



## REFLECTIONS OF THE HAREM IN THE TURKISH NOVEL BETWEEN 1950-2000

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### Abstract

Harem-i Hümayun, where the families and concubines of the Ottoman Rulers stay, is perceived as a “mystery world” due to its closed structure to the outside World. The Harem attracted the attention of many Western travellers during the Ottoman period. The beginning of dealing with the topic of the harem in the Turkish novel corresponds to about a quarter century later, after the Ottoman Empire collapsed after 1950. What is surprising is that; The point of view of the Turkish authors after the 1950s is quite similar to the viewpoint of Western travellers. Among the reasons of this are; the popularisation of writings of Western travellers as well as the assimilation of the right information, and the writers who are concerned about their high sales discover that this is attractive to the reader.

**Keywords:** Harem, Historical Novel, Concubine, Courtier Women, Sultan.

### Introduction

Harem-i Hümayun where the family of Ottoman sultans and many women prisoners which mostly foreigners, was institutionalised by the name of the harem by Orhan Gazi (1336-1360). The Harem became in the most influential position during the reign of the conqueror Sultan Mehmed (1451-1481) (Baysal, 2009: 593).

The Harem, a curiosity by western travellers thanks to the mystery of being utterly closed with non-residents, “this hidden and mysterious part of the palace where 200-300 women have a closed life; Westerners have been curious for a long time, full of imagination and fantasy and left the hearing portraits.” (İnalçık, 2001: 7).

This subject that Western travellers consider mostly in the Ottoman period has been resurrected surprisingly since the foundation of the Republic, but this time it has frequently been handled by Turkish novelists. Turkish writers are not in a position to speak of their historical heritage when they consider Harem-i Hümayun. The attitude they take when creating their stories is more like the western travellers who lived in the Ottoman period.

The Ottoman-era Turkish novel is initiated by *Taaşuk-i Talat and Fitnat* (1873) belonging to Şemseddin Sami, which was accepted as the first novel by the researchers. The authors of the Ottoman state in their novels from the time of this novel to the proclamation of the republic reflect their own culture and civilisations, sometimes in the period, they lived and sometimes in their novels by re-arranging past times.

Among these are, of course, novels dealing with the Ottoman sultans and the palace. But in these novels, it is not possible to find a trace from the mysterious and exciting world of the Sultan's harem.

This topic which is very popular later, was not well respected by writers living at that time, can be explained by writers and society that is their readers is alive on the date Harem-i Hümayun continued its existence, and they mostly live in Istanbul, so they know that it is not a haven for sex and pleasure. The readers who were the targets of Ottoman novel writers were mostly well-educated people who lived in Istanbul with a population of around 900 thousand at that time<sup>1</sup>, and they knew what the palace was all about.

With the collapse of the state, the vision of authors and readers begins to change. Differences begin in the content of the novels and the readers' expectation. The volition that establishes the Republic has the idea of breaking ties with the Ottoman state in order to build a new national identity. In addition to other artistic branches, the founding volition who uses literature in its identity building encourages writers to write novels criticising the Ottoman Empire (Çıkla, 2007: 47). In addition, authors who wrote novels in 1923 and later years were trained in the Ottoman era and trained by the Ottoman education system. Therefore, their

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<sup>1</sup> Average population between 1873 and 1923.



criticism does not include fantasies about the sultan and harem. Their criticism is more concentrated in the governance and traditions of government.

Harem became one of the most popular topics in the Turkish novel after the 1950s. This issue has not only gained popularity in order to undermine the old state, underscore its shortcomings. One of the factors is that the Turkish society, which has started to learn history and culture from Western writers, begins to perceive harem as Western travellers and moreover to find buyers of such content.

In the Turkish novel, during the ascension period, especially after the conquest of Istanbul and after the settlement of the Topkapı Palace, the woman in the palace takes the place of the woman in the home. Even though, at the sources, some information is available for the concubines in the harem such as: "Woman Sultan candidates young girls, have had a very serious education in various arts and sciences at the time", "The harem, was, in fact, a very serious education center that provided education in the fields of science, art, music and aesthetics" (Baysal, 598) but there is no such information in the novels.

Harem means power struggle and intrigue. "Social institutions do not reflect a single patriarchal thought, but rather reflect the political processes and power relations that the gender hierarchies are formed and questioned (Kandiyoti 1997: 171). The harem in the novels is often handled in this direction. The harem, which is also known as the place where the sultan is in love or the emotional relations like this, is emphasised as the struggling area of those who try to stand out among the most hierarchical structure and community.

The harem had attracted the attention of Western Travelers because of the strict prohibition of men's entry and exit, the living of beautiful women from all over the world, and the infiltration of information from inside to outside; it is perceived as a place where all day fun is organized, naked sightseeing, homosexual relations and insatiable sexual pleasures are experienced. In XIX.th century Eastern Societies symbolised by Western writers in the context of "harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing men, belly dancers, sorbets and oil, etc." (Said, 1998: 262).

Surprisingly, in the post-1950 Turkish novel, the harem is also referred to with similar concepts. In addition, this topic which the writers who want to criticise the Ottoman Empire deal with, conservative writers are expected to address this issue in the context of defence, but they prefer not to mention it. For example, when a writer who wants to criticise Fatih Sultan Mehmet tells beautiful women and men in his harem, the writer who wants to praise him, sees only other state administrators and scientists around the sultan, not touching the harem.

In the post-1950 Turkish novel, especially in the works which take the Ottoman sultans in the centre, the next active character from the sultan is the courtier woman. Concubines, favourites (women), hasekis, and eventually the mother sultans (Valide Sultan= Mother of the Sultan) are often used in the chain of events. In some novels, courtier women are the chief character whose name is more commonly pronounced than the sultan.<sup>2</sup>

Full-grown, brave Turkish woman image comes out in the novels about the Establishment of Ottoman era and the period of National Struggle period. In addition, in the novels written with reference from the history of Turkish Maritime, women are warriors, and they fight enemies with their husbands in the front ranks of the army. Even these women, as in the period of National Struggle, they participate in the battle with the body power rather than supporting the war with the professions such as nursing or journalism.

In the novels describing the periods and places other than these, women live in the mansion or palace, has expensive jewels, wears beautiful and flashy clothes, is beautiful and attractive. We do not see them while she is busy looking after children or housework. In the novels, similar descriptions are made, especially about the women in the harem. The most important characteristic of women in nice and flashy clothes is that they are beautiful, that is, the reflection of the women in the mirror of the man [here the Sultan]. The value of the woman in the harem is proportional to the liking of the man. From time to time, besides the beauty, a nice voice and a noble posture are added. These are the details for increasing the influence on the sultan. While reading and thinking of her, we don't see the woman in the palace -with the exceptions- busy with art. The most important goal in her life is to show herself or if she is not young and beautiful, a concubine that will make her power holder, to the Sultan. After reaching this goal, the "intrigue" process begins, which is one of the concepts that are often called along with the harem in the novels. Intrigue is about eliminating competitors and being active in state administration by using the closeness of the kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> The following novels are the leading examples of this: Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi's *Hürrem Sultan*, Reşat Ekrem Koçu's *Kösem Sultan*, Murat Aykaç Erginöz's *Haremın Büyüsü* (life of Nakşidil Mother Sultan), and Zuhuri Danışman's *Saraydaki Kadın*.



In the novels, the concubine who ruled the emperor-as the Haseki<sup>3</sup> or the Valide Sultan<sup>4</sup> makes every effort to keep her's position and to defeat opponents. About the personality of these characters, except their ambitions, all we know they don't hesitate to intrigue. However, in the fiction of novels, the concubines who fluttered to be close to the palace, and dedicated their whole lives it, cannot reach their goals in general, every time the Sultan chooses, reluctant and half-hearted concubine. Not always, in case she has not been presented to him yet, he falls in love with the concubine he coincided with and becomes a passionate lover. He is now a prisoner of love, somehow, he cannot get rid of his influence, and he doesn't want to leave her for a moment. The concubine in question responds this love in the same way or less. She is never more passionate than the sultan

In the novels, harem has full of intrigues and jealousy, the only thing women do is struggle to enter the sultan's bed, but historical publications on harem life contain different information:

There were those who entered the Harem and went out with a good marriage, and there were those who were married to ordinary men that they must be state or foundation officials, but there were also servants who remained there, which didn't have to get a marriage proposal. They sometimes reach a high rank like a Kethüda Def-i Gam Hatun (treasure master), some worked in simple jobs, even cleaning jobs.

The girls first learn Turkish, then the Qur'an and literacy. They take lessons on the topics of music, dance, fine arts etc. They absolutely learn the palace protocol, the etiquette and the rules of good society. A lady, who is given religious information, but more procedural course, then gives in marriage and goes out of the palace. Because of her behaviours, this lady known as The Courtier Woman and she was respected for her convenience and etiquette. The presence of a lady with a palace debauchery in a neighbourhood was enough for it to learn the palace decree and the Palace Turkish. Those who lived next to these ladies continued these beautiful adaptations for generations (Ortaylı, 2008: 147-148).

In the novels, a courtier woman as described above, we rarely encounter except Tanpınar's novels. The authors have not been very interested in what women do after the time of the Palace. The concubines' the getting out of palace is usually in the form of execution. Along with that, İlber Ortaylı is not of the opinion that there is no intrigue in the palace: Politics and intrigue in the harem is on purpose a short section of long history. After the killing of Kösem Sultan in a palace coup, the Harem returned to its former calm. Venetian Bafö (Safiye Sultan), Hürrem Sultan, Kösem Sultan were the names mentioned in the political intrigues (2008, 147-148). Concubines, Hasekis and Valide Sultans who don't make intrigues are not much to mention in the novels. The most mentioned courtier women are the remarks of the Ortaylı. "Members of the period called "Womens' Reign"<sup>5</sup> are favourite themes for popular historians and they are the main or important characters of the novels. However, Hatice Turhan Sultan (who keeps the bride -Gülnuş Emetullah- away from politics and mother of the child Sultan IV. Mehmed, thoroughbred Ukrainian and grandmother of the dynasty) ended the tradition of intervention in state affairs of the woman of Harem (Ortaylı, 2001: 42). In the Turkish novel between 1950-2000, Hasekis and Valide Sultans not included in the text, who not involved in the intrigues, away from politics consciously or their names are mentioned just one time in the chain of events. Therefore, Turhan Sultan's name, with these properties are not mentioned in the novels.

"Concubines who come to the Ottoman harem do not necessarily come to be presented to the sultans and princes" (Ortaylı, 2001: 40). Besides, even though in literature there are some information such as; the sultan cannot be able to rule the women as he wishes, the concubine who wants to marry and live outside the palace, can choose to not accompany with the sultan (Osmanoğlu, 2007: 37), but the general point of view in the novels is not such that.

### 1. Foundation and Ascension Period

The Ottoman family is known for making the most cosmopolitan marriages among all the dynasties (Ortaylı, 2001: 40). Cavit Ersen was one of the first writers to deal with these cosmopolitan dynastic marriages, which handled by many novelists. In his novel Yıldırım Beyazıt, Yıldırım falls in love with Olivera -by hearing praises about her-, the sister of the Serbian king Stephen. He sees Olivera in his dreams. He wants to see her in his harem as soon as possible. He demands the Serbian King's sister from him. The king gives his sister to the Sultan by rejoicing. This marriage both concerns Olivera and Devlet Hatun, the wife of Yıldırım Beyazıt. While Olivera wondered how the first wife of the sultan would act on her, the

<sup>3</sup> Haseki Sultan: Favorite concubine of the Sultan; she makes the sultan fall in love with her and then married with him. Also, they are named as "Hünkâr Hasekisi= Haseki of the Emperor". Özcan, A. (2014). TDV. İslam Ansiklopedisi. Cilt 16, p368. Ankara

<sup>4</sup> Valide Sultan: Mother of the Sultan

<sup>5</sup> An example of the subject is Ahmet Refik Altınay's book of Reign of Women. The first volume of the book was published in 1916 and the second one in 1923 in the old letters (Ottoman Alphabet). New prints of the book continue to be made that this shows the subject maintains popularity



Devlet Hatun thinks that she is no longer loved. "Whereas, the sultan's heart is wide enough to both." He loves both because in his heart each of them is valuable and takes her places. Women will notice this after a while, become closer to each other and become like sisters. In both, there is no effort to see the other as a rival and keep it away from the sultan, even if they are the biggest supporters of each other (1983, 38-51).

In Enver Behnan Şapolyo's novel *Fatih İstanbul Kapılarında*, Sultan II. Murat's wives are mentioned. Because of taking the second wife of Sultan Murat, festivals are held in the palace. At this time, while everyone is very happy, there is only one woman in the palace who does not laugh and tears in her room. This person, who is a Turk, is Hüma Hatun, the wife of the sultan. Being a very beautiful woman, Hüma Hatun is jealous of a fellow wife. Tonight, her beloved husband is with another woman. Hüma Hatun is a Muslim Turkish girl, but her fellow wife is Serb and a Christian. She thinks that "what does the infidel girl in the Muslim palace?". The author explains this as a necessity for politics and country interests. In fact, Hüma Hatun is aware of them but her heart unable to listen to her, she constantly cries in grief. Nobody comes to solace her. Because of she couldn't give birth a baby boy and couldn't be a Haseki, her sadness increases. Her sadness grows by thinking as "if New bride gives birth a baby boy". In such position, the New bride will get prosperity but maybe herself will be a woman of pleasure (as a second wife), and she cannot be a Valide Sultan. Finally, her trouble became even bigger level. After this, referring to the fact that Hüma Sultan is the mother of The Conqueror Fatih Sultan Mehmet, the writer says: "luck is not certain, perhaps she would be the greatest of the Valide Sultans. But nothing can be said already (2013, 17).

In Emre Kongar's novel titled *Hocaefendi'nin Sandukası*, which is deal with the Fatih Sultan Mehmet's period, not a Sultan's woman but the concubine named Mahpeyker, who is given to the Palace Doctor, Hodjaefendi, comes forward. Mahpeyker is trying to find a high position in the palace for herself. Since Hodjaefendi has the same goal, he helps Mahpeyker in this direction for his benefit. He makes plans for her. The Palace Doctor, Hocaefendi smokes marijuana and lies on her concubine's arms and says to her unconsciously: "My beauty, don't be fear anymore, don't be afraid of Sitte Woman, we will overcome to Chef Musahip İsmail Efendi soon. Then Sitte Woman will lose her position in our Sultan's eye (1990, 60). In this way, the palace doctor through her concubine also involved palace intrigues and tried to get the power.

The aim of concubines in Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi's novel titled *Gem Sultan* is also to obtain power through lie with the prince, give him a baby boy and by this way to get a reputation in palace society. They are impatient to achieve this goal. They are jealous of each other and are against them. However, Tülbentçi's prince chooses a concubine as a wife who does not have this greed or even does not even think of it. The prince doesn't want any of the concubines who stands ready receive orders and who expects the prosperity from him. Instead of them, he chooses a concubine as his wife that is not so beautiful but has a more noble stance (2008, 64).

Sevda Sezer's novel titled *Rukiye Hatun* begins by being depicted in the eyes of a concubine, the Trabzon Palace of Yavuz Sultan Selim when he was a prince: "The places of the palace's large hall are covered with Buhara carpets. There is a large cedar decorated with serrated silk fabrics with two marble stairs on the corner. In the middle of this decor, there are two girls, one of them blonde and other one is a brunette. They are leaving their hair open which up to their hips, and they cool in the prince with big fans in their hands. There is a large diamond on the turban of the prince. Twelve young girls leaning on the stairs at the tip of the cedar; keeps wine and fruit in gold trays in his hands, another girl who is nicer than all wears a white shalwar -baggy trousers- with eye-catching seams. She firstly tastes the wine which shedding the wine from a gold jug, and then goes on her knees and gives it to the master. A rehearsal ensemble composed of women plays songs in front of the prince. In the middle, a half-naked, black-haired, black-eyed, tall girl dances with a seductive expression." (1957, 15). Sezer's courtier women are the concubines, at the same time dozens of them serving the sultan's pleasures. In the novel, we don't see the concubines anymore except the one who is the loved one by Yavuz Sultan. Here the woman's job is to look cheerful and beautiful to purify him from distress by having a good time with the manager of the palace (Sultan).

## 2. Period of Pause

The courtier women foreground in the Murat Sertoğlu's novel titled *Baltacı and Katerina*, this time it is not just a fictional character that the author created out of his mind. Emerges with the reconstruction of a historical personality: Hürrem Sultan<sup>6</sup>. In the novel, Hürrem Sultan is very active on the Sultan. Hence, she had been taken power in her hands. Hürrem is afraid of losing her dominion which she gained by the

<sup>6</sup> Considering the flow of historical events in the novel, it is seen that the person mentioned as Hürrem Sultan is Kösem Sultan. Hürrem Sultan's name must have been used by mistake.





influence of the sultan. He plans to kill Turhan Sultan, who is likely to take over this domination. While this plan is in the stage of being implemented, the pashas close to Turhan Sultan are aware of this plan. With the orders of the Pashas, one of the sluggish executioner raid the harem, and one of them strangles the Hürrem with a curtain cord and ends its reign over its four-sultanate period (1966, 265).

Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi's novel, Hürrem Sultan, is one of the most popular novels of harem and courtier women. In the novel, Sultan Kanuni, because of his love for Hürrem, gives priority to her wishes even in the presence of palace members. The writer describes Kanuni as a man who loves, owns and protects his wife. Describes this feature as if coming before his Sultanate. He is in love with his wife, and he does what she wants. The author elaborates on Hürrem's rivalry with the Sultan's first Haseki, Gülbahar Hatun, and the greed and jealousy of the other concubines. In the novel, in which the sultan is drawn as a good figure, Hürrem Sultan is a positive character. She is not jealous, but she is the person who was envied by others. In the beginning, we more see Hürrem Sultan in the victim role. But then Hürrem Sultan is included in the battle for domination.

Within the frame of the fiction of the novel, Haseki Gülbahar Hatun so jealous of Hürrem, when they meet with the Hürrem in the corridor shortly after the sultan's presence, she makes moves on her "like a female tiger", saying "traitor, are you gonna compete with me?" Hürrem cannot react to this. Another person involved in the intrigue is Valide Sultan. The Valide Sultan is also disturbed by the presence of Hürrem, whom his son loves very much, but she is also satisfied with the situation that a serious opponent raised in front of the Sultan's Haseki Gülbahar Hatun. Later, Gulbahar Hatun learns that Hürrem is pregnant. This situation makes her even sadder, and because she was afraid that the baby to be born, can be the successor to the throne she said, other women, that the baby to be born would be a girl. The evidence of his prediction is Hürrem's ugliness during her pregnancy. In the end, the baby is born, that she is a girl child. This situation makes Hürrem sad. From the suffering that she felt because she didn't give birth to a prince to the sultan, wins loose with the Sultan's compliment. Tülbentçi's Hürrem changes after this attitude of Gülbahar Hatun and after the child is a girl. Acquires information about state and palace organisation while Kanuni Sultan Süleyman is in Rhodes campaign. She is beginning to get to know many people who have taken part in the state organisation, and she becomes involved in politics (2008a, 35-65).

In the section where explained that Hürrem Sultan could rule Kanuni when Hürrem is informed that Kanuni is in a recreational environment where dancing with concubines, she enters in the assembly in a dissonant way and expels everyone, especially the concubines in the presence of the Sultan. The Sultan, in the face of this movement, instead of punishing her, he likes her jealousy. After the guests have left, The Sultan comforts Hürrem by telling how much he likes her (2008a, 88-91).

Zülfü Livaneli has devoted his novel titled "Engereğin Gözündeki Kamaşma" to portray the harem. In the novel, Sultan Ibrahim period is described, but the name of Sultan is not given. Although there are negative judgments in many subjects directed to the Ottoman State, in the novel, criticisms are concentrated on harem life. In the novel which narrated from the mouth of a Master of Harem, it is expressed that, Western travellers perceive the harem according to their fantasies, but in reality, the harem is completely different:

The harem was a crying and sadness world. Embracing the dreams of the outside, the harem, which even dragged the Habsburg ambassador into a poetic love and forced him to lose his sense, it was never loved, song and dance paradise which beautiful women dances like swans. Those, who burn with the imagination of naked, whose skins became red and ginger in the warmth of hammam (Turkish bath), even cannot stand the women's destiny; they aged, untreated and fattened in the damp, dark corners of the harem. Women are living in a homeroom as if in prison. Which is the only entertainment of these women, intrigue and gossip environment, and crying jag caused by jealousy. Thick walls of Harem, would not have worked any more than hiding the many disaster, death and crimes, and apart from the crazy and extraterrestrial dreams about the harem (Livaneli, 2012: 165-166).

Zuhuri Danışman's novel titled Saraydaki Kadın is about the period of II. Selim's the last years and III. Murat and the main theme of this novel is the power struggle between the palace women. At the centre of the events that revolve around the palace, intrigues are not the sultan but the sultan's wife Safiye Sultan, Valide Nurbanu Sultan and some concubines.

Raziye who one of the concubines of the palace, along with a gardener who also makes fortune-telling, spend half-naked time in the harem. Harem, no one other than doctors can enter, even its difficult to enter for Hadım Masters (D'ohson, 1992: 960), in the frame of the novel, a gardener could easily have entered. III. Murat's Lala (male nanny), he sees this scene, falls into the horror, he screams to the concubine as "prostitute". In the continuation of the chain of events, there is no sanction or punishment applied to the concubine (1964, 20-28).



In the novel, it is also referred to the process of bringing the concubine Safiye, who will later become the Valide Sultan. Safiye, the daughter of a Venetian family, whose real name is Bafo, is kidnapped by the Turkish pirates and brought to the palace. The pirate who kidnaps her sees the young girl as soon as he understands that she deserves the palace. II. Selim's son Şehzade Murat falls in love with Safiye seeing her. When the Venetian Bafo, who came to the palace by chance, came to understand the life of the Ottoman palace, to master the palace administration, she wants Sultan Selim to die, and Prince Murat becomes the new ruler who falls in love with her (1964, 23).

The only person who wants to have palace mastery in this novel is not Safiye Sultan. While Safiye Sultan considering how to take power from Valide Nurbanu Sultan's hand, the concubines search for ways to approach the Sultan. Another concubine, who came to Safiye Sultan and said, "Watch out for the concubine named Canfeda, because she's trying to be Haseki", tries her's best to get into the bed of the sultan even if it is the night. According to the novel, everyday six-seven concubines come to the palace. They are all beautiful, saucy, coquettish girls. Of these girls who serve on the Sultan with their thin, silky dresses, the reason for being in the novel, just makes the Sultan happy (1964, 38-41).

In the Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi's novel titled "Sultanların Aşkı" which is about of the Second Selim period, harem life is handled in a wide way. The Sultan has many concubines in the palace. Besides, in the mansion which he goes as a guest, girls are presented him. The Sultan does not like them very much. Because all the girls he meets until now, kisses the skirt, waits for the orders. According to Sultan, there is no pleasure to have the girls who are the waits sultan's orders. He doesn't have an attachment for women who lie with him, for a long time. The concubine Barletta (Bedia) he meets coincidentally is different from all others. Because she does not always act like a servant, who is waiting for orders. She makes the interlocutor feels like he is equal to her (2008a: 128).

In the novel through the novel character of Kethüda Woman who is one of the courtier women, the image of the woman who cuts the of future, but who doesn't give up her passion for being active in the country administration, is embodied. Kethüda woman wants the Barletta to be the wife of the sultan, whom she sees her close-by. In this way, she is also expecting of providing herself with a high position. She takes care of Barletta, who is also responsible for her training. She takes care of her one to one. However, in this process of interest, training process such as handcraft, language learning, playing an instrument and acquiring religious knowledge which is mentioned in historical sources, is not a question. The only thing is the palace training needs is to look good. The Sultan is also not in any other expectation from the potential palace girls who may be his wife. Because of Kethüda Woman is aged, she will not be able to prosper, but if the girl gets success in the palace who is trained by her, she will be close to the power. She scrawls Barletta's hairs, perfumes her, and dresses her clothes up. By spiffing her up like this, she tries to attract the Sultan's attention. One day while Kethüda Woman is spiffing Barletta up, says: "Oh my baby what a beautiful body you have" and runs her hands over the young girl's hips. Kethüda Woman praises the II Selim to Barletta. Describes her, how important it is to enter Sultan Selim's bed. In the Harem-i Hümayun, there are hundreds of young girls who are desiring strongly to enter the Sultan's bed. Because the sultan gives diamonds and pearls to the woman which he loves and keeps her in his hand (2008a, 124). Through all these descriptions, the writer, emphasises that, during the II. Selim period, women are in ambitious of dominating the sultan. The palace is no longer the palace of the "Muhteşem Süleyman - Great Solomon" period. An irregularity is dominant in the Harem. Beside them, it is a remarkable detail that the writer caresses Kethüda Kadın to another woman and it seems natural by interlocutor

In Zuhuri Danışman's novel titled "Deli Hüseyin Paşa" which tells about the period of Sultan İbrahim, (1640-1648) the love between the Sultan and his concubine Zafire is explained. In the novel, Sultan İbrahim visible to us mostly as a lover. He doesn't separate from Zafire even for a moment. The Sultan doesn't know what to do to please her, and being loved such this, causes Zafire to be envied in the palace. The concubines glance emulatively at this Circassian girl, Zafire, who ties the sultan so much to her, while they see the sultan admiring her and caressing her child on his lap at the same time (1960, 25).

There is uncertainty as to who his father is of the son born after Zafire's arrival in the country. The Sultan doesn't know whether this child from himself, or from someone who Zafire met before when she came to the palace, but he doesn't care this situation. He also expresses that he loves this child as much as he loves Zafire. The writer notes this "mysterious information" in the footnote that he learns this detail by bringing together American and European historians documents and Oriental records (1960, 25).

Kösem Sultan, after the death of I. Ahmet, is closed to the Old Palace but turns back to the palace as Mother Sultan when his son IV. Murat takes the throne. Those who live the hardest life of the world's history and should be the most intelligent, are the mothers of the Ottoman sultans and princes (Ortaylı, 2001: 41).



The reason for this difficulty is, of course, the throne struggles. In the novels in which Kösem Sultan is addressed, it is often the case that Kösem attempts to be active in these struggles and administration. Bekir Büyükarkın's novel titled *Bir Sel Gibi* which in IV. Mehmet's period, also tells about the life of the sultan's harem. Hasekis and concubines don't divert the sultan's attention who spend their nights with him because if he tends to one, she spoils immediately, and she attempts to give orders to him like his grandmother Kösem Sultan. Sultan Mehmet, with difficulty, is finally able to take charge from her mother, Kösem Sultan. The Sultan is so tired from his mother's work that he is determined not to share power with a woman no matter who she is (2010, 79). Because of their power ambition, he is forced to stay away from concubines.

In the novel titled *Kösem Sultan*, the writer specifies that power ambition also exists before the IV. Mehmet period. Writer notices that in the period when the sultan was still a small boy, his grandmother Kösem, does everything in her power to reign alone in the palace. Kösem, to consolidate her power, keeps people close to her thinking like herself, and puts the most ineffective persons in high places, gives and receives bribes, and does illegitimate works (2010: 331).

In Turkish literature, Suzan Sözen known with popular love novels, not only tells simple love stories but also came up face the reader with findings of the Turks and the foreign nations (Yılmaz, 2009: 2441). With her findings, Suzan Sözen deals the Kösem Sultan in her novel titled *Siyah Zambak*. As it is in the novels mentioned before, Kösem Sultan is filled with the ambition of power in this novel. Besides that, she is described as a woman who addicted to the magic and fortune telling. She also uses this book for her ambition of power (1962, 109).

In the Ottoman Palace, the Valide Sultan and the Hasekis are said to have been involved in government affairs due to foreign blood (the wife of the monarch who carries native blood is not favoured in any country, the foreign bride comes to the palace) (Ortaylı, 2001: 41). One of the writers dealing with this issue is Suzan Sözen. The writer, in her novel titled *Batmayan Güneş* which addressed the Kösem Sultan and Sultan İbrahim period, the writer, makes Fazıl Ahmet (a Turkish hero) says like that: all Mother Sultans are stranger, as if there were no Turkish girls, they are getting married to stranger women who not good for country. Fazıl Ahmet describes all the princes as "half-infidel". Even the public thinks so about the sultans and princes. It is expressed as such, the period's Ottoman society thinks like "Girls of the infidels are enthroned because they gave birth the baby boys" (1963, 91-92). Suzan Sözen expresses this situation clearly, which has been criticized by many of the novels related to Haseki and Valide sultans. A similar criticism but for more palace men is found in Abdullah Ziya Kozanoğlu's novel *Sencivanoglu* (1957). Kozanoğlu also criticises the foreign dominance in the palace by explaining that the black masters ruled the harem, who say yes to the sultan in the palace (2005, 59).

### 3. Disintegration and Destruction Period

In the novel titled *Belki Bir Gün*<sup>7</sup> which written by Bekir Büyükarkın IV. Mustafa's period is described. The writer, unlike the others, doesn't mention about the intriguing and saucy concubines. According to the writer, the concubines are the women who do not live their lives, and they are forced to live a life other than their will. The writer gets talking a concubine this: "Do you know what palace harem is? Even happiness is as lie there. Every day, hundreds of young women fade piece silently by piece, melt piece by piece, and cannot open their troubles to anyone. Captivity is a terrible thing (2010, 110).

Murat Aykaç Erginöz in his novel titled *Haremin Büyüsü* is about Nakşidil Sultan's life who is French-born and actual name was Amiée Duboc and who is reported to be Napoleon's wife's cousin. The novel which the main theme is the portraits and life of a Valide Sultan., unlike the novels that describe Kösem and Hürrem, it doesn't deal with the power struggle. This woman is also powerful. But the power didn't come to her through intriguing but through nobility and knowledge.

Around the life of a Frenchwoman Nakşidil, The Ottoman palace life is attempted to be reflected in the eyes of a "foreign" concubine. Nakşidil Sultan is a real foreigner. She neither adopts the culture and nor the religion of the country which, the country which she comes in the child age and staying until the end of her life. She does whatever she can to make the Ottoman State like France. She is partly successful in this goal. While she is dying, she demands that her funeral is removed according to the rituals of Christianity. The days when the Nakşidil first came to the palace think that were that the women of the palace were left without love, free and indecisive, that they were raised as a means of pleasure. The majordomo of the harem Despina Hatun protests this. She thinks that the women in the palace are not merely instruments of pleasure,

<sup>7</sup> Mustafa IV came to the throne before Mahmut II and after Abdülhamit I and Selim III. While the other novels in the text are explained chronologically, the reasons why this novel is taken here, are Murat Aykaç Erginöz's novel titled *Haremin Büyüsü* covers three different sultans' periods and researcher wants to prevent the novels from intermingling



but they can rule the state by ruling the emperor. She tells that the power which makes and break down the history is women. The most famous of them is Roxalane who is debonair and legendary Russian, mean Hürrem Sultan. She captured him with her beauty, the “Magnificent Süleyman” who is the Europe trembles in front of him. She even managed to marry him. This is the only example in the history of the harem. What about Kösem Sultan? Kösem was Greek, besides her beauty, she had a unique charm, attractiveness, skills and unlimited ambition. When his son Murat IV came to the throne, she became a very powerful Valide Sultan (2010, 12). Nakşidil begins to think that she can reach the point where, among the hundreds of courtier women, a few of them could reach there throughout history

The author implies that Nakşidil, a Frenchwoman, is a perfect woman. Some New concubines were brought to the palace. While these caravans are arguing for simple matters among themselves, The majordomo of the harem Despina Hatun silences them. She returning to Nakşidil and saying “Now you know our language, my daughter, now let’s talk Turkish, these stupid and supines hear you. Could you tell, how they made you a slave someone like you?”, emphasises the ignorance and mediocrity of the other girls and Nakşidil’s intelligence and dignity (2010, 10).

According to the writer, these concubines are not the main source of the negativity in the harem. The jealousy of the women of the harem and struggle to be near the sultan with a thought of ascension, it is explained from a concubine's language called Hümaşah that such situations originate from the harem's malfunctioning system (2010, 14).

Nakşidil is the wife of Abdülhamit I. The sultan loves so much his wife. It is difficult to say the same thing for Nakşidil's feelings towards her husband. In the novels studied, Nakşidil, one of the few women engaged in art, she is very talented in playing the harp. One day while she is walking around the palace, meets Prince Selim (nephew of Abdülhamit I, and later he will become Selim III). After chatting him for a while, she plays the harp, and then prince Selim blows the ney<sup>8</sup> for her. She swooned when she heard this voice and with an instinctive act, begins to dance with the tulles on her. When the dance is over, she embraces with the prince and kisses him (2010, 65). This edification in particular about for Nakşidil and Selim III is exemplified of Erginöz’s perceiving way of the palace’s morality. In Erginöz's novel, this illegitimate relationship between the sultan's woman and the sultan's nephew continues for a while.

After the death of Abdülhamit I, Selim III goes to the throne. The writer says Selim III takes some advice on how to manage the country. She says the sultan; to make rules for peasants to return to the land and to encourage farming, to save the legal system from the whims of the pashas, beside them, to make some system changes and to reorganise the army and to have some military sanctions. These are all fulfilled in a very short time by Selim III. In the novel, Selim III says to Nakşidil, who is a person whose ideas are so important for him: “I can not give up on you, I need you to live. The only woman I can freely talk to is that you because you are free, intelligent and have possessed personally” (2010, 93). Therefore, the author, who also uses Nakşidil as a symbol, makes an obscure criticism for the Ottoman woman. Because of no other woman around the Sultan, is free, intelligent and possessed personality.

In Haremin Büyüsü, II. Mahmut's decision and actions are said to have affected by his mother Nakşidil's ideas. He introduced the modern army to the Ottoman Empire, and who removed the Janissary Quarry and established the Asakir-i Mansure-yi Muhammadiye (2010, 171).

The writer says that Sultan Mahmut II ruled the country, not in his way but the direction of Valide Sultan's will. Nakşidil tells his son Mahmut II, to kill his brother Mustafa for the future of the country. After killing his brother, Mahmut II tells Nakshidil: “By means of you, for you, in front of you, I became like what you wanted, Nakşidil” (2010, 172).

In the novel, the writer connotes that Nakşidil’s influence on his son is not always negative. She demands some requests from his son about the system of state management. These are: Allowing women for a little more freedom, to go out the street, to go to the countryside; allowing the women of the sultans who died to be withdrawn in a desired place but not send in the old palace; to take “liberal” measures in the harem; To reduce the number of harem and to send back girls who want to be go to her family. As soon as the words of the Valide Sultan are over, the Sultan gives the following answer: “I will immediately prepare an ordinance and tomorrow morning I will declare all that you want to my people” (2010, 175).

Nakşidil is also mentioned in Mehmet Coral’s novel titled Konstantiniyenin Yitik Günceleri. It is repeated in this novel that she is a Frenchwoman whose real name is Aimée Duboc. The rumour that she is a cousin of Napoleon’s wife is also the reality of this novel. Nakşidil, whose wife of Abdülhamit I, tells in her letter to her cousin that she loved each other with the sultan, and shared him with hundreds of women, and

<sup>8</sup> An instrument of Sufi Music like flute.





witnessed eternal intrigues in the palace. Nakşidil also tells in the letter after the death of her husband, her son Mahmut II has gone on the throne and that her son has made many important reforms and destroyed the "Janissary House" which was the greatest trouble in the country and was a troublemaker for many sultans and viziers (2011, 79).

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar believes that the courtier women are not the only ones responsible for the competitive environment they are in. In rivalry are, even the environment has some expectations from them. In his novel titled *Mahur Beste* there is a scene envisioned about the period of Mahmut II; Adile Hanım, from the former concubines, tells the story of how the courtier women are trying to be close to the sultan. Adile Hanım's sister Buyidil is a very beautiful girl, so everyone from her concubines to favourites is jealous of her. For this reason, she tries to protect her sister from them. One day Buyudil serves to Mahmut II, she holds a towel while he takes ablution and she is complimented due to her decency. The sultan has just made a fatherly compliment, but because of this compliment, Buyudil, with the influence of the social circle, she is in, dreams in longterm that she can be a Haseki (1979: 155).

In Nahit Sırrı Örik's novel titled *Sultan Hamid Düşerken*, which deals with the period of Abdülhamit II, we see the courtier women's favour to the sultan. After the declaration of Constitutionalism, "In the harem circle of the Yıldız Palace, woman masters, sultans, successors, favourites, treasurer and concubines, an entire woman army with all sorts and degrees" because of concerning about sultan's life, they don't want him to go out on Friday greetings. After a long hesitation, Abdülhamit II with Grand Vizier Sait Pasha and Chief of general staff, Rüştü Pasha and goes out of the palace. Then they, in eternal and lethal excitement, expect them to return "without troubles". When they find out that the sultan has entered the grand hall with a big crowd and applauding never seen before, joy and throws tears in each other's arms (2015, 57).

Kemal Tahir's novel titled *Bir Mülkiyet Kalesi* also deals the period of Abdülhamit II. In the novel, the life of the palace is explained from the language of a concubine. According to this concubine, all the people of the palace are jealous of each other. Slaves and foreman are nasty persons. Kept women of pashas and the "little mischief" of the sultans are among the chat topics of the palace people (2009, 40-64).

### Conclusion

It is seen that the way in which the subject of the harem is handled in the Turkish novel is quite similar to the viewpoint of Western travellers. Though, there is frequent repetition by researchers that harem is "a school", not every woman which living there is to satisfy the sultan's sexual desires, and willings who want to marry can go outside the palace, but these repetitions not been effective on the harem perception of novel writers.

In the process that the Ottoman state continued to exist, especially after the 16th century, the harem, which attracted the attention of Western travellers, the attention of the Turkish writer and the reader could only be drawn years after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. While there are many historical and sociological reasons for this, it is believed that the greatest factor in the frequent handling of this subject after 1950 is that the mystery of it, attracts the readers' attention and, as a result, gained popularity to the writers

In these novels, the palace is regarded as a place where the women live who in rivalry of power struggle and these women who are the ones who make their way from their hands to become a woman of the sultan. The woman who reaches this desire, to keep the power, she may try to kill even their grandchildren, just as in the case of Kösem Sultan. Those who understand that they cannot reach the power; through experiencing unlimitedly body pleasures, they try to get rid of sultry atmosphere where they live. These women, who are entirely forbidden to meet men, satisfy their bodily pleasures with each other without knowing boundaries in this regard. There is even a fiction where one concubine attempts to rape the other concubine. Along with breaking the limits of the article, when the novels written in the year 2017 are examined, it is seen that these types of fiction have not changed and that the Ottoman period in the modern Turkish novel is reflected in the works similar to those of the Western travellers.

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