A View at “Flagbearer Ballad” and “Victory and Bequest” Play of Özker Yaşın in Terms of Relations between Historical Events and Literary Texts*

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ABSTRACT

Özker Yaşın is one of the most important figures of Cypriot Turkish literature. In his works, he told Cyprus and Cypriot Turks. Being born in Cyprus and being a Cypriot Turk has shaped the entire life, art and poetry world of Özker Yaşın. With his works, Yaşın shared the joys, hopes and pain that Cypriot Turks experienced throughout history. Özker Yaşın lived the painful and dark times of Cypriot Turks and he reflected the events that took place in these times in his poems, novels and plays. In his play Flagbearer Ballad, Yaşın recites the attacks and violence Cypriot Turks experienced in 1958s in the island. The work consists of three acts and it was staged in the Independence Day anniversary of Istanbul at Zafer Theater on 29 May 1959 by students of Cypriot Turkish Institutions Federation Acting Branch and Atatürk Institute. In Victory and Bequest, the edict enacted by Selim II (Sultan Selim Khan) for the conquest of Cyprus and the efforts he paid to reach the victory are displayed. In the play, the capturing of Cyprus are presented. In the foreword of his book, Özker Yaşın underlines that we should not lose the places we won with victory at the table. In this paper the two mentioned plays of Özker Yaşın will be evaluated in terms of historical event and relation between literary texts.

Keywords: Özker Yaşın, Victory and Bequest, Flagbearer Ballad, Theater, Cyprus.

1. Introduction

There are important common points between the science of history, which draws results by making use of certain sources, and the science of literature that prioritizes aesthetic values. Especially written literature genres (novel, poetry, theater, etc.) fulfill an extremely important function in illuminating the details of the history. In addition to this, the artists coming out of the society naturally write several works by being influenced by the historical events that take place during their lifetime. Artists who want to produce successful literary works about the past must know history very well. When successful historical novels such as "Mother State", "Osmanlık", "Those Crazy Turks" in Turkish literature are examined, it is seen that the authors of these works had a command of the historical events they wrote about. In successful novels such as "Mother State", "Osmanlık", "Those Crazy Turks", there are photographs of each period taken from different angles. The science of history reveals events with their causes and consequences.
Literature, on the other hand, goes into life more and deals with the problems caused by the mentioned events by fictionalizing and reviving them. Thus, by revealing many details that history does not mention, it gets closer to real life. Hülya Argunşah says that sometimes details that even the science of history does not give can be found in literary works (Argunşah, 1993: 35). At this point, literary works that have been successfully written in general are of great importance in integrating the past with the future and in the development of the consciousness of being a nation. For example, the world view of the people living in Anatolia between the 13th and 14th centuries revealed in the hymns of Yunus, the love of the country symbolized on the flag of the Turkish people in Akit’s Independence Anthem, and the liberation struggle and life of the Anatolian people in the novels and stories of Yakup Kadri and Halide Edip has become eternalized. Although people have to follow the historical facts according to the comments of the historian dealing with the subject (Çelik, 2002: 53), the reader should also consider the fact that literature is a fiction and not confuse the reality of art with the reality of life. In short, the case in the literary work is different from the historical and experienced. We cannot claim that any novel brings the historical and lived case to attention as it is. What we call the truth enters the world of literary work after it has been changed (Aktas, 2000: 14-15). Artists reconstruct historical facts and imaginary elements through an aesthetic filter and bring out literary works. In literary texts, the feelings, dreams and even intuitions of the narrator affect the work. Especially the literary works which take historical events as subject play an essential role in making the reader love the period narrated and thus history and to make them knowledgeable about the period narrated. For example, the troubles brought by the wars and the assimilation policies implemented by the Russians are narrated in the works of Cengiz Dağçi and Cengiz Aytaç in a more vivid and effective way than history books. In this context, literary works are of great importance for Turkish Cypriots. Unfortunately, the science of history does not fully reflect the liberation struggle of the Turkish Cypriots in the past and the trauma they have experienced. In Turkish Cypriot literature, artists such as Ahmet Gazioglu, Suleyman Ulucamgili and especially Ozkerヤşın dealt with the liberation struggle of the Turkish Cypriots in their works, reflected the problems brought by the wars in detail, and played a major role in the construction of national consciousness in those years.

Ozkerヤşın was born on 4 October 1931 in Nicosia and made a name in Cypriot Turkish literature mostly with his poems. In his works, he described the island of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot. Cyprus has shaped Ozkerヤşın’s whole life, his art and his world of poetry. Yaşın has shared the joys, hopes and pains of the Turkish Cypriots throughout history with his works. Behçet Kemal Çağlar, in one of his articles expressed the pleasure he received while reading Ozkerヤşın’s poems as follows: “There are some poets that affect and excite me equally in terms of both my artistic taste and my love for the country. Yahya Kemal when I read Mohac Ballad, Mehmet Akif when I read Nightingale, Mehmet Emin when I read Let Me Cry, and Köroğlu with all his epical folk poems ... You are one of the youngest poets of this genre, Ozker” (Yaşın, 1998: 171). Indeed, OzkerYaşın is a great poet who lived through the painful and dark times of the Turkish Cypriots and reflected the events that took place during this period into his poems. He clearly revealed the Cyprus problem with his poems. Nationalism dominated his poetry from 1963 to 1974. Şükrü Elçin used the following expressions for OzkerYaşın in an article he wrote: “In the events of Cyprus, he was the poet of the people as a warrior artist and with his productive personality. In one sense, he produced the strongest poems of the art called ‘seh-i mümteni’, which look as if they are easy to write but actually very hard to deliver. With his poetry books and novels, which are some ten volumes, he made his mark on the history of Cyprus at a very young age. It is certain that OzkerYaşın’s poems, which have an epic character and are fed with lyricism, will serve as a source for historical research.” (Elçin, 1990: 198) Yaşın, who epicized the struggle of the Turkish Cypriots with his lyrical and epic poems, is also known as the “National Poet” of Cyprus.

2. Methodology of the Study Research Model

Research model

Qualitative research method is used in the study and document analysis technique is employed to collect data.

Sample of the study

The universe of the study is general Turkish Cypriot literature, and the sample is Flagbearer Ballad, Victory and Bequest Plays. This study is based on convenience sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling; thus, the literary texts that the researchers have examined previously, have knowledge about, and think that the data about historical event is profound are preferred.

Data collection and analysis method

The data of the study were collected from the works mentioned in the sample. In the research, plays were analyzed through ‘descriptive analysis’ and interpreted. In order to obtain more objective and scientific results, the works were carefully read and analyzed.
3. Findings
In Özker Yaşın's play titled Victory and Bequest, Selim II (Sultan Selim Han) issuing an edict for the conquest of Cyprus and his efforts to achieve victory are narrated. In the play, the victory of Cyprus is put forward. In his book titled Flagbearer Ballad, the attacks and violence that the Cypriot Turks suffered from on the island in the years of 1958 are described. It is possible to evaluate the historical facts determined in these two plays as follows:

3.1. Victory and Bequest
3.1.1. Mohacs and Szigetvar Campaigns
Kanuni set out on Hungary to prevent a Christian state to be founded under the leadership of the Holy Roman Empire. The Ottoman army defeated the Hungarian army in this war that took place in the Mohacs Plain. After this victory, there was no power left in Central Europe to confront the Ottoman Empire. Özker Yaşın also mentioned this war in his work titled Victory and Bequest, and wrote that thanks to its skilled commanders, the Ottoman army of less than 100 thousand people defeated the Hungarians, who were superior in the number of soldiers, cannons and weapons:

“...In just two hours
The great Hungarian army,
Defeated by the Ottomans.
Let it be heaven place,
Sultan Suleiman Khan
Unique war geniuses,
Like Bali Beg,
Like Hüsrev Beg,
His raider commanders” (p.142-143).

Szigetvar is a city located in Hungary. The most important historical relic in this city, where Suleiman the Magnificent had his last siege, is Szigetvar Castle. The castle passed into the hands of the Ottoman Empire after the Szigetvar War, which was the last campaign of Kanuni before his death. Szigetvar was captured on September 7, 1566, but Kanuni passed away before he could see it taken. Özker Yaşın, in his work titled Victory and Bequest, stated that Sultan Suleiman died in Szigetvar and emphasized that the news of his death was given to Selim II in private.

3.1.2. Historical Characters in the Play
Özker Yaşın, in his play Victory and Bequest, featured very important historical figures of the period, such as Sultan Selim, Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, Mimar Sinan, Lala Mustafa Pasha, Piyale Pasha, Nurbanu Sultan, and İsmihan Sultan. At the same time, he remembered and referred to prominent names in Turkish history such as Suleiman the Magnificent and Mehmed the Conqueror. Yaşın explained the sultan of the period, Sultan Selim, who decided to take Cyprus, with the following sentences:

“That gentle was a sultan, he became the first Ottoman khan who did not lead his army into a campaign. He was always for peace. When he became the sultan, Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, a talented statesman, gave his seal... However, he did not let go of the ropes. He was not a tool for the grand vizier’s jealousy and hatred. He was not fooled by rumors, and protected his pashas and begs. No brothers or sons, grandchildren or viziers were strangled. His reign became a bloodless age of justice. He was kind-hearted and compassionate, clothed the naked, fed the hungry. He commanded the conquest of Cyprus! Yemen and the island of Cyprus became Ottoman territory during his reign” (p.232 - 233).

Özker Yaşın, in his work, not only gave the positive sides of Sultan Selim, but he did not hesitate to give the negative sides when necessary, and stated that he was very fond of wine.

Sokollu Mehmet Pasha is an important statesman who both served as the captain of the Ottoman navy and was also the grand vizier. He was also the last Grand Vizier of Suleiman the Magnificent. Pasha, who was a hardworking, brave and just grand vizier, strived for the rise of the Ottoman Empire until the end of his life.

Özker Yaşın also included Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in his theater work titled "Victory and Bequest" and emphasized that he was a very experienced grand vizier. Yaşın wrote that although Sokollu occasionally succumbed to his ambition, he gave great service to the state.

According to Yaşın, Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, who at first opposed the conquest of Cyprus, then sided with Selim II, and did everything he could for the Ottomans to achieve victory. Sokollu was a grand vizier who enjoyed serving the state (p.18; 21).

In his play titled Victory and Bequest, Özker Yaşın also referred to Sultan Selim's father, Süleyman the Magnificent. Yaşın described Sultan Suleiman as Koca Kanuni, Süleyman the Magnificent and the conqueror of Hungary, but he did not hesitate to criticize it. The artist stated that Kanuni, who won the Battle of Mohaç with much less strength, in two hours, was a unique war wit. However, he said that he could not prevent the fights for the throne, he believed in rumors, and that the blood of his children and grandchildren was on his hands (p. 128).
In the work, Yaşın emphasized that Lala Mustafa Pasha was a far-sighted commander, Baki was the sultan of poets even though he was disgraced during the reign of Sultan Selim (Crow Bâkı), and that the anonymous hero (Bayraktar) who placed the first flag on Costanza was a brave soldier.

3.1.3. Architectural Structures
Özker Yaşın made a reference to Selimiye and Süleymaniye Mosques in his play Victory and Bequest. According to Özker Yaşın, Mimar Sinan promised II Selim that he would build a much more beautiful mosque than Suleymaniye. Selim II told Mimar Sinan that Istanbul did not need another mosque other than Suleymaniye and that he should build Selimiye to Edirne (p.73 - 74). Yaşın also stated that the funeral of Suleiman the Magnificent was held in the Suleymaniye Mosque, which is described as the journeyman work of Mimar Sinan, and described that day as a tremendous crowd (p.38). However, Topkapı Palace appeared as the first place at the beginning of the play.

3.1.4. Conquest of Cyprus
The Catholic Venetians were persecuting and oppressing Orthodox Greek Cypriots. The Greek people who wanted to get rid of these harsh conditions found the remedy in the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottomans, who had great respect for justice and religion, and applied to Sultan Selim II through the governor of İzçil (Alasya, 1987: 1). Thereupon, the conquest of Cyprus was launched and with the conquest of Famagusta on August 1, 1571, the island was completely under Ottoman rule.

Özker Yaşın objectively addressed the conquest of Cyprus in the theater play examined. Stating that the Jewish Yasef constantly offered Cypriot wine to Sultan Selim, persuaded him to take Cyprus, and that Yasef wanted to become the King of Cyprus, Yaşın also gave the reasons for the conquest from the perspective of a historian to his reader: “Venetian pirates attacking our pilgrims and merchant ships, looting the goods of our merchant ships that took shelter in Cyprus ports due to bad weather, the capture of our treasurer of Egypt and the robbing of his ship” (p.109). Stating that Ottomans tried to solve these negative events peacefully in the beginning and sent envoys for this purpose, Yaşın said that after waiting for years, Ottomans had to go to war as no solution was found (p.110).

3.1.5. Ottoman Justice and Tolerance Policy
One of the most basic characteristics of Turkish people, who do not refuse to help even those who pull a gun when they are in trouble, is benevolence. Turkish people are mature, brave, just and tolerant. These are the most basic features of Anatolian culture. Özker Yaşın emphasizes in his work that, after the bloody battles the Ottomans took the island from the Venetians in 1571, the people living in Cyprus lived a happy life away from wars. In addition, the artist said that the Turks were compassionate towards those who surrender, and that nobody interfered with their religion and faith (93; 165).

3.1.6. Settlement Policy of the Ottomans
After the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottomans in 1571, many Turks from all crafts and professions from various regions of Anatolia were settled in Cyprus. These people, of course, brought culture and art together with Turkish traditions and customs. With the island’s placement under Ottoman rule in 1571, the Anatolian people, who spread to all parts of Cyprus in large immigration waves, preserved the social and cultural values they brought with them, and added new ones with the influence of the environment they lived in. Özker Yaşın also stated in the mentioned theater play that Sultan Selim Khan decided to make Cyprus Ottoman territory with this settlement policy put into effect (p.242).

3.2. Flagbearer Ballad
3.2.1. Conquest of Cyprus
Özker Yaşın also referred to the conquest of Cyprus in this work, which is about the attacks and violence experienced by the Turkish Cypriots in 1958. Özdemir, one of the characters of the play, refers to Bayraktar (Flagbearer), who showed great heroism during the conquest of the island. He said that the Turkish Cypriots would be saved from these troubles and suffering thanks to the Turkish military and that the glorious flag would fly on the walls (p.15). Again, in the sixth scene of the play, Özdemir described the Ottoman army, which conquered Cyprus, as an enormous and magnificent army to which three continents yielded (p.37).

Yaşın emphasizes the heroism Canbolat Pasha displayed during the conquest of Famagusta at the end of the first scene of the play with the following verses:

“Turkish army in front of Famagusta fortresses,
Venetian, the ambush you set up for us did not work,
Canbolat Pasha attacked the castle suddenly,
He entered the hole with his white horse,
The enemy was stunned by this majesty,  
They saw the beheaded hero in attack” (p.26-27).

3.2.2. Longing for Turkey and Turkish Army

Turkey has continued and continues to assist Turkish Cypriots in every field from past to present. Yaşın constantly expressed the Turkish Cypriots' longing for the Motherland Turkey in his works:
“One day my flag will rise in these skies,  
The desire of the martyrs who lie in this land,  
Will be realized for sure when the Turkish army arrives” (p.11).
In the twelfth scene of the play, Özker Yaşın emphasizes that Turkey has always been with the Turkish Cypriots and that these difficult days will pass very soon and the Turkish flag will fly over the island (p.60).

3.2.3. Atatürk

The Turkish Cypriots, who watched the Anatolian War of Independence with great enthusiasm from the beginning to the end, were devoted to Mustafa Kemal, the victorious commander of Çanakkale. They were sure that he would save the Turkish homeland. These beliefs were not shaken even in the worst of the news (Özoran, 1965: 95). The Turkish Cypriots feel a great love for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who gave the Turkish nation a contemporary appearance with the revolutions he made. Cypriot Turks, who always regard themselves as an integral part of the Motherland, followed the national struggle in Anatolia with great interest, and every success of Mustafa Kemal and Anatolia gave them hope (Özoran, 1965: 363).

Emine, one of the characters of the play Flagbearer Ballad, hung a picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the wall of the school where she taught in a mountain village in Cyprus, and told her students about Atatürk at every opportunity. The following words of Emine also reflect the Turkish Cypriot perspective towards Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: “Atatürk means homeland, Atatürk means Flag” (p.49).

3.2.4. Namık Kemal

Özker Yaşın also wrote several poems for Namık Kemal, one of the important names of Turkish literature. Namik Kemal is a symbol of freedom for the Turkish Cypriots. Özker Yaşın, who wrote many poems for Namik Kemal, collected all of them in his book titled “Namik Kemal in Cyprus”. Yaşın also expressed the admiration of the Turkish Cypriots in these poems he wrote for Namik Kemal. The paintings of Namik Kemal, who were seen as the symbol of freedom in the eyes of the Turkish Cypriots in 1958, were hanging on the walls of the houses (p. 22).

3.2.5. Love for Motherland

Turkish people love the lands they are connected to with historical ties. If necessary, they can easily sacrifice their property and life for this purpose. This is also known as a sacred duty for the Turks. Özker Yaşın, one of the national poets of Turkish Cypriot literature, is also a person with the mentioned sensitivity. In his play, Flagbearer Ballad, Yaşın both expressed his love for the land he was born in, and also expressed his love for Motherland Turkey, where he would later spend a significant part of his life:
“I am a simple poet, my motherland is Turkey,  
Her name appears in every song I write.  
My dear father lies beneath his land,  
The blood in my veins from the water of Turkey.  
My Turkey is a big country, my Turkey is fertile,  
The people of Turkey are majestic like mountains ... “(p.21)
Again, in the sixth scene of the play, the poet expressed his love for the land where he was born in the following lines:
“You are the land where I was born,  
The land where my father and mother were born.  
I walked over it step by step  
From Famagusta to Paphos.  
Villages among lush valleys,  
Minarets visible from afar,  
All the peasants are relatives,  
Their eyes look fondly” (p.50).
3.2.6. EOKA

The attacks of EOKA against the Turks, which started on April 1, 1955, disturbed Dr. Küçük and his friends, and small national resistance organizations were established in time to defend the safety of life, honor and property of the Turkish Cypriots. However, as the attacks on the Turks intensified, the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) was established two and a half years after the terrorist organization EOKA. TMT, which did not attack any Greek villages when it was active, trained Turkish youth and provided the necessary weapons to defend themselves.

Özker Yaşın’s play Flagbearer Ballad is about the events of 1958 when EOKA intensified its attacks against Turkish Cypriots. In those years, the conflicts in Cyprus flared up with the murder of two Turks on the road to Paphos by EOKA members, whom Özker Yaşın called as murderers (p.30). Later, with the influence of the priest Makarios, whom Yaşın described as devil and murderer (p.36), the island became unlivable.

4. Conclusion

Literary works are of great importance in the formation of national identity. When the works written by artists such as Süleyman Uluçamgil, Ahmet Gazoğlu and Özker Yaşın in Turkish Cypriot literature are examined, it can be said that they generally reflect the feelings and thoughts of the society they belong to, and the pain and suffering of the Turkish Cypriots during the process. When Özker Yaşın’s plays Flagbearer Ballad and Victory and Bequest are examined in the context of history-literature relations, it can be said that they are in harmony with historical facts to a great extent. While Yaşın based the events on historical facts in both works, and he also took care to give the cultural characteristics of the period. Especially in the play Victory and Bequest, important poets of the period, architectural structures and some details about the Ottoman palace are also included. Saying that he read everything about Selim II era, Yasef Nasi and the conquest of Cyprus before starting to write his play Victory and Bequest, Yaşın acted very objectively while giving the characteristics of some historical figures such as Sultan Selim, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman and Sokollu Mehmet Pasha. He did not hesitate to mention the shortcomings or mistakes of the above-mentioned persons. Again in his book Flagbearer Ballad, Yaşın criticized some Turkish Cypriots escaping from the conflicts and migrating to different countries, and although there are false heroic expressions from time to time, at this point, he successfully applied the critical understanding of history in both of his works. In addition, Yaşın criticized the promise of Sultan Selim to Yasef Nasi when he was a prince (I will make you the King of Cyprus) in his work titled Victory and Bequest, and successfully reflected the inner conflict of Sultan Selim to his reader in the later parts of the play. According to Özker Yaşın, Sultan Selim abandoned his promise by saying “no matter what happens, victory cannot be a bequest” at the end of the play, and found the right path. Although literary works are not directly accepted as historical documents, Özker Yaşın provided important historical information to his readers in both plays and made them love history. He even shared with his readers details not found in most history books. Both works of Özker Yaşın, who reconstructed the conquest of Cyprus in 1571 and the pain and suffering of the Turkish Cypriots in 1958, can be easily used as a complementary element in Cyprus history classes. It is an undeniable fact that both of Yaşın’s works will contribute significantly to history teaching.

References

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