

Comparative Aspects of National History and Artistic Imagination in the Development of the Turkish Historical Novel

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Abstract. Historical novels have played an important role in Turkish literature by connecting historical reality with literary creativity. Rather than simply retelling historical events, they offer new ways of understanding the past through narrative, characters, and cultural memory. This study examines the relationship between national history and artistic imagination in the development of the Turkish historical novel from a comparative perspective. It focuses on selected novels by Namık Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study analyses how these writers interpret history, construct historical characters, and reflect national identity through literary narrative. The findings show that although the selected authors differ in style and historical interpretation, they all view history as a living part of cultural identity rather than a collection of past events. Their novels reveal that artistic imagination strengthens historical understanding by highlighting the human, cultural, and emotional aspects of history without moving away from historical reality. The study also demonstrates that the Turkish historical novel has gradually developed into an important medium for preserving collective memory and encouraging new interpretations of the national past. These findings contribute to comparative literary studies by offering a deeper understanding of the relationship between history, literature, and cultural identity.

Keywords: Turkish historical novel, national history, artistic imagination, comparative literature, collective memory, cultural identity

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Türk tarixi romanının inkişafında milli tarix və bədii təxəyyülün müqayisəli aspektləri

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Xülasə. Tarixi roman türk ədəbiyyatında keçmiş bədii düşüncə vasitəsilə canlandıran və milli tarixin müxtəlif dövrlərini oxucuya yeni baxış bucağından təqdim edən mühüm janrlardan biridir. Bu romanlarda tarixi faktlar yalnız olduğu kimi nəql edilmir, həm də yazıcının bədii təxəyyülü ilə zənginləşdirilərək dövrün ictimai, siyasi və mədəni mənzərəsini özündə əks etdirir. Məqalədə türk tarixi romanının inkişafında milli tarix və bədii təxəyyülün qarşılıqlı əlaqəsi müqayisəli şəkildə araşdırılmışdır.

Tədqiqat zamanı Namiq Kamal, Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Hüseyin Nihal Atsız və İskəndər Palanın tarixi romanları təhlil edilmiş, onların tarixi hadisələrə yanaşma prinsipləri, tarixi şəxsiyyətlərin bədii təqdimatı və milli kimliyin ifadə xüsusiyyətləri müqayisə olunmuşdur. Araşdırmanın nəticələri göstərir ki, fərqli dövrlərdə yaşayıb-yaratmalarına və müxtəlif bədii üslablara malik olmalarına baxmayaraq, bu yazıçıların əsərlərində tarix milli kimliyin və mədəni yaddaşın əsas mənbələrindən biri kimi təqdim edilir. Müəlliflər tarixi hadisələri bədii təxəyyülün imkanlarından istifadə etməklə daha təsirli şəkildə canlandırmağa, eyni zamanda isə tarixi həqiqətdən uzaqlaşmamağa çalışırlar. Bu xüsusiyyət türk tarixi romanının təkcə keçmişi təsvir edən deyil, həm də milli yaddaşı yaşadan, tarixi hadisələrin mahiyyətini anlamağa kömək edən mühüm ədəbi janr olduğunu göstərir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri tarix, ədəbiyyat və milli kimlik arasındakı əlaqələrin daha dərinədən öyrənilməsi baxımından əhəmiyyət kəsb edir və türk tarixi romanının inkişaf xüsusiyyətlərinə dair müqayisəli tədqiqatlara yeni baxış təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *türk tarixi romanı, milli tarix, bədii təxəyyül, müqayisəli ədəbiyyat, kollektiv yaddaş, milli kimlik*

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Introduction

Every nation preserves its historical memory in its own way. While historical records document events, dates, and political developments, literature captures the human experiences, emotions, and cultural values that official history often leaves unexplored. In this respect, the historical novel occupies a unique place, bringing together historical reality and literary imagination (Dadashova, 2024). Rather than replacing history, it offers a different way of understanding the past by presenting historical events through the lives, thoughts, and experiences of fictional or historical characters. For this reason, the historical novel has attracted growing attention not only in literary studies but also in cultural history, memory studies, and comparative literature.

The relationship between history and fiction is especially significant in Turkish literature. The development of the Turkish historical novel coincided with a period when questions of national identity, statehood, and cultural continuity became increasingly important. Although the genre was initially influenced by the historical novels of Walter Scott, Turkish writers gradually shaped it according to their own historical and cultural experience. Instead of simply recounting past events, they used history to explore broader issues such as national identity, social values, power, and cultural heritage. As a result, the Turkish historical novel developed its own distinctive literary character, rooted in the Ottoman past, Central Asian traditions, and the process of nation-building (Abeladze, 2019).

The publication of Cezmi by Namık Kemal marked an important turning point in the development of the Turkish historical novel. Since then, writers such as Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala have approached history from different literary and ideological perspectives (Aynacı, 2022, p. 23). While some emphasize the social and political foundations of historical events, others focus on individual transformation, national consciousness, epic tradition, or symbolic interpretation. These differences demonstrate that historical novels are shaped not only by historical facts but also by each writer's artistic imagination, worldview, and literary purpose.

Today, historical novels are regarded as more than literary representations of the past. They contribute to the preservation of cultural memory and influence how societies understand their own history. Readers often develop their first impressions of historical periods through literary narratives before encountering academic historiography. Consequently, historical fiction plays an important role in shaping historical consciousness by combining factual knowledge with creative interpretation (Argunşah, 2013, p. 45).

Although many studies have examined individual Turkish historical novelists, comparative research on the relationship between national history and artistic imagination remains relatively limited. This study addresses that gap by comparatively analysing selected novels by Namık Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala. It explores how historical reality is transformed into literary narrative and how different writers reinterpret the same historical periods through their own artistic vision. The study argues that the enduring value of the Turkish historical novel lies in its ability to establish a meaningful dialogue between historical reality and creative imagination, offering readers not only knowledge about the past but also a deeper understanding of national identity and cultural memory.

Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu offers another perspective on the Turkish historical novel. In his works history is not presented as a simple sequence of events. Instead he combines historical facts with epic tradition, collective memory, folklore, and religious symbolism. Historical figures remain connected to real events, but they also become symbols of national unity, sacrifice, and continuity (Tekin, 2018). This approach shows that literary imagination does not weaken historical authenticity. On the contrary it helps readers build a stronger emotional connection with the past.

The diversity of Turkish historical fiction also shows that every writer approaches history differently. Authors choose different events, focus on different historical figures, and highlight different aspects of the same period. Their choices are influenced by their own intellectual background, cultural values, and literary aims. As a result the same historical event can lead to different interpretations without losing its historical foundation. This diversity is one of the defining features of the Turkish historical novel.

Artistic imagination plays an essential role in this process. It allows historical events to be experienced through the lives of individuals rather than through facts alone. Historical characters become people with emotions, fears, hopes, and personal struggles. At the same time fiction makes it possible to explore aspects of the past that cannot easily be explained through historical documents such as memory, personal experience, and cultural identity. In this way literature complements history instead of competing with it. The lasting influence of the Turkish historical novel comes from its ability to maintain a balance between historical reality and creative interpretation. A novel that relies only on historical facts may lose its literary appeal, while unlimited imagination can reduce its historical credibility. Successful historical novels bring these two elements together and create narratives that are both convincing and meaningful. They help preserve collective memory and encourage readers to think about the past from different perspectives.

This study adopts a comparative approach to examine how Turkish writers reinterpret national history through different literary strategies. It focuses on selected novels by Namık Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala. The analysis explores the relationship between historical reality and artistic imagination, paying particular attention to characterization, narrative structure, symbolism, and the representation of national identity. The study argues that the strength of the Turkish historical novel lies in its ability to transform historical knowledge into meaningful literary experience while preserving its connection with the historical past.

Materials and Methods

The present study is based on a qualitative research design and employs a comparative literary analysis to examine the relationship between national history and artistic imagination in the development of the Turkish historical novel. Rather than measuring historical accuracy through quantitative indicators, the research seeks to understand how different writers reconstruct the past through literary discourse and how their individual artistic perspectives shape representations of national history. This approach makes it possible to move beyond descriptive summaries and to explore the interpretative mechanisms through which historical reality is transformed into narrative experience.

Comparative literary studies have long emphasized that works belonging to the same genre often reveal their distinctive characteristics only when they are examined alongside one another. Historical novels, despite sharing a common interest in the past, differ considerably in narrative organization, ideological orientation, characterization, and historical interpretation. Consequently, the present research adopts comparison not merely as a technical method but as an analytical framework capable of identifying both common literary tendencies and individual creative strategies. The comparison focuses not on determining which novel is "more historical", but on understanding how different authors assign literary meaning to similar historical phenomena.

The corpus of the study consists of selected historical novels representing different stages in the evolution of Turkish historical fiction. Particular attention is given to *Cezmi* by Namık Kemal, *Devlet Ana* by Kemal Tahir, *Osmancık* by Tarık Buğra, the historical trilogy (*Kilit*, *Anahtar*, and *Kapı*) by Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, *Bozkurtlar* by Atsız, and *Şah ve Sultan* by İskender Pala. These novels were selected because they represent different historical periods, literary generations, and ideological approaches while sharing a common concern with the literary reconstruction of Turkish history.

The selected texts span nearly one hundred and fifty years of literary development, beginning with the late Ottoman modernization period and extending into contemporary Turkish literature. Such chronological diversity enables the study to observe how literary perceptions of history have changed over time. The research assumes that historical fiction is not only influenced by the historical period represented in the narrative but also by the social, intellectual, and political environment in which the author writes. Accordingly, each novel is examined simultaneously within two historical contexts: the historical era depicted in the narrative and the historical moment of the author's own intellectual production. This dual perspective allows the analysis to distinguish between historical reconstruction and contemporary interpretation.

To ensure analytical consistency, the comparison is organized around five interconnected dimensions. The first concerns the representation of national history and the selection of historical events. Particular attention is paid to which historical episodes are emphasized, which are marginalized, and how historical continuity is established within the narrative. The second dimension examines artistic imagination, focusing on the literary techniques through which historical material is reshaped. This includes fictional characters, reconstructed dialogues, symbolic episodes, psychological interiority, and imaginative narrative expansions that extend beyond documentary history while remaining compatible with the broader historical framework.

The third analytical dimension addresses characterization. Historical protagonists are examined not simply as reflections of documented historical figures but as literary constructions shaped by narrative purpose. The analysis investigates how individual authors balance historical authenticity with artistic creativity when constructing the personalities, motivations, and ethical dilemmas of historical characters. Differences in characterization frequently reveal broader ideological positions regarding leadership, nationhood, social justice, religion, and statehood.

A fourth dimension concerns narrative discourse and historical perspective. Historical novels inevitably organize historical knowledge through particular narrative voices. Some narrators remain relatively detached from historical events, while others openly guide readers toward specific moral or ideological interpretations. The study therefore examines narrative perspective, temporal organization, symbolism, and intertextual references in order to understand how literary discourse influences readers' perception of historical reality. Special consideration is given to the interaction between documented historical information and fictional narration, since this interaction constitutes one of the defining characteristics of historical fiction.

The final analytical dimension focuses on the relationship between collective memory and national identity. Rather than treating national identity as a fixed historical category, the study approaches it as a literary construction that evolves through narrative representation. Historical novels participate actively in shaping cultural memory by selecting certain historical experiences as representative of national consciousness while assigning symbolic significance to particular historical figures and events. The analysis therefore considers how literary imagination contributes to the formation, preservation, and reinterpretation of collective historical memory across different generations of Turkish writers.

Methodologically, the research combines several complementary theoretical perspectives. Comparative literature provides the principal analytical framework by enabling systematic comparison among different authors and texts. This framework is supported by hermeneutic interpretation, which emphasizes the contextual understanding of literary meaning rather than isolated textual description. At the same time, the study draws upon principles associated with New Historicism, acknowledging that literary texts and historical discourse continuously influence one another rather than existing as separate systems of knowledge. Finally, selected narratological concepts are employed to examine characterization, narrative voice, temporal organization, and symbolic representation within the novels.

The interpretation of the selected texts follows an inductive analytical strategy. Instead of imposing predetermined theoretical conclusions upon the novels, recurring literary patterns are identified through close reading and subsequently interpreted within broader historical and cultural contexts. Such an approach allows similarities and differences to emerge organically from the textual evidence itself, reducing the risk of ideological overgeneralization while preserving the individual artistic identity of each author.

Particular importance is attached to textual evidence throughout the analysis. Comparative observations are derived not from isolated quotations but from recurring narrative structures, thematic patterns, and stylistic tendencies observed across the selected corpus. This methodological choice reflects the understanding that historical fiction should be examined as a complex literary system in which narrative form, historical consciousness, ideological discourse, and artistic imagination function as interdependent components rather than independent analytical categories.

Accordingly, the methodological framework adopted in this study is intended to illuminate the dynamic interaction between documented history and literary creativity. By examining historical novels comparatively rather than individually, the research seeks to reveal how different writers reconstruct national history through distinct artistic strategies while simultaneously contributing to the broader evolution of the Turkish historical novel as both a literary genre and a medium of cultural memory.

Results

The comparative analysis shows that the Turkish historical novel has developed as much more than a literary genre that recounts the past. Throughout its evolution, it has become a space where history

is interpreted through different literary perspectives and where artistic imagination plays a central role in shaping historical meaning. Although the selected writers draw on the same national history, they differ in the way they understand historical events, construct their narratives, and represent national identity. These differences do not arise from conflicting historical facts but from the authors' individual worldviews, literary styles, and ideological approaches.

One of the main findings of this study is that Turkish historical novelists do not treat history as a fixed and complete account of the past. Instead, history is presented as a living source that can be reinterpreted by every generation. This becomes especially clear when different writers focus on the same historical period. Rather than repeating the same narrative, each author highlights different social, political, or cultural aspects of history. As a result, the Turkish historical novel presents multiple interpretations of the national past while remaining connected to historical reality (White, 2005, p. 151).

This tendency can already be seen in *Cezmi*, where Namık Kemal uses history not simply to describe the Ottoman-Safavid conflicts but to express ideas about patriotism, freedom, and national consciousness. The historical setting provides the background, yet the novel reflects the intellectual concerns of the Tanzimat period as much as the sixteenth century (Değirmenci, 2020). This demonstrates that historical novels often represent both the period they describe and the period in which they are written.

The comparison between Kemal Tahir's *Devlet Ana* and Tarık Buğra's *Osmancık* further illustrates how literary interpretation shapes historical narrative. Both novels focus on the foundation of the Ottoman state, yet they explain this process in different ways. Kemal Tahir emphasizes social structure, justice, and collective responsibility as the foundations of state formation. Tarık Buğra, by contrast, places the moral development of Osman Gazi at the centre of the narrative and presents personal growth as the driving force behind historical change. Although both writers rely on the same historical background, they assign different meanings to the events they describe (Gülendam, 2002, p. 12).

A similar approach can be observed in the novels of Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu. His works combine historical facts with epic tradition, folklore, religious symbolism, and collective memory. Instead of separating documented history from cultural imagination, he brings these elements together to create a richer historical narrative. In this way, history becomes not only a record of past events but also a reflection of shared cultural values and national memory.

Overall, the findings indicate that artistic imagination does not weaken historical authenticity. On the contrary, it enables writers to present history in a more meaningful and engaging way while preserving its historical foundations. The Turkish historical novel therefore emerges as a literary form that connects historical reality with cultural memory and national identity, allowing readers to understand the past through different yet equally valuable perspectives.

Another important finding of this study is that national history is preserved not only through official historical records but also through cultural memory. Stories, traditions, beliefs, and symbols help societies keep their past alive and give historical events a deeper emotional meaning. This idea is especially clear in the novels of Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu. By combining documented history with folklore, epic tradition, and cultural symbolism, he presents history as a living part of national identity rather than as a collection of facts. His novels show that artistic imagination enriches historical understanding by revealing cultural and emotional dimensions that are often absent from conventional historical writing (Samsakçı, 2023).

The comparative analysis also demonstrates that the Turkish historical novel has changed significantly over time. While earlier novels focused mainly on political events and military

achievements, later works pay greater attention to the cultural, psychological, and moral aspects of history (Timur, 2002). This shift reflects a broader change in Turkish literary thought, where history is understood not only as a record of past events but also as a way of exploring national identity and collective experience.

A similar development can be seen in the portrayal of historical characters. In the novels examined in this study, historical figures are presented as complex individuals rather than idealized heroes. They face difficult decisions, personal struggles, and moral responsibilities that make them more convincing and relatable (Timur, 2002). By emphasizing their human qualities, the writers encourage readers to understand history through individual experience as well as historical events.

The analysis further shows that Turkish historical fiction has gradually expanded its understanding of historical truth. Alongside rulers, soldiers, and political leaders, increasing attention is given to ordinary people whose lives are shaped by historical change (Moran, 2019a). This broader perspective suggests that national history is created not only by major political events but also by the everyday experiences, beliefs, and values of society.

These differences become particularly clear in the works of Atsız and İskender Pala. Although both writers draw inspiration from Turkish history, they interpret the past in different ways and employ distinct literary approaches. Their novels demonstrate the richness of the Turkish historical novel and show how artistic imagination allows the same historical heritage to be understood from different perspectives while remaining connected to historical reality.

Atsız presents history from a strongly national perspective. In *Bozkurtlar*, the idea of the Turkish nation shapes both the characters and the events of the novel. Values such as courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and unity remain at the centre of the story, while the protagonists are portrayed as individuals devoted to protecting their people and their homeland. Through this approach, history becomes more than a record of the past. It becomes a source of national pride and a way of strengthening cultural identity. Atsız uses literary imagination to make historical events more vivid and emotionally meaningful without losing their connection to historical reality (Atsız, 2019).

İskender Pala offers a different interpretation of history. In *Şah ve Sultan*, he moves beyond heroic narratives and explores the human side of historical events. The conflict between Sultan Selim I and Shah Ismail is presented not only as a political struggle but also as a story shaped by personal beliefs, emotions, and difficult decisions (Gülendam, 2008). His historical characters are neither completely heroic nor entirely flawed. Instead, they are shown as complex individuals whose actions are influenced by both historical circumstances and personal experiences. This approach encourages readers to think about history from different perspectives rather than accept a single interpretation.

The comparison between Atsız and İskender Pala demonstrates the diversity of the Turkish historical novel. While Atsız highlights collective ideals and national unity, Pala gives greater attention to the emotional and psychological dimensions of history. Despite these differences, both writers contribute to preserving national history through literature. One emphasizes shared values and heroic memory, while the other reveals the human experiences behind historical events.

The analysis also shows that historical settings play an important role in shaping the meaning of these novels. Places such as frontier regions, cities, battlefields, and imperial capitals are more than simple locations where events take place. They reflect cultural memory, historical change, and the values associated with different periods of Turkish history. In each novel, space helps create the atmosphere of the narrative and strengthens the connection between the reader and the historical world being described.

Time is treated with similar flexibility. Unlike historians, who generally follow a strict chronological order, novelists organize historical events according to the needs of the narrative. Important moments may receive greater attention, while long historical periods can be presented briefly. These narrative choices do not change historical reality. Instead, they help readers focus on the events, emotions, and experiences that are most significant for understanding the past (İslam-Külahlıoğlu, 2004, p. 117). In this way, the Turkish historical novel combines historical knowledge with literary storytelling to create a richer and more engaging interpretation of history.

The findings also show that artistic imagination is not simply an additional element of historical fiction. It is one of the main features that gives historical events literary meaning. Without imagination, historical novels would become little more than a retelling of historical facts. At the same time, imagination remains closely connected to historical reality. The most successful Turkish historical novels achieve a balance between historical accuracy and creative interpretation, allowing readers to understand not only what happened but also the cultural and emotional significance of those events (Moran, 2019b).

Despite their differences in style and ideology, the writers examined in this study share a common view of history. They present the past as a living part of cultural identity rather than as a closed and unchanging record (Moran, 2019c). Their novels suggest that every generation returns to history with new questions and new perspectives. As a result, the Turkish historical novel has continued to develop by offering new interpretations of the past while preserving its historical foundations.

The analysis also demonstrates that historical characters play a key role in connecting history with literary imagination. Although these figures are based on real historical personalities, their thoughts, emotions, and personal conflicts are created through fiction. Historical sources can explain what these individuals did, but they rarely reveal how they experienced the events around them. It is through literary imagination that writers give historical figures a human voice and make them more meaningful to modern readers.

This can be clearly seen in the novels of Kemal Tahir and Tarık Buğra. Both writers focus on the figure of Osman Gazi, yet they interpret his role in different ways. Kemal Tahir explains the rise of the Ottoman state through social organization, justice, and collective responsibility. Tarık Buğra, in contrast, emphasizes personal growth and moral development, presenting leadership as the result of individual transformation (Nemutlu, 2023, p. 109). Although both novels are based on the same historical period, they offer different explanations for the emergence of the Ottoman state, demonstrating how artistic imagination shapes historical interpretation without changing historical facts.

Historical conflicts are also presented as more than political or military events. Battles and struggles for power become opportunities to explore broader themes such as identity, loyalty, justice, and responsibility (Prigozhin, 2026, p. 63). While earlier historical novels often drew a clear distinction between heroes and their opponents, later writers tend to present historical figures as more complex individuals. This approach makes historical narratives more balanced and convincing, showing that the past cannot always be understood through simple oppositions. By combining historical knowledge with literary creativity, Turkish historical novelists offer readers a deeper and more nuanced understanding of national history.

Another important finding of this study concerns the role of collective memory in the Turkish historical novel. The selected writers show that the past is preserved not only through historical records but also through language, traditions, beliefs, architecture, and everyday cultural practices (Taştan, 2006). In this sense, historical novels perform a different function from academic history. While historians document the past through evidence, novelists preserve the emotions, values, and cultural meanings that surround historical events.

This perspective also explains why certain periods and events appear repeatedly in Turkish historical fiction. The foundation of the Ottoman state, the conquest of Constantinople, and the struggles on the eastern frontiers are not important only because of their historical significance (Nazlı, 2019). They also occupy a special place in Turkish cultural memory. Although these events remain the same, each writer interprets them differently. Some focus on political development, others emphasize moral values, individual sacrifice, or cultural continuity. These different interpretations enrich the literary tradition and demonstrate that history can be understood from more than one perspective.

The comparative analysis also highlights the importance of narrative style. Each writer uses language in a distinctive way that reflects both personal literary preferences and the intellectual climate of the period. Namık Kemal writes with the patriotic tone of the Tanzimat era, while Kemal Tahir adopts a more realistic and analytical style. Tarık Buğra combines historical narration with philosophical reflection, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu draws on the traditions of oral storytelling, and İskender Pala enriches his narratives through symbolism and references to classical Ottoman literature. These stylistic differences influence not only the artistic quality of the novels but also the way readers understand historical events (Tosun, 2022).

The findings further show that Turkish historical fiction balances continuity and change. The past is presented as an important source of national identity, yet every generation interprets it according to its own social and cultural concerns. Writers do not simply repeat historical narratives. Instead, they return to familiar events and offer new ways of understanding their meaning (Altın & Baylan, 2023). This continuing reinterpretation has played an important role in the development of the Turkish historical novel and has helped keep the genre relevant across different periods.

For this reason, Turkish historical novels should be viewed as more than literary retellings of historical events. They offer thoughtful interpretations that connect history, literature, and cultural identity. By combining historical knowledge with artistic imagination, these novels encourage readers to reflect on the past and to understand its significance from different perspectives. The comparison also confirms that the lasting influence of the Turkish historical novel comes from its ability to balance historical reality with creative expression. Historical evidence provides credibility, while literary imagination adds emotional depth, symbolic meaning, and human experience. Together, these elements allow historical fiction to preserve both the factual and the cultural dimensions of the past.

Finally, the analysis suggests that the interpretation of history depends not only on historical evidence but also on the way that evidence is presented. Historians and novelists may begin with the same historical events, yet they pursue different aims. Historians seek to explain what happened, whereas novelists explore how those events were experienced by individuals and communities. This difference gives the historical novel its unique place in preserving cultural memory. This idea is consistent with Hayden White's view that historical narratives are shaped through interpretation rather than by facts alone (Tezcan, 2018, p. 633). The Turkish historical novels examined in this study support this perspective by showing that history becomes meaningful when historical events are connected with human experience, literary narrative, and cultural memory. As a result, these novels help readers understand not only the past itself but also the values and experiences that continue to shape national identity today.

A comparison of *Devlet Ana* and *Şah ve Sultan* clearly shows that Turkish historical novelists can interpret the same historical period in different ways. Both novels are based on Ottoman history, but their focus is not the same. In *Devlet Ana*, Kemal Tahir explains the foundation of the Ottoman state through social order, justice, and strong community values (Beyaz, 2019, p. 122). The development of the state is presented as a gradual social process. In contrast, İskender Pala's *Şah ve Sultan* focuses more on the inner lives of historical figures. Alongside political events, the novel explores faith, personal conflict, and emotional struggles. Although both writers remain connected to historical facts, each presents history from a different perspective.

This comparison supports Paul Ricoeur's idea that people understand history through stories. Historical facts become more meaningful when they are presented as part of a narrative. Turkish historical novels do not simply repeat historical events. Instead, they explain how those events affected individuals and society. In this way, literature adds a human dimension to history without replacing historical reality (Heller, 2011, p. 92).

The selected novels also show that history is closely connected with national identity. They encourage readers to think about the origins of the Turkish nation, the development of the Ottoman state, and the values that have shaped Turkish society. Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community" helps explain this idea. Through literature, people from different generations share a common historical memory and develop a stronger sense of cultural belonging. Although all of the writers focus on Turkish history, each follows a different artistic approach. Kemal Tahir emphasizes social structure and historical development. Tarık Buğra gives greater importance to personal growth and moral responsibility. Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu combines historical facts with epic tradition and collective memory. İskender Pala highlights the psychological and cultural aspects of historical events, while Atsız presents history through heroism, courage, and national ideals. These differences show that the Turkish historical novel offers multiple ways of understanding the same historical past (Moran, 2019b).

The analysis also shows that artistic imagination is not separate from history. Historical documents explain what happened, but novels help readers understand how people experienced those events. Through characters, dialogue, and symbolism, writers make history more vivid and emotionally meaningful while remaining connected to historical reality. Overall, the comparison demonstrates that Turkish historical novels do more than describe the past. They help preserve cultural memory and encourage readers to look at history from different perspectives. Although Namık Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala interpret history in different ways, they all show that national history is a living part of cultural identity. This balance between historical reality and artistic imagination has played an important role in the development of the Turkish historical novel.

Another important finding of this study is how Turkish historical novelists use historical sources. Although they write about real historical events, they do not simply retell history. Instead, they carefully choose which events, characters, and details best serve the purpose of the novel. Some events are described in detail, while others receive little attention. This does not reduce the historical value of the novels. Rather, it shows that every writer interprets history according to a particular literary perspective.

This difference can be clearly seen in the works of Kemal Tahir and Tarık Buğra. In *Devlet Ana*, Kemal Tahir focuses on the social structure of the early Ottoman state. He gives more attention to justice, social order, and community life than to military victories. Tarık Buğra follows a different approach in *Osmancık*. Instead of concentrating on political events, he presents history through the personal growth and moral development of the main character. Although both novels describe the same historical period, they explain it from different viewpoints (Gülendam, 2002). The writers also shape historical time according to the needs of the story. Long historical periods may be presented briefly, while an important conversation or personal decision can occupy several pages. This allows the authors to emphasize the moments they consider most meaningful. In the same way, historical decisions are not presented only as political events. Writers also explore the emotions, doubts, and responsibilities behind those decisions, making historical figures feel more realistic and human.

Another common feature of Turkish historical novels is the importance given to fictional secondary characters. Alongside well-known historical figures, writers introduce ordinary people such as soldiers, farmers, craftsmen, women, and religious scholars. These characters help readers understand how major historical events affected everyday life (Mecidova, 2019).

The comparison also shows that different authors give readers different levels of freedom to interpret history. Some writers present clear messages about historical events, while others leave more space for readers to draw their own conclusions (Heller, 2011). As a result, Turkish historical novels not only preserve national history but also encourage readers to think about it from different perspectives. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the Turkish historical novel has developed far beyond simply retelling historical events. It combines historical knowledge with artistic imagination to create narratives that are both historically convincing and emotionally engaging. This balance between fact and fiction is one of the main reasons why the Turkish historical novel continues to hold an important place in modern literary studies.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the Turkish historical novel has developed into much more than a literary genre that simply retells historical events. It has become an important way of interpreting national history and preserving cultural memory. Although the selected writers differ in their literary style and understanding of history, they all demonstrate that the past can be presented from different perspectives without losing its historical foundation. This diversity has played a significant role in the development of the Turkish historical novel.

The comparative analysis also indicates that artistic imagination strengthens rather than weakens historical representation. While historical documents provide factual information, novels help readers understand the emotions, values, and human experiences behind historical events (Kara, 2021). In this way, literature complements history by presenting aspects of the past that cannot always be found in official records. As a result, historical novels contribute not only to literary development but also to the preservation of cultural identity and collective memory. The comparison of Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız, and İskender Pala demonstrates that each writer approaches the same historical reality from a different perspective. Kemal Tahir focuses on social structure and institutions, Tarık Buğra emphasizes moral development and leadership, Sepetçioğlu combines history with epic tradition and collective memory, Atsız highlights national ideals and heroism, while İskender Pala explores the psychological and cultural dimensions of historical events. These different approaches do not contradict one another. Instead, they broaden the literary interpretation of Turkish history and show the richness of the historical novel as a genre.

The findings also support the views of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, who argue that history becomes meaningful through narrative. Turkish historical novels confirm this idea by transforming historical knowledge into stories that connect the past with the present. Rather than presenting history as a completed process, they encourage readers to reflect on its continuing influence on national identity and cultural values. Overall, this study suggests that the lasting importance of the Turkish historical novel lies in its successful balance between historical reality and artistic imagination. By combining historical facts with literary creativity, Turkish novelists have created works that not only preserve the past but also encourage new ways of understanding it. This balance remains one of the main reasons why the Turkish historical novel continues to occupy an important place in both Turkish literature and comparative literary studies.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine how national history and artistic imagination interact in the development of the Turkish historical novel. The comparative analysis confirms that historical fiction occupies a unique position between historiography and literature. While remaining connected to documented historical events, it offers possibilities of interpretation that extend beyond the limits of historical narration. Through literary imagination, history is not altered but re-experienced, allowing readers to engage with the past on both an intellectual and an emotional level.

The analysis also demonstrates that the Turkish historical novel has never followed a single literary model. From Namık Kemal's early attempts to connect history with the ideals of patriotism and national awakening to the more philosophically and psychologically complex narratives of Kemal Tahir, Tarık Buğra, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Atsız and İskender Pala, each generation has introduced new ways of understanding the relationship between history and literature. Although these writers differ in style and worldview, they share a common conviction that the past should not remain a static record of completed events. Instead, history continues to acquire new meanings as each generation revisits it from its own cultural and intellectual perspective.

A significant outcome of this research is the recognition that artistic imagination should not be regarded as an element that distances historical fiction from historical reality. On the contrary, it enables writers to reveal dimensions of the past that are often absent from documentary sources. Personal dilemmas, ethical choices, emotional conflicts and the everyday experiences of ordinary people become essential components of historical understanding. In this way, the historical novel complements rather than competes with academic historiography, enriching the reader's perception of national history through narrative interpretation.

The comparative perspective adopted in this article further demonstrates that the same historical event may generate different literary meanings without losing its historical foundation. Each novelist constructs the past according to a particular aesthetic vision, intellectual background and cultural sensitivity. These differences should not be interpreted as contradictions but as evidence of the richness of the Turkish historical novel. The coexistence of multiple perspectives allows national history to be approached from social, political, cultural, psychological and philosophical viewpoints, thereby expanding its literary and scholarly significance.

Another conclusion that emerges from the study concerns the role of historical fiction in preserving cultural memory. The selected novels do more than reconstruct the past; they sustain a dialogue between generations by transmitting shared values, historical experiences and cultural symbols. Their contribution therefore extends beyond literature itself. They participate in the continuous reinterpretation of national identity and help maintain the connection between historical consciousness and contemporary cultural life. This function partly explains why historical novels continue to occupy a central place within Turkish literary tradition despite changing literary movements and historical contexts.

In conclusion, the development of the Turkish historical novel illustrates that the relationship between national history and artistic imagination is not based on opposition but on mutual enrichment. Historical reality provides literature with authenticity, while artistic imagination transforms that reality into narratives capable of preserving cultural memory, stimulating critical reflection and encouraging new interpretations of the past. It is precisely this dynamic interaction that has ensured the vitality of the Turkish historical novel and secured its enduring place in both Turkish literature and the broader field of comparative literary studies.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest several directions for future research. Comparative analyses involving Turkish historical novels alongside historical fiction from other literary traditions could offer a broader understanding of how different cultures reconstruct the past through narrative. In addition, interdisciplinary studies combining literary criticism with cultural history, memory studies and historiography may further illuminate the evolving relationship between historical reality and artistic representation in historical fiction. Such approaches would contribute not only to Turkish literary scholarship but also to wider discussions concerning the role of literature in shaping historical consciousness.

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