

**NAMIK KEMAL'S NOVEL *ALI-BEY'S ADVENTURES*
(19th CENT.) AND THE TURKISH TALE OF
SEFER-BEY-ZADE (17th CENT.)**

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The appearance of a new genre, namely, the novel marked the history of Turkish literature in the second half of the 19th century. This innovation is usually thought to have been caused by the emergence of a new social and political situation in the country, the growth of national self-consciousness, the increasing influence of European culture on different sides of social life, but most of all – by the influence of European literature. Namık Kemal (1840-88) is rightfully regarded as one of the founders of the genre, and his work *Caution or Ali-bey's Adventures* (*Intibah yahut sergüzeshti Ali-bey*, 1876) is a classical specimen of the early Turkish novel.

It is a tragic love story of a young man of noble origin and a woman of 'blameworthy conduct' that ends in the death of both hero and heroine. In the opinion of literary critics, the author's acquaintance with *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848) by Alexandre Dumas *fils* stimulated the creation of the novel. Certain similarities can be traced in both works, such as the heroine's position in society, the unhappy outcome of the romance, etc.

However, Namık Kemal might have other 'sources of inspiration'. Namely, old Turkish literary prose works which so far are not only unstudied but even completely unknown. In my opinion Namık Kemal was familiar with one such work – *The Tale of Sefer-bey-zade* (*Sefer-bey-zadenin hikâyeti*), a copy of which is preserved in the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Russia. Being acquired in Istanbul in 1893 by a Professor of the University of St. Petersburg, Vasiliy D. Smirnov, and described by him in the *Reports of the Library* (Smirnov 1896: 38) this manuscript did not attract the attention of scholars; no catalogue mentions a work with such a title, either. However, a study of this tale seems to be very productive from different points of view (Vasilyeva 1986: 57-65; 1993: 143-155). Here we shall try to compare it with Namık Kemal's novel *Sergüzeshti Ali-bey*.

The copy of *Sefer-bey-zadenin hikâyeti* can be dated to the beginning of the 18th century but the tale itself was written by an anonymous author earlier – in the

second half of the 17th century. The numerous readers' additions in the margins of the manuscript show that the tale was very popular among urban readers. It is the story of a certain Sefer-bey-zade and a youth adopted by him, i.e. Hüsn-shah, who fell in love with a *hanım-efendi* – a beautiful young widow.

The *Tale of Sefer-bey-zade* and the novel *Ali-bey's Adventures* bear resemblances at many points. Both 'love stories with a criminal case' take place in Istanbul, their culmination scenes take place on a Friday in the heroines' houses surrounded by gardens. The principal heroes of both works are young orphans who are coming to maturity; their passionate love leads to a tragic finale.

More similarities are to be observed between the heroines of the anonymous tale and Namık Kemal's novel. Both of them represent a type of 'Moslem hetaera', both are proud and perfidious, literate and rich, both are older, cleverer and trickier than their mates. Their love is as strong as their hatred. Wounded self-respect drives them to a blood feud. In both cases perfidy leads them to their death.

The plots of the tale and the novel are compared in the following table.

The tale of Sefer-bey-zade

Hüsn-shah, a handsome 16-year-old youth, has only a mother. He has spent seven years as a barber's apprentice, when Sefer-bey-zade, who is 40 years old adopts him and introduces female company to him.

Three or four months later a 'beautiful and extremely coquettish' young woman of 25 years comes to their home. Hüsn-shah falls in love with this anonymous Hanım-efendi, and for 20 days the widow escorted by two maidservants visits him every evening.

After a quarrel Hüsn-shah, who is drunk, slaps Hanım-efendi on the face, and her nose bleeds. The beauty swears to take vengeance for the

Ali-bey's Adventures

(Smirnov 1891b, 108-115)

Ali-bey, a young man of 22, is in charge of his mother after his father's death.

One day, while taking a stroll, he sees a beautiful and coquettish young woman called Mah-peyker, who is riding in a carriage with two maid-servants. After a while Mah-peyker declares her love to Ali-bey.

bloodshed. Sefer-bey-zade hears this oath and asks the boy never to see Hanım-efendi again. Hüsn-shah falls ill from anguish.

'He shed tears day and night in lonely places.' Sefer-bey-zade entertains his son as usual: coffee and prayers in the day-time, wine and women – by night.

Five to ten days passed. On Friday Hüsn-shah receives a letter with an invitation to come to Hanım-efendi's house next Friday. 'If you do not come, this slave of yours is destined to die.'

Hüsn-shah goes joyfully to her house. Hanım-efendi makes her guest drunk and starts to beat him unmercifully with the intention of fulfilling her oath.

Sefer-bey-zade comes to the aid of Hüsn-shah, joining the fight with

Ali-bey's friends try to warn him against love affairs with a woman of bad reputation.

Ali-bey cannot eat and sleep, he is in a state of deep depression. Meanwhile his mother finds an odalisque for him, a girl named Dil-Ashub.

Ali-bey makes a decision to break with Mah-peyker. Next Friday he has a last rendezvous with her in her house surrounded by a garden. Ali-bey leaves Mah-peyker and returns to Dil-Ashub, who is still waiting for him.

Ten days passed. Mah-peyker waits for Ali-bey but he never comes. She writes a letter to him that remains unanswered. In the third letter she threatens that she will commit suicide. Ali-bey sends her an insulting letter. The insulted courtesan wants to take vengeance.

As a result of her intrigues Ali-bey strikes Dil-Ashub's head against the wall so that her nose and mouth bleed.

Ali-bey falls ill, his mother sells Dil-Ashub to a slave-trader who takes her to Mah-peyker's house. Ali-bey plunges into hard drinking. His mother dies. Ali-bey rejects Mah-peyker's love once again, and she wants him to be killed.

Ali-bey comes to her house. He is drunk. Dil-Ashub tries to save his life, she persuades him to leave, puts on his coat and is killed by a hired assassin.

Ali-bey calls the police.

Hanım-efendi's servants, and defeats them.

The woman cries for mercy and gives away all her wealth. Nevertheless Sefer-bey-zade kills her and her maid-servants.

Sefer-bey-zade and Hüsn-shah take refuge in Egypt, where they become engaged in trade. Six years later, having multiplied their wealth, they return to Istanbul.

'These men, Sefer-bey-zade and Hüsn-shah, living as father and son, had fun and pleasure in this deceitful world, and died in their time... The loyal and perfidious world banished them and they made their way towards their eternal haven, and away they went. Only this story remains to remind us of them'.

Ali-bey sees Mah-peyker laughing; infuriated he takes a knife and stabs her in spite of her cries for mercy.

Six months later Ali-bey dies of grief.

The comparison of the contents of the tale and novel points to the similarity of some intricacies of the plot, to the closeness of the characteristics of the main personages, to the identity of various details. At the same time, differences are obvious as well. Thus, Hüsn-shah's tutor in everyday life and in his love affairs is Sefer-bey-zade, his foster-father, but in reality his older friend. In Namık Kemal's novel this role is played by the hero's mother and his friends. Ali-bey's mother is also helped by Dil-Ashub. So in the novel there is not one but two young beauties, the hero's beloved, opposed to each other as the embodiment of positive and negative principles.

Differences can also be traced in the description of Hüsn-shah and Ali-bey. The latter is six years older than Hüsn-shah, more independent and active in his behaviour, sharper in his reactions to current events. And at last, a main distinction in plot is in the finale: the hero of the tale goes on living in easy circumstances and merriment, while the hero of the novel dies of grief six months after the tragic events.

Each work pictures 'some aspects of the inner life of Turkish society together with its ideas and views' (Smirnov 1891a: 115). Within two centuries certain changes occurred in this society that inevitably influenced the authors' position. The anonymous 17th-century author continues his narration in a rather indifferent

manner without blaming or praising, pitying or despising his heroes. Only one sentence contains a slight hint of the author's ethical view of the events described: 'Sefer-bey-zadeh and Hüsn-shah... had fun and pleasure in this deceitful world.' On the contrary, Namık Kemal's presence is constantly felt in his story. He pities 'a well-bred child', feels indignation towards Mah-peyker and compassion towards a mother who buys an odalisque for her son, who sells her when she is no longer of any use.

An additional and a very significant distinction between the 17th-century tale and the 19th-century novel is the language. The tale is written in a comparatively simple language which is not overloaded with Persian and Arabic loan-words or complicated grammatical forms. At the same time the 19th-century novel is marked by its refined style and pretentious language. And this cannot be explained simply by the influence of the epoch. The works were addressed to different social groups of readers. The former to the middle class urban population: to traders and craftsmen. The novel of Namık Kemal, who was one of the spiritual leaders of the 'new Osmans' movement, was intended for the new class of intellectuals. Hence a new type of literary hero emerged: an office employee, the offspring of a noble family.

The comparison between these two works composed in different eras shows that the emergence and rapid development of the Turkish novel cannot be explained by European or, in particular, French influence. The Turkish prose of the 19th and 20th centuries has deep national roots, and the task of revealing its sources is far from being completed.

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