

DOSTOEVSKY AND YAŞAR KEMAL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF “THE ORDINARY MAN” CONCEPT: A REVOLT OF THE ORDINARY MEN

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important description of Russian novelists in the 19th century was маленький человек [malenkiy chelavyek], which can be translated as a “small man” or “little guy”, and can be understood as an ordinary man in society. The ordinary man is a person who has a very low status in society, is not gifted, but he is a well-behaved, innocent man, who deserves sympathy, attention, and support. Through his life, the ordinary hero struggles so that he can be wealthy and influential but he never succeeds. This research work is an attempt to explain the concept of “the ordinary man” in the societies of Dostoevsky and Yaşar Kemal, who have deep influence on world literature’s communist and socialist ideas through their characteristic techniques and devices. Their novels: *Poor Folk* and *The Wind From The Plain* are good examples of capitalism as a slavery system. The aim of this comparative study is to identify the both ordinary people of different cultures, and show the psychology of these ordinary heroes who are under pressure but ambitious characters.

Key words: Dostoevsky, Yaşar Kemal, ordinary man, psychology.

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DOSTOYEVSKİ VE YAŞAR KEMAL: "SIRADAN İNSAN" KAVRAMININ KARŞILAŞTIRMALI OLARAK İNCELENMESİ: SIRADAN İNSANLARIN İSYANI

ÖZET

19. yüzyıl Rus romancılarının en önemli prototiplerinden birisi olan маленький человек [malenkiy chelavyek] "küçük adam" olarak tercüme edilebilir ve toplumda sıradan bir insan olarak anlaşılabilir. Sıradan insan toplumda çok düşük bir statüye sahip, yetenekli olmayan fakat sempati, ilgi ve desteğe layık olan iyi huylu, masum bir adamdır. Sıradan kahraman hayatı boyunca zengin ve sözü geçen biri olabilmek için mücadele eder ama asla başaramaz. Bu araştırma kendilerine özgün yöntem ve metodları aracılığıyla, komünist ve sosyalist fikirleriyle dünya edebiyatını derinden etkileyen Dostoyevski ve Yaşar Kemal'in toplumlarındaki "sıradan insan" kavramını açıklamak için bir teşebbüstür. *İnsancıklar* ve *Orta Direk Dağın Öte Yüzü* - 1 romanları kölelik sistemini içerdiklerinden dolayı kapitalizmin işlendiği en iyi örnekler arasındadır. Bu karşılaştırmalı çalışmanın amacı farklı kültürlerin iki sıradan insanını tanıtmak, aynı zamanda baskı altında fakat hırslı olan sıradan kahramanların psikolojilerini yansıtmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dostoyevski, Yaşar Kemal, sıradan insan, psikoloji.

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Once a man has lost his self-respect, and has decided to abjure his better qualities and human dignity, he falls headlong, and cannot choose but do so. (Dostoevsky 50).

Introduction

The motif, “the ordinary man”, was used by numerous Russian writers to describe the features of anti-heroes in their literary prose. This type of hero appeared in Russian literature within the realism of the 1820s and 1830s. The pioneer of the ordinary man motif considered to be Pushkin’s novel, *The Postmaster*, and Gogol followed him with his novel, *The Overcoat*. There are some distinctions between the ordinary man of each novelist. Pushkin has feelings of sympathy, compassion and pity for his hero, while Gogol respects his hero’s revolt against injustice. In addition, Dostoevsky’s ordinary man like Gogol’s, revolts against injustice, and he also struggles to be a valuable, powerful individual in society. Dostoevsky deals with the ordinary man concept as the depths of a human psychology. He criticizes the ordinary man of Pushkin’s *The Postmaster* and Gogol’s *The Overcoat* in his novel *Poor Folk* (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 42-43). He was influenced not only by Russian writers such as Pushkin and Gogol, but also by Western writers such as Charles Dickens in his portrayal of the ordinary man. Furthermore, he improved and added something to the ordinary man: his deep psychology and empathy. With the abolition of slavery that existed so many years in Russia’s fields, a number of novelists discovered a new theme for writing – the life of an ordinary hero. They narrated the miserable poverty of people and the cruel injustice of the landlords with the new conception of realism to describe the real poor people’s lives, the officers, artisans, villagers, and so on. They stopped writing about the upper class, land lords, queens, princes and princesses, etc.

The Ordinary Man Motif in Dostoevsky’s *Poor Folk*

Dostoevsky’s first novel *Бедные люди* [Bedniye Lyudi] (1845), was praised by the critic Belinsky at that time as a socially conscious literary work. After the publication of this short sociological novel, Dostoevsky became a best-known writer around the world. The novel was translated into English several times as *Poor Folk* and also as *Poor People*. *Poor Folk* is an epistolary novel that contains a lot of letters written by the main characters: Makar Alexeyevitch is a poor clerk, forty-seven years old, and Varvara Alexeyevna is a seventeen-year-old orphan. She is one of his relatives, and works at home as a seamstress. Makar takes care of Varvara, and in the process he falls in love with her. As Dostoevsky was in need of money and lived in debt throughout his life, he projects his psychology on Makar, the ordinary hero.

Although Makar is poor, he sends money to Varvara, in fact he feels compelled to do that because he is a relative of her and also loves her. and he occasionally explains what he buys, where he spends his money. First, he wants to show Varvara that he doesn't pay money for odds and ends. Secondly, in this way he shows that after expenses and sending money to Varvara, he has no money left. And thirdly Dostoevsky expresses a revolt against the injustice of Tsarist Russia by an ordinary clerk: Makar's salary isn't enough for his actual living expenses. Although he is an ordinary man, he can still rebel against the injustice:

"I am terribly agitated and distraught. My heart is beating as though it would burst my breast, and all my body seems weak. I send you forty-five roubles in notes. Another twenty I shall give to my landlady, and the remaining thirty-five I shall keep twenty for new clothes and fifteen for actual living expenses. But these experiences of the morning have shaken me to the core, and I must rest awhile" (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 58).

In this novel, the ordinary man shows some differences from his other novels' ordinary man. Makar knows that he himself is an ordinary man:

"When you sent me those thirty kopecks, and thereafter those two grivenniks, my heart sank within me as I looked at the poor little money. I felt greatly depressed, dearest. That is to say, persuaded that I should never do any good with my life, and that I was inferior even to the sole of my own boot, I took it into my head that it was absurd for me to aspire at all rather, that I ought to account myself a disgrace and an abomination" (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 50).

Dostoevsky gives importance to details in order to describe the deep feelings and psychology of poor people. He not only describes the ordinary man, but he also reflects on poverty in general. Dostoevsky describes his character's poverty in detail: "my shoes are patched" (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 32), "a button of mine that was hanging by a single thread suddenly broke off, it reached the feet of his Excellency" (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 57). Dostoevsky portrays every nuance of his hero successfully. Being noble and educated but poor was Dostoevsky's life-long problem, and therefore he has undertaken the task of writing about working class psychology and sociology. He also was well-known for his gait: he walked very carefully in order not to wear out his shoes. It is a painful truth that he lived miserably, but thanks to this painful truth he became an internationally recognized writer, as he reflected his own life standards and the conditions of his heroes. In other words, because Dostoevsky felt the ordinary man deeply inside himself, he successfully portrayed his hero. The ordinary man lives with regret, despair, sorrow, lack of

confidence, and so on. Nevertheless he looks hopeful about the future, never gives up, and he struggles to upgrade his status:

“Well, I am a burden upon no one. It is my own crust of bread that I eat; and though that crust is but a poor one, and sometimes actually a maggoty one, it has at least been earned, and therefore, is being put to a right and lawful use. What therefore, ought I to do? I know that I can earn but little by my labours as a copyist; yet even of that little I am proud, for it has entailed work, and has wrung sweat from my brow. What harm is there in being a copyist?” (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 28).

Dostoevsky expresses his feelings directly using the epistolary novel style. His rebellion is very clear as he describes himself as a neat and devoted but unpromoted clerk:

“I am respected by my superiors, and even his Excellency has had no fault to find with me; and though I have never been shown any special marks of favour, I know that every one finds me at least satisfactory. Also, my writing is sufficiently legible and clear. Neither too rounded nor too fine, it is a running hand, yet always suitable. Of our staff only Ivan Prokofievitch writes a similar hand. Thus have I lived till the grey hairs of my old age; yet I can think of no serious fault committed. Of course, no one is free from minor faults. Everyone has some of them, and you among the rest, my beloved. But in grave or in audacious offences never have I been detected, nor in infringements of regulations, nor in breaches of the public peace” (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 38).

Dostoevsky here describes Russia’s unchanging economy and politics: bribery. Some common issues of his novels are poverty, debt, economic freedom, unfairness:

“You ought to obtain a loan of Peter Petrovitch (his Excellency), who does a little in that way. I myself once borrowed some money of him, and he charged me fair and light interest.” Well, Barbara, my heart leapt within me at these words. I kept thinking and thinking, - if only God would put it into the mind of Peter Petrovitch to be my benefactor by advancing me a loan! I calculated that with its aid I might both repay my landlady and assist yourself and get rid of my surroundings. Sometimes his Excellency passes our desk in the office. He glances at me, and cannot but perceive how poorly I am dressed. Now, neatness and cleanliness are two of his strongest points. Even though he says nothing, I feel ready to die with shame when he approaches” (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth).

In this novel Dostoevsky uses two artistic movements; on the one hand Realism (with Makar) and; on the other hand Romanticism (with Varvara). Varvara and Makar live not far from each other but Makar fears gossip; he feels social pressure deeply, as if love is less important than other people's thoughts and gossip. Varvara needs human compassion and care, she feels lonely:

"Varvara ... What is it you have written to me?" "Why do you not come in person to see me?" "Dear one, what would people say? I should have but to cross the courtyard for people to begin noticing us, and asking themselves questions. Gossip and scandal would arise, and there would be read into the affair quite another meaning than the real one" (Dostoevsky Trans. Hogarth 9).

The thought – What would others think about us? – disturbs him. So at the end of the novel he loses the chance to marry her. Makar's love for Varvara is limited only to their letters. Ironically she marries a wealthy lord, in order to escape from her miserable life.

The Ordinary Man Motif in Yaşar Kemal's *Ortadirek* (*Dağın Öte Yüzü*, 1)

Yaşar Kemal's novel *Ortadirek*, the first volume of *Dağın Öte Yüzü* trilogy, was published in 1960, thirty-seven years after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey. This novel reflects Turkey's politics of that time. *Orta Direk*, which was written after *İnce Memed*, shows us that in Turkey agas [land lords] no longer exist, but instead of agas, there are muhtars. In this novel a ruthless, cruel muhtar, who tyrannizes on poor villagers, represents the government. He has tricked the villagers for five years: every year the villagers go and work about one-and-a-half months in the Çukurova's abundant cotton fields for their yearly income. As an ordinary man, Long Ali, the hero, rebels, struggles against poverty, the muhtar, and also his mother Meryemce's stubborn behaviors. That year, before setting out for Çukurova, Long Ali and Taşbaş call trusted friends and hold a meeting in Lone Duran's house. Long Ali, Tashbash and Lone Duran try to enlighten the people and to organize them against the muhtar. It is a painful truth that the villagers are not only poor, but also live in debt. Muhtar Sefer knows this, and holds it against the villagers:

"A muhtar, they'll say, should be a father to the villagers ... But you have joined forces with that cuckold, Batty Bekir, and the two of you receive bribes from the owners of the most barren cotton fields to get us work there. While other villagers gather a hundred kilos each day, our people hardly make twenty-five. While other villagers return home with bags of money, we cannot even pay back what we owe Adil Efendi... we shall choose a field for ourselves. Let's choose two men. But who? They must be strong and fearless". (Kemal Trans. Thilda Kemal 22-23)

Accordingly, Taşbaş, who is a charismatic leader in the village, expresses that one of the strong and fearless men is Long Ali. Lone Duran supports his friend and expresses that

“He was the first to discover that the Muhtar and Batty Bekir were cheating us, and were having their palms greased by the plantation owners. And for the past five years he has talked himself hoarse to get this truth into our brainless heads. We couldn’t find a better man”. (Kemal Trans. Thilda Kemal 23)

All of the villagers know the truth that the Muhtar cheats them, but during five years they do not do any thing in order to make it right. The main reason they fear, the Muhtar is that he not only asserts social and economic pressure, but also threatens and humiliates people. Yaşar Kemal successfully depicts the psychology of people under pressure. He also describes how materialistic people exploit poor folk, and the consequences when capitalist leaders damage their communities in sociological, psychological, economic, and political ways. Yaşar Kemal during his life dealt with these issues as a political activist in his novels. The villagers who met in Lone Duran’s house, however, leave Long Ali in the lurch. Of course the Muhtar takes advantage of this situation. At this point the ordinary man’s struggle ends in failure, so he never makes his dreams come true. Here, however, the ordinary man’s condition becomes even worse:

“I’ll not let you lead my villagers astray. Take your woman, and go off to the seeshore and loaf about to your heart’s content... Go there and starve to death. Yes clear out of this village! Hey, watchman, come here! Proclaim this. It’s an order of the village council. Ali Uzundja, born in 1922, son of İbrahim and of Meryemdce, is to be banished from this village as soon as we get down to the plain. Since he holds our village in contempt ” (Kemal Trans. Thilda Kemal 46).

The concept of “village council” is something from the imagination of the Muhtar. He uses this expression in order to increase his dominance, and to imply that his deeds are conducted legally, and also to frighten Long Ali. What’s more, by threatening Long Ali, he gives the message to the villagers: if you continue to rebel, I will dismiss all of you, and all of you can starve to death, because I’m the only one who will give you money. As a result, he increases his power over the villagers. He is like a tyrant or an all-powerfull leader. The villagers accept that Long Ali is strong and fearless enough to speak the truth to the Muhtar, but actually, in this novel Long Ali isn’t an heroic character like *İnce Memed*. The rebellion of Long Ali is in the framework of the ordinary man. In this novel, Yaşar Kemal portrays a working class hero in society, so the rebellion consists of only several meek attempts of rebellion,

contrary to the novel *İnce Memed*. There is a big difference between the main characters of Yaşar Kemal's novels *The Wind from the Plain* and *İnce Memed*: Long Ali is an ordinary man, but İnce Memed is an extraordinary one, despite his ordinary background. Long Ali doesn't lead the villagers: he makes several attempts, but in the end he gives up against the ruthless Muhtar. His revolt comes out as a silent scream. Not only the Muhtar, but also Long Ali's own mother, Meryemce, humiliates and punishes him as a result of their poverty. His mother's punishment is: not to talk to him. Economic conditions are so harsh that Meryemce curses her only son to hell. She humiliates, and hates him because he lets Old Halil ride their only horse and it soon dies before they reach Çukurova (Kemal Trans. Thilda Kemal 41). And yet, all the villagers except for Muhtar Sefer and Batty Bekir want Ali to become a wealthy and esteemed man in the village. All the villagers wish and pray for this, as he deserves it: "What a good fellow our Ali is!" "May Allah turn everything he touches into gold!" (Kemal Trans. Thilda Kemal 40).

Conclusion

In both novels, Dostoyevsky's *Poor Folk* and Yaşar Kemal's *The Wind from the Plain*, the main characters shows up as an ordinary man in their societies although they are trying to fight for truth and justice. They struggle against their destiny, but in the end nothing changes for the better. They cannot improve their economic lives and social status. Furthermore, their struggles are as described in an unheroic style. In these novels, the writers portray colorless lives, weak efforts of rebellion, harsh conditions, unfair landlords, and so on. These matters limits the heroes so that they cannot improve their conditions. Moreover, both novels are perfect examples of psychological novels. They also reflect the economic and political life of their community. They are based on a system of human needs according to minimum standards so their society is really poor and they live under harsh conditions. An important issue in these novels is the inner analysis of the characters. Both are autobiographical novels and reflect their writers as heroes.

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