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CITY, HISTORY AND LITERATURE: REFLECTIONS ON CHARLES DICKENS AND ORHAN KEMAL

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Abstract

The concept of the city has played a vital and dominant role since the rise of civilizations. Cities are not only places where people live but also places which shape and give them their identities. Moreover, they are the witnesses of the past, present, and future; consequently, they come into existence with their histories, identities, and societies. Literature practices on many multi-layers, cities and their histories are the tools that inspire, harbor, and mirror it substantially. Cities, which are the subject matters of the novels, stories, epics, and plays, are indispensable literary instruments of writers. Two of the most outstanding and notable of these writers are Charles Dickens and Orhan Kemal. Dickens, who lived in 19th century Britain, sets the city of London and its transformation in his certain works. The Great British Empire, the leading country with the advent of the industrial revolution, gained significant momentum in industry and technology; on that account, the empire experienced radical changes in every sense. These changes also had great impacts on the social, economic, and cultural structures of the cities. London, one of the most affected cities, was handled and described in detail by Dickens. Despite not being a contemporary of Dickens, Orhan Kemal, whose subject matters and character types are similar, is one of the writers who emphasize Adana and depicts its changing socio-economic aspects. Kemal, who wrote in a period when Turkey was undergoing radical changes and transformations, underscored the impacts and consequences of these changes and transformations on Adana in particular works. This study investigates the city, city-literature relationship and Charles Dickens's London and Orhan Kemal's Adana.

Keywords: City, literature, history, London, Adana.

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INTRODUCTION

Evidently, there are many cities in the world that deserve a label of 'gorgeous' both with their history, geographical position and socio-economic areas of influence. However, Charles Dickens' London and Orhan Kemal's Adana are two of the rarest locales where history, geography and socio-economic processes are all melted into one pot going well with their distinctive identities. The two cities have been thematic settings in the writings of various authors, poets, travelers, politicians, etc. with their unique histories, natures and identities. They have been a major structural beauty of magnificent architectures, as well. History is embedded within each phase of their representation. They are represented to be the core of the meeting point of humanity; of various religions, nations, identities, histories and cultures all-inclusive within their urban beings. It is a fact that London and Adana have attracted attention of authors greatly and have found a place in their writings due to their historical settings and social-financial opportunities. The writings have addressed both their significance in terms of historical heritage, financial developments and their intrinsic being in close connection with their supreme souls in which a lot of differing identities, cultures, and communities come together. This paper tries to interpret the cities of "London" and "Adana" in terms of the construction of their social and economic aspects considering their fictive delineations in Charles Dickens' and Orhan Kemal's novels. The study aspires to unearth some details on the social-financial making of British-Turkish communities regarding their representations in the works mentioned.

The City and Urban Identity: London and Adana

History has witnessed the construction of the cities. The cities have always been the natural envelopes of existing experiences of humanity from the earliest periods till now. People have lived on the backs of the cities; they have *ad infinitum* carried all those adjectives special to humanity conceptualized as 'good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust' etc. on their back from the birth of Adam till today's humankind. The city has been in literature throughout this time period. In *The City in Literature: an Intellectual and Cultural History*, Richard Lehan (1998) states that "One can find books that touch upon the idea of city as early as Plato's Republic and Augustine's City of God, but these books are about the good life as it is affected by place, and he continues, "and one can find historical accounts of cities in texts [...]" p.6). Just like such an emphasis, it is an observable truth that the city has been an indivisible institution within man's individual and public life. The selected cities in literature, therefore, have been reflexive locales for the real and obvious amalgam of human's soul and mind. For that reason, a group of scholars, professionals, researchers, philosophers and critics have attuned differing lexicology to the usage of the cities and environments within the texts. The lexicology in mention refers to the every hint of the environment surrounding the city. For instance, on the subject of literary and environmental connections, they have created ecocriticism to put forward "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glottfelty & Harold, 1996, xviii) in which all physical beings in the cities are matter (e.g. animals, plants, natural happenings, landscapes, natural beauties, nature, and the human-caused damages to them). They have underlined various sub-genres of ecocriticism like ecopoetics (the study of poetry and environment), ecopolitics ("a political ideology that aims to create an ecologically sustainable society rooted in environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice, and grassroots democracy"), (Wall, 2010, p.12) and biopolitics (Foucaultian perspective, social and political power over life). Furthermore, the scholars have produced the term emotional geography to underline "the study of the dynamic, recursive relation between emotions and

place of space” (Gregory, 2009, n.p.) which they stress how human feelings connect them, or have an effect on the milieu around them.

For these reasons, the city has been a supplementary part of literary writings, on top. Doing the research on the literature that was produced on and about four ancient cities Athens, Alexandria, Rome and Jerusalem, Susan Stephens (2014) in her research on *The City in the Literature of Antiquity*, writes that “Ancient cities were physical spaces; many of them have long been abandoned; others exist as palimpsests overwritten by more recent inhabitants” (p.31), and she points out their being indispensable settings of literature such that:

“Today their very names stimulate a set of predictable responses: Athens is coextensive with the “glory that was Greece”—the cradle of democracy, the birthplace of philosophy and tragic drama. Rome is the city of grandeur, where imperial power rose and fell, the center of a vast empire—and a synonym for decadence. In contrast, Alexandria was a city on the margins, neither fully Greek nor Egyptian, despite its location at the Mediterranean edge of the Nile. Alexandria was home to the western world’s first great library, but it was also notorious for incestuous marriage of its rulers, the most famous of whom was Cleopatra. Jerusalem is at once the capital of Judaea, the hereditary Jewish state, and its sacred city, as well as the spiritual center of western Christendom” (31).

Kristiaan Versluys (2000) in his review article titled *The City in Literature. A Review Article on Recent Studies* expresses that “In origin the first cities in antiquity were linked to the surrounding countryside and took their meaning from religion and myth”, and he continues, “But, as cities grew, their inhabitants became more and more estranged from nature and from the non-rational forces in the cosmos” (p.229). Karen Newman (2014) on the other hand, in her study on medieval and early modern city, emphasizes that “The Middle Ages experienced urbanization on a greater scale than would be seen again until the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, which means that the cultural and commercial achievements we associate with the Renaissance occurred in a context of de-urbanization” (p.42) by which she underlines the significant change within the scope of the cities as a whole. This is an explicit reference to the physical/ecological metamorphosis of the cities, because the construction of any city has passed through many stages of evolution from the antiquity till the present period.

London and Adana are no exception among all cities on the earth. Their historical, socio-economic evolutions appear in a variety of novels, essays, stories and poetries. What make London and Adana cities of literature, in particular, are their social and economic prosperities and their being the fusion of prominent civilizations of the world, among others. In the 19th century, London witnesses many revolutionist developments. With the Industrial Revolution in the Great Britain, the Empire faced scores of alterations within its socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural milieu. Undoubtedly and drastically, London became the very centre of these metamorphoses. The idea of change and transformation triggered by the Industrial Revolution enabled London to develop and prosper; that is to say, London regained a privileged impression. Among the British cities, London became the gateway to new scientific, technologic and social revolutions. This drastic transformation spread from industry to trading; from factories to the port’s capacity. To be precise, it affected the whole British traffic of development chain. Shaping specifically the wealthier and the prosperous part of the Empire more extensively, this change affected the life of all people, as well. Social and economic developments and desire to live such-

like prosperous life seemed to be indispensable for rural British to migrate to urban, more notable to London. This was overt within the literary productions of the period too.

On the other hand, having vast plains, fertile fields, castles, monuments and a long history, Adana is a city of abundance. The city, which has always preserved its historical magnitude, strengthened its superiority thanks to its geographical location, especially after the 1930s. Turkey, having achieved a new identity with the proclamation of the Republic, underwent multiplexed social, political and economic metamorphoses and transformed substantially. Being a young country, The Republic of Turkey went through with massive revolutions on the way to becoming a new-based state. Leading breakthroughs backed up by its history, it is not surprising that Adana is home to some novelties. Transition to mechanization in agriculture, industry and production activities turned Adana into an attractive and coveted destination. Newly established factories and business opportunities pushed on the immigration to Adana. People from the countryside and various cities hurried to factories and different business lines. The city of abundance withdrew from traditional agricultural policies and switched to mechanization thanks to Marshall Aids offered to Turkey, this deep and radical transition kept the current potential and prominence of the city in an inaccessible position and made it the richest city in the Mediterranean.

London and Adana in Literature: Charles Dicken's London and Orhan Kemal's Adana

London and Adana have become indispensable destinations for literary works, too. Many authors have attuned the two cities to their dramatic masterpieces. While Dickens generated his masterpieces in the heart of London, that's why his "extraordinary knowledge of London, when combined with his skillful ability to direct his readers to where events took place, give his works the seeming seamless of mappable verisimilitude" (Robinson, 1996, p.61), and Kemal picked up Adana and its people in his magnum opuses as argued "The people and stories Orhan Kemal talks in his works mirror the changing Turkish society... Kemal, who witnessed nearly Turkey's thirty-year period in which Turkey was undergoing modernization in the political, economic and social areas, revealed the effects of this process specifically on the social dimension in his novels" (Erol, 2014, p.106). Though the two notable authors were not contemporary to each other, the ideology of what they pursued was conformable. Overtly speaking, they both depicted the lower class and plight of the poor in the cities we have mentioned. Charles Dickens, for the most part, chose children, the rabble, the underdog as the main characters in his London's works, on the other hand, as similar to Dickens, Orhan Kemal revolved around factory workers, the oppressed, victimised and the tragic downfall of the ordinary people in his writings, besides "in some of his works, he describes the urban worker and reflects various aspects of industrialization and the new societies that emerged from that industrialization (Emre, 2014, p.160). Nevertheless, they sought to bring the consequences of the social-economic changes in the above-mentioned cities.

From Shakespeare to Virginia Woolf, from Christopher Marlow to William Blake, notable literary geniuses have used London as a setting in their literary works; moreover "for William Blake, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Thomas Quinchey, F.Engels, W. Wordsworth and Charles Dickens, the city has meaning as unexpected event which takes place constantly... London for these writers and in their texts is a taking-place of mystery, mutability, catachresis and ineffability" (Wolfreys, 1998, p.5). By all means that's because of London's ancient and gorgeous historical background and "London is an embodiment of English history, an industrial centre to a certain degree, the centre for law and for prisons, and for luxury, spectacle and consumption" (Tambling, 2017, int). London's social, political, economic, cultural aspects became sources for the writers. Charles Dickens, one of the

most remarkable authors revealing the 19th century London, chooses London because “London’s streets, its people, its crowds, its buildings. It is Dicken’s constant subject, from his early journalism, *Sketches by Boz* to *The Uncommercial Traveller*, from his first novel, *Pickwick Papers*, to the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*” (Tambling, 2013, p.1). He designates this city as the location in some of his great works, one of which is *Great Expectations* (1861). The novel, which is essentially a bildungsroman, is based on a character leaving to countryside for London metropolis. The novel presents the reader a panorama of the Great Britain Empire on the industrial revolution reflecting how much London was affected by the industrial revolution, the social and economic changes, transformations and their deep effects on the society. *Great Expectations* reflects the poor, the oppressed, the lower class living in London. The praise-worthy novel of Dickens draws attention to the gap between the rich and the poor, London’s contrasts and dilemmas. Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838) finds itself in the 19th century’s London. Being one of Dickens’ masterpieces, Dickens presents a broad perspective of the 19th century London in *Oliver Twist*. He draws the picture and makes the reader feel of London like a painter. Dickens shows almost all the deep consequences of the industrial revolution, one of the most substantial turning points of the British Empire. Child labor, prostitution, industrialization, crowded population, migration issues are described through Dickens’ ordinary characters. London’s poor, underdogs and oppressed people are revealed realistically and a historical perspective is offered. In Dickens’ London, the reader witnesses pain, poverty, the gap between social and economic classes. Dickens, a social realist, brought up social disorders in *Oliver Twist* and stood by the oppressed.

Orhan Kemal mirrored the changes and transformations of Turkey and reflected them in his masterpieces. By using Adana as a setting, Kemal presents us the historical, social and economic structures of the period and the city since “in each Orhan Kemal’s novel, we have the opportunity to observe the people on the plains of Çukurova, the painful and passionate lands of Adana” (Taşdelen, 2014, p.98). After the proclamation of the Republic, new approaches in economy came up in Turkey. The country changed rapidly and dynamically, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s stated as by Fikret Uslucan (2014) “We refer to a period in which major changes in socio-economic life and in demographic structure; migration from villages to cities are observed” (203). Traditional production models gave way to modern techniques and new potentials emerged. Famous for its climate, geography and valleys, Adana benefited from mechanization and industrialization, thus became the city of new opportunities. Orhan Kemal’s Adana finds itself as the main destination in some of his major works. One of the works in which Adana is the setting is *Harurun Çiftliği* (1961). Factories, mechanization in agriculture, changing socio-economic structures of Adana are the issues he deals with. Besides, Kemal shows the transition to the multi-party system, the consequences of the politics on the society and the reactions of the people to the radical changes taking place expeditiously. Noting that the gap between the lower and upper class of the city is enormous, the author underlines that the corrupted economic order and exploitation push the people into poverty, in spite of the fact that Adana is the city of abundance, the doctrine of survival of the fittest takes place in the novel. Another novel where Adana is the main destination is *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* (1954). It is the story of three friends coming to the city and its obscurities indicated as “in *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, three friends leave the village for a living. In Çukurova, manufacturers and landlords are waiting to exploit them” (Uysal, 2014, p.217). Tough living and working conditions, worker-boss frictions, urban-peasant conflicts, and poverty issues are depicted through a social realist perspective in the Adana-based novel. Kemal underlines the changing society, its consequences and mostly the darker side of the survival hinted as “the main theme of *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* is the humanitarian plight suffered in Çukurova. While uncovering poverty, misery, and the inhuman lives of the laborers, it is

manifested how fertile Çukurova turned into an area of fight and battle” (Tosun, 2014, p.381). Orhan Kemal's Adana contains contrasts - richness, abundance, high living standards- on the one hand, - poverty, exploitation, and lost identities- on the other hand. Just like Dickens, Kemal adopts a social realist approach and stands by the oppressed of Adana.

CONCLUSION

City and literature have been intertwined for centuries and influenced each other substantially and consistently. Cities that host the history, identity and the core of a society have been unique locations of civilizations. Social-political, social-economic changes and transformations take place in cities and make their mark on the society as a whole. Cities have multi-faceted functions, they do not only provide a concrete-superficial shelter, but also give an identity to the society, its members and surround them. It is not surprising to see this surrounding chiefly and mostly in literature and literary works. The writers who are close observers of the dynamic and rapid changes and transformations of the cities present the portraits of these cities to the reader and so some writers are identified with the certain major cities like James Joyce's Dublin, Victor Hugo's Paris, Arthur Conan Doyle's London, Dostoyevsky's Saint Petersburg and Yaşar Kemal's Adana. Charles Dickens' London and Orhan Kemal's Adana is the main destination of these two great authors. They revealed both the identity and radical transformations of these cities just like in the perspective of a photographer. They spoke of the metamorphoses, contrasts and repercussions that the cities underwent, without deviating into dead-end streets. In fact, the contrasts of the two cities were similar to each other, the gap between the poor- the rich, the lower-upper classes, the weak-the strong was enormous in both cities. Dickens and Kemal, who penetrated into the hearts of the cities and uncovered them, put emphasis on social injustices in these cities and stood by the oppressed.

While presenting the social and economic structures of the cities, they adopted a close approach to the characters who struggled to survive in the society, but they felt more distant towards the ones who ignored and pushed them to death and despair. Dickens and Kemal, who melted the city and literature in one pot, revealed the visible and hidden faces of the cities in a deep and effective way, they grounded the cities on a realistic perspective. And over and above, they enormously contributed to the cities' in question to be taken as the most essential locations in the historical scene.

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