeni vardır. Kahveye çıkılır, tavla oynanır. Geceleri yatakta yatarlar karısıyla. Kışın, uykuda döndükçe yorgan kayar, üşürler. Ayrı yatakta yatamazlar. İsteksiz, ara sıra, ödev yapar gibi sarılmalar, tümü. “Bir güreşken horoz beslesem” diye düşündü dün gece. Gerçek bir heyecan kaynağı olurdu bu horoz. Ama evde kümeslik yer yok.

Karşıdaki bakkal köşedeki kahveciye iki çay bağıyor. “Birini kazıklayacak yine” diyor saatçi kendi kendine. Sonra yeniden saatlara dönüyor. Bunların çoğu İsviçre’de yapılır. Duyduğuna göre dağlık bir yermiş orası. Dağlarında kar varmış. Bir özlem kabarıyor içinde. “Bir gün kurmayacam şunları” diyor. Ürperiyor, daha bir büyümüş sanıyor kendini.



Ben yakında saatçinin bir gün saatları kurmayıvereceğini biliyorum. Dükkândan fırlayacak. “Saatların yapıldığı yere!” diye bağırarak. Konu komşu sınırsız yakalayacaklar onu; bırakmayacaklar; delirdi diyecekler. Bana bunları dükkânın önünden geçeceğim zaman kepenkleri inik görüp sebebini soracağım deminki aççı çırağı anlatacak. Yüzünde bir üzüntü, bir acıma izi olmayacak. Benim de...

Şimdi büyük bir sevgi duyuyorum saatçiya. Onunla tanışmayacak kadar, saatim bozulsa ona değgin düşüncelerim değışir korkusuyla saatımı ona değil gidip o acenta saatçısına onartacak kadar büyük bir sevgi. Yazmayacağım onun hikâyesini, vazgeçtim. Beceremem, yanlış anlatırım diye korkuyorum.

Kahveden çıktım. Sıkışmışım. Genel ayakyoluna doğru yürüdüm. Sokağa saptım. Baktım sağımda bir ayakkabı onarıcısının dükkânı vardı. İçerisi görünmüyordu.