



The Creative Phenomenon of Tarık Buğra in the Tradition of the Turkish Novel

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Abstract

This article explores the life and literary legacy of prominent Turkish author Tarık Buğra from a scholarly perspective. It highlights his unique portrayal of rural life, complex psychological depth, and the representation of universal values such as justice, courage, faith, and intellect. Buğra's artistic style is marked by historical realism, inner monologue, narrative dynamism, and deep psychological insight. Furthermore, his socio-philosophical reflections contribute significantly to the development of contemporary Turkish novel writing.

Keywords: Tarık Buğra, Turkish literature, historical novel, artistic mastery, inner world, philosophical views, psychological analysis, values, realism

In Turkish literature, the novel as a genre is intrinsically linked to the creative mastery of the author, as it is precisely this mastery that emerges as a decisive factor determining the aesthetic and ideological value of a literary work. Each major novelist has left a distinctive mark on literary history through an individual style and original artistic techniques. An author's¹ artistic mastery is defined not only by plot construction or character creation, but also by the ability to provide a profound artistic interpretation of the complex dimensions of human life. For this reason, the study of artistic mastery in the novel genre, along with an analysis of its stylistic and theoretical foundations, remains one of the most relevant and enduring directions in literary scholarship.

¹ Zeynep Sare Dinçkal, A Study on Epic and Mythological Elements in Tarık Buğra's Novel "Osmanjık", Sanal Türkoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi, Volume 9, Issue 1, 2024, pp. 39–51.



Tarik Buğra, one of the prominent figures of Turkish literature, is distinguished by his high level of artistic mastery. His novels are particularly notable for their artistic portrayal of significant historical processes in Turkish history, their profound exploration of the inner layers of the human psyche, and their enrichment through distinctive philosophical reflections. In Buğra's works, historical realism, the effective use of interior monologue, and the strong expression of narrative dynamism emerge as key poetic characteristics.

The writer's renowned novel "Küçük Ağa" is distinguished by its unique poetic and aesthetic approach to the representation of historical events. The novel offers a profound analysis of the characters' inner psychological worlds, while their roles within society are articulated through carefully crafted artistic images. In particular, the work subtly portrays social transformations in Turkish society, as well as the tensions between traditional values and modernity, through refined literary techniques.

Tarik Buğra's mastery in creating historical novels is not confined to the artistic depiction of events alone; it is more clearly manifested in his ability to harmonize historical reality with the human psyche and the ideals of a given era. He does not present historical processes as simple, event-driven narratives, but rather seeks to reveal their impact on human consciousness and social development through in-depth analysis. This approach enables a nuanced interpretation of the characters' inner experiences and spiritual worlds in Buğra's works.

Consequently, alongside the progression of events, Buğra's historical novels offer a compelling portrayal of spiritual experience, moral ideals, and psychological transformations (metamorphoses) in human life. These aspects illuminate several fundamental principles. First and foremost, the characters' courage is intrinsically linked to their historical and moral roots, a connection that is depicted as the artistic outcome of their inner psychological processes². In his historical novels, Tarik Buğra presents the concept of courage within a deeply psychological and moral framework. He interprets courage not in terms of external action, but through the inner spiritual world of his characters, their strength of will, and moral perseverance. As a result, his

² Ünüvar S. The Relationship between Anatolia and the Idea of Anatolianism in Tarik Buğra's Novels, Presented at "Hatırlayıp Yeniden Bulmak, Tarik Buğra 100 Yaşında" Symposium, Istanbul, 2018, pp. 397-410.



protagonists are often distinguished not by physical power, but by ethical stability and resolute spiritual choices. This approach allows historical figures to be portrayed as vivid and lifelike characters.

Moreover, Buğra places particular emphasis on the intellectual capacity of his characters. The writer carefully depicts the cognitive horizons of historical figures, their ability to adopt rational positions in complex social circumstances, and their intellectual maturity in decision-making processes. Consequently, his protagonists are represented not only as courageous leaders, but also as thinkers of their time—intellectual pioneers who guide society through reasoned judgment and moral insight.

In addition, ideological concepts such as justice and faith function as central thematic pillars in Buğra's novels. In his works, the actions of characters are grounded in ethical principles; for them, the struggle for truth and justice is inseparable from inner emotional experiences and spiritual suffering. Through distinctive artistic techniques, Buğra offers a profound psychological analysis of historical characters and reconstructs them according to moral values that remain relevant for the contemporary reader.

Tarik Buğra interprets historical events not merely within the framework of artistic representation, but as a means of illuminating eternal values that occupy a central place in human existence. This approach endows his works with a profound philosophical dimension, creating a synthesis of artistic expression and intellectual enlightenment. As a result, historical material in his novels acquires not only aesthetic significance but also a broad socio-philosophical meaning.

Fourthly, in revealing the complex dimensions of the human psyche, Buğra analyzes such states as anger and judgment with notable psychological precision. In particular, anger in his works is interpreted not simply as a marker of conflict or confrontation, but as the onset of deep inner transformation and a process of personal revolution. Through this perspective, the writer portrays his characters as more vivid, realistic, and psychologically grounded.

Likewise, the firmness of judgment in Buğra's works carries a dual interpretation: on the one hand, it appears as a practical manifestation of justice, while on the other, it is perceived as a symbol of personal and social responsibility. In the



process of decision-making, Buğra’s characters demonstrate a deep awareness of the consequences of their choices, which enables the depiction of their personal development and social turning points within a more substantiated and psychologically nuanced context.

Although Tarık Buğra is widely known for such celebrated works as “Afsus Gençliğim,” “Kara Kehribar,” and “Firavun’un İmanı,” the narrative approach employed in his other novels—particularly in his depiction of rural life and the socio-cultural problems faced by village communities—differs markedly from that of many representatives of modern Turkish literature. In his oeuvre, Buğra stands out as a writer who pays special attention to the exploration of everyday human existence, its complex and multilayered nature, ambiguities, and inner contradictions.

The author was born in 1918 in the city of Akşehir, Turkey, where he completed his primary and secondary education. In 1936, he graduated from high school in Konya. Although he spent some time studying at the faculties of medicine and law in Istanbul, he did not pursue a continuous or systematic course of higher education in these fields. He later enrolled in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the Faculty of Letters of Istanbul University; however, he was unable to complete his studies due to being drafted for military service. After returning from military duty, he attempted to resume his education, but various life challenges and material as well as spiritual difficulties ultimately prevented him from completing higher education.

In the early stages of his creative career, Buğra published a periodical titled “Nasreddin Efendi” in Akşehir in 1947, and from January to February 1948, he co-published “Zeytin Dalı” together with Talat Tekin. In 1951, he published the journal “İstanbul Haftalığı” for a period of three months. Later, in 1963, he contributed to the publication of the journal “Yol” alongside Mümtaz Turhan and Erol Güngör. Six of his short stories were published in the journal “Çınaraltı” in 1948. In addition, from 1951 onward, he was actively engaged in literary and journalistic work in various newspapers and journals, including “Akın,” “Borluk,” “Yeni Dünya,” “Yüksel,” “İstanbul,” “Küçük Dergiler,” and “Dost”³.

³ Ayvaz B. Çalışma Yazı: Tarık Buğra. İstanbul: Ötügen Yayınları, 1997. – S. 108-109.



In his works, he emphasizes that every individual bears responsibility for his or her own labor, asserting that each person must fulfill the duties entrusted to them. Tarık Buğra maintained that the primary responsibility of the artist is to create a work of art, while the public derives from it whatever is meaningful and necessary for them. He also believed that the artist should contribute to society and stressed the importance of intellectual integrity and sincerity as essential conditions for the cultural and moral advancement of society⁴. According to Tanpınar, Tarık Buğra differs from his contemporaries primarily in his rigorous attitude toward style. Tarık Buğra selects words with great care, avoiding unnecessary verbosity. The words he chooses belong organically to the Turkish language and are not artificially constructed. He pays particular attention to the purity and expressive capacity of Turkish, a concern that can be clearly observed in his numerous essays on language published at different times. His sharp criticisms directed at Turkish language institutions also stem from this linguistic sensitivity.

Alemdar Yalçın, comparing the expressive styles of Tarık Buğra and Kemal Tahir, notes that “Tarık Buğra’s mode of expression is broader in scope and higher in artistic quality; therefore, it offers the reader a distinct aesthetic pleasure.” Within Buğra’s oeuvre, the novel “Osman Gazi Han” (1983), devoted to a historical theme, occupies a special place and may be regarded as an important source for studying the evolution of his artistic and aesthetic views. This work, above all, reveals the author’s attitude toward historical events, their literary interpretation, and his pursuit of expressing national identity. Before proceeding to the main analytical observations, it should be emphasized that a large number of literary works with rich socio-historical content have been produced in Turkish literature on the Ottoman Empire and its founders. Among these, the novels “Osman Gazi” (1985), “Orhan Gazi” (1987), and “Sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver” (1988) by Yavuz Bahadıroğlu—one of the prominent representatives of the modern Turkish historical novel—are directly devoted to Ottoman history and successfully convey the spirit of historical figures and their era through deep artistic representation.

From this perspective, in order to determine the position and significance of a particular author in the tradition of historical novel writing, it is essential to analyze

⁴ Tuncer H. Tarık Buğra. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988.



the historical approaches, modes of artistic thinking, systems of characterization, and attitudes toward historical truth reflected in their works. Especially when considering the role of the historical novel in shaping national consciousness and historical memory through artistic generalization of reality, the writer's contribution to this process must be revealed through analytical inquiry. This leads to a fundamental question: which factors, stylistic strategies, and historical-aesthetic perspectives prevail in the works of an author who has been actively engaged in the historical novel genre and holds a distinctive position within the Turkish literary tradition?

In this regard, an academically grounded response to these questions can be achieved through an analysis of the novel "Osman Gazi Han," which serves as the object of the present study, by examining the author's historical consciousness, mastery of characterization, and attitude toward historical facts. The novel demonstrates not only the writer's interest in the historical novel genre but also his strong sense of responsibility toward the artistic representation of national history. Through this work, Buğra seeks to present history to the reader not merely as a collection of facts, but as a source of aesthetic and moral values.

Despite having lived in a complex and conflict-ridden historical period, Osman Gazi Han emerges in history as a major figure who put an end to political and social disorder in a fragmented land and laid the foundations of a powerful and enduring state. Through his actions, he left a profound mark on the history of the Turkish people and succeeded in creating the historical conditions necessary for national prosperity, the advancement of knowledge, and the rise of civilization. An analysis of historical processes shows that Osman Gazi Han embodied such high moral qualities as loyalty to the homeland, commitment to strengthening state stability, defense of territorial integrity, enhancement of political power, fidelity to allies, firmness toward enemies, integrity of word, moral purity, and devotion to family and community.

In order for these qualities to resonate deeply with the reader, awaken historical consciousness, and provide aesthetic pleasure, the author pays particular attention to portraying them with objectivity and artistic balance. A truthful and just depiction of the life and activities of a national leader constitutes a sacred responsibility of the historical novelist. For this reason, approaching the subject from the perspective of



national interests and historical truth, the writer seeks to reveal Osman Gazi Han's life not only through historical facts but also through profound artistic representation.

Undoubtedly, the author makes a concerted effort to study historical sources related to Osman Gazi Han and his era, including chronicles, historical works, and archival documents. However, his primary task is not merely to recount a sequence of historical events, but to construct the spiritual and moral portrait of Osman Gazi Han—that is, to reveal his inner world, personal motivations, and the complexities of his decision-making through deep artistic reflection. Through the life journey of Osman Gazi Han, the novelist aims not only to create the image of a great historical figure, but also to express the intellectual capacity, moral potential, and socio-political worldview of the people to whom he belonged. In this context, the foundations of the power of the state established by Gazi Han are seen as rooted in a model of governance based on principles of justice.

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