From tale to novel: a theoretical study on the common features of tale and novel[*]

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"We will never give up reading fiction, whatever it takes, as we are constantly searching for the formula in it to give the meaning to our lives. All our lives, we are in quest of the first story to tell us why we have come to this world and why we are living here. We sometimes look for a cosmic story, the story of the universe, and at times, our own. Sometimes we hope we can relate our own story with that of the universe."

Umberto Eco (1995: 157–158)

0. Introduction
Michel Butor defines the common point of view shared by the literary theoreticians of the 20th century in the following terms:

> "Narration is a phenomenon which greatly surpasses literature; one of the building blocks of our comprehension of reality. From the moment we start to make sense of what is spoken around to the day we die, we are always surrounded by narrations; first in our family, then at school, later on in interviews and in readings." (Butor 1991: 17).

It is possible to consider Butor's account on the line from the past to the present time and to the future, not only based on individualistic level, but also at the level of society and nation. In this line myths, legends, sagas, novels and stories respectively come into play. It is necessary to take the great difference between the two main types of narration for granted, which

can be described as the oral narration of the public and and the written narration of the individual. However, it is also possible to select two islands in the sea of narration to study the geographical and historical ties, waves, deep streams and give-and-takes in between. To this end, we will focus on the islands of *tale* and *novel* to study the similarities and differences between these two forms. The fundamental reason behind the selection as such is that tale has been rediscovered, in a sense, in today's novel in the world in general, and specifically in Turkey.

It would be reasonable to address the similarities between tale and novel from the following aspects:

1. Historical aspect
2. Social aspect
3. Reality
4. Interrelation between author-work-reader
5. Structure

1. Historical aspect

From historical aspect, tale has been one of the first literary forms which have appeared and developed thanks to the necessity of the societies to create and preserve the narration of a fictitious reality. Tales, which create a fictitious world while combining the dream and the reality to deliberately make their addressee/reader grasp this fiction, make up 'the novel and the story of the literate people' for the illiterate people 'for whom the only education available is to listen and remember, and to pretend' (Günay 1975: 1–2). In this respect, it is possible to say that tales have opened the path to the novel and made up the first samples of the novels. It is generally acknowledged that the tales have been the sources to the novels at the time of transition from the oral accounts of culture to the written ones; that tales are the first works of literature which we inherit from the past thanks to the print; and the first samples of the novels are known to have been written to be read aloud just like tales (see Ong 1995). Furthermore, the narrative basis of *Decameron* (Boccacio), and *Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer), which have been the first works of novel, obviously depend on the fiction of tales. *Müsameratname* by Emin Nihat Efendi and *Muhayyelat* by Aziz Efendi evidently show that it goes for Turkish literature, as well. Thus, it is possible to establish a before-and-after relation between the literary genres of tale and novel based on the historical course of development.

Another characteristics of both novel and tale from the historical aspect to bear in mind is the inevitable existence of the historical reality in the back-

ground of the narrated event. It is what Umberto Eco calls the "background of the narration". There is a two-way relation between the background and the real world: Fictitious world constitutes a rather limited world when compared to the real world and creates a relatively wider world as new events, new characters and new characteristics are introduced to the real world. This way, fictitious world is not confined to its narration but it goes beyond (Eco 1995: 98).

Eco's approach to the background of the narration is particularly important for us in terms of the reference to the information in tales and novels which can only be obtained through history reading. Tale, which "perhaps had an account of real stories in the beginning, yet lost some of its constituents because of being told many times, changing memory and environment, and in turn losing the genuine content, and substituting it with some imaginary constituents" (Tezel 1987: 135–136), has never lost its close ties with the particular features of the nation in the memory of which it has deep roots, despite having undergone a substantial change by cultural developments, and interrelations due to the wars and migration events. It has always traced the life, traditions, beliefs, expectations, realities and hopes of that particular society. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to say that tales witness the secret history of a nation. Because they contain something which the history books do not: dreams of a nation! Furthermore, many research studies conducted so far on tales have revealed that all tales in the world have evolved on the basis of almost the same structures and themes. With that in mind, it goes without saying that tales offer the account of the secret history of the dreams and realities of not only one particular nation but also all the nations around the world. The same situation is the case for the novel, yet in a different way. Novel is the product of more recent a time when compared to tale, however it seems to represent a historical evidence of the different conscious and the quest of reality the mankind has achieved, despite the internal development it has undergone as a genre, starting with the first works. It will also be reasonable to mention the structure of the novel, which is open to historical reading and its function of witnessing the time, society and mankind.

2. Social aspect

From the social aspect, the prominent similarity between the novels and tales is that both are the products of the need for narration felt by the individuals and societies. In the sea of narrations we always swim, it is quite understandable that there is a need for interpersonal dialogue through

narration. However, the existence of the first narrator fades away in tale. This way, the narration is no longer under the possession of its creator, but it expands to become public (and unanimous). Yet, the individualistic possession of the novel is preserved both at the stage of production and consumption (reading), as if holding tight to it. The social function tale serves by spreading on the instant from the single center (narrator) to many (audiences) in an active and dynamic way, is served by the novel in a different way than the tale, through moving from the single center (author) to reach out to individuals one by one (reader/readers). Therefore, both genres serve two functions at the same time: social and individual.

On the other hand, it would be reasonable to bear in mind that the tales and novels can be regarded, in a sense, as the products of the common subconscious of the society (as a natural outcome or a part of historical evaluation). From this point of view, it goes without saying that tales offer a comparatively richer source than novels. Yet, it is important to note that cultural analysis is one of the modern methods used in textual analysis in the 20th century, which shows that novels always trace the social structure, class, and the point of view they represent. There is an inevitable difference between tale and novel in terms of the social structure which produces them. So, it is quite natural that they present a superficial or deep discussion about the problems of these structures. Pertev Naili Boratav makes a comparison between novel and tale in the following terms: "Tale draws the outline of character types having a world knowledge comprising of the questionings of life for long centuries on this land which has built a cultural unity, despite not presenting the people of one particular time and place as the way the modern story and novel do" (Boratav 1992a: 14), and draws a distinction between the two genres. While tale is "an art which was born and developed among middle-class and lower classes of people" (Boratav 1992a: 18) who were illiterate; novel is born as the product of the bourgeois individual. Yet, it is a fact that it is possible to find people of all types, professions and all walks of life in all works of the both genres. This brings about the "obligation of the novel to sincerely understand the whole society (as if something we belong to; something original, which the most active individuals cannot let go of)" (Butor 1991: 123). However, it should not be forgotten that the tales are stored and developed in the verbal memory of the society, which follows that it is related to the social perception, while novels should be studied under written, documentary products which stem from individualistic perception.

3. Reality

When the *interrelation between the reality and fiction* is taken into account, both genres show the characteristics of artificial narration.[1] The explicit indicator of the artificiality or the fictitious nature of the tales is that they all start with the classical phrase: "once upon a time, there was...". Similarly, the riddles in the beginning of the tales "offer an introduction for the audience to the supernatural and surreal atmosphere (...) and an invitation to observe the reality through the curtains of imagery and lies" (Boratav 1992: 33); and the riddles in the middle "remind the audience that the narrated story expresses a different comprehension, and they are the constituents which *alienate* them, prevent them from loosening their ties with the life they live, and getting lost in the world of dreams" (Günay 1987: 130). Although there are no ready-made phrases or aesthetic usages as such to functionally complement the text, the reader has to keep the distance with the awareness that is created with the first lines of the narration that s/he has stepped in the world of fiction no matter how similar it may be to the real world. Umberto Eco explains this as the following:

> "The principal rule of getting in contact with a narrated text is that the reader makes a silent *fiction agreement* with the author, which Coleridge calls '*suspending the disbelief*'. Reader should know that it is an imagery story, yet that does not necessitate that s/he has to think that the author is telling a lie. (...) Author *acts as if* s/he is giving the true accounts of something. Then, we comply with the fiction agreement terms and *act as if* it really happened." (Eco 1995: 87)

In this respect, it is that non-verbal '*fiction agreement*' which allows the animals to speak or disguise in tales, the audience to take the existence of genes, nymphs, witches and giants for granted and helps the approval of "the internal logic of the tale, and its pre-acknowledged opportunities" (Boratav 1992a: 13) and of its definition as "a type of narration which takes place in the imaginary world and makes the reader believe even if it is not real" (Sakaoğlu 1973: 5); and which helps the reader to identify her/himself with the characters in the novel – consciously, or not – and convince them of

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1. Here "artificial narration" comes to mean the fictitious narrations "which act as if telling the truth or claim that they tell the truth in a fictitious universe of discourse". In that sense, it covers the narrations which are "natural narrations" and "the series of narrations, which really happened, or which the narrator believes to be true, or s/he tries to convince us (by telling lies) that they really happened; the narration of what happened to me the previous day" (Eco 1995: 136).

the reality of the time and place of the narration. In this agreement, the primary expectation of the reader is 'internal consistency' in that imaginary, artificial and original world. Internal consistency can be regarded as "the integrity of the system of values set by the author in the work, consistency of the point of view, and the harmony of the formal features" (Joseph Conrad, in Stevick 1988: 12). This expectation of integrity goes for the tales, as well.

As the narrations introduce us an imaginary world (Butor 1991: 130) and as novel and tale bring along a different vision from various aspects about the time and society in which they take place, it is also possible that the giants, nymphs, and all the dream creations are the elements which this or that way (with their function in the plot and the lives of the characters) symbolize the realities. It would be reasonable to have a look at the Roland Barthes's theory of signs. The reality of the man and mankind has always been questioned in tales and novels. Novel is a literary genre which came into play when man has reached a conscious against the universe, nature, life and himself as individual, which is totally different from the time of the traditional genres such as tale, epic or legend. Yet, is it not the "ratio between the reality and fiction" (Eco 1995: 90), which draws the fundamental distinction between tale and novel? Does not the literary work, regardless of the genre, state "a reperceived and reconstructed reduced and confined truth which is not related to the existing world"? (Andre Helbo, in Yücel 1993: 57). Confronted with the peculiar gate between the dream and the reality in narrations, the reader has to be careful all the time, which urges us to consider the tale and the novel from the aspect of author-work-reader interaction.

4. Interrelation between author-work-reader

On grounds of the *author-work-reader interaction*, there are at least three participants of each narrative text: fictitious character(s), author and reader. If we apply it to the tales, these are the hero, narrator and audience. There is a constant and strong tie between these three participants. It is a fact that this interaction will be more active and dynamic in the oral narrative process of tale. The dynamism is the basic characteristics of the tale, which opens the path to the direct participation of the audience to the narration as well as it helps the narrator add some gestures as a contribution. "Each text is a lazy tool which asks for the contribution of its reader," (Eco 1995: 9), whether it involves an active and direct participation as such, or a passive and introvert version of the novel reader. This participation serves a similar function for both the tale audience and the novel reader: *discovering life!* "Yet, it means

discovering something which could only be discovered through a novel" (Kundera 1989: 13). The information the reader will obtain through this discovery will not comprise the practical knowledge but help him/her understand and perceive the life, acquire the experiences of the protagonist which s/he followed all through the narration, and internalize all these experiences. That is what Eco defines as "arranging the experiences which are in disorder". According to Eco, narration is a game played to learn how to make sense of all the things which have occurred, are occurring and will occur in the real world. That is how the narration serves a curing function, and is the reason why people have told stories since the first existence of the mankind. It is also the function of the myths (Eco 1995: 100). The most significant condition Greimas put forth in addition to that is also related to the legibility of the text: "the existence of an internal agreement between the addresser and the addressee (reader) as to the generalized knowledge about the events in the text". What Kundera, Eco and Greimas have suggested reflect a reader-oriented point of view in narration. In fact, fundamental differences come into play between novel and tale as to the function of the narrator and to the fiction, when only the tale is studied.

5. Structure
Propp's studies on tales marked the first *structural* approach to the narrated texts. Propp, who studied in his work *The Structure of the Tales* (1928) the colorful and various visions of the tales and the relation between these visions and the single-formation underneath through the action domains of seven characters (protagonist, antagonist, offender, forgiver, assistant, princess and sender) in terms of thirty-one principal functions, studied one hundred Russian fairy tales and proved that they all represent almost the same structure. The originality of Propp is that he studied the tales not through categorizing them in terms of the genres or history with a descriptive approach, but through their common internal formal features. The principal importance of Propp comes from that fact that his method pioneered the course of development of the methods of analysis from structuralism, to post-structuralism, semiotics and – even – to deconstruction.

The function limitation whose validity was proved by Propp and justified by the tale researchers following him cannot be applied to novels, yet it is possible to find some common features, anyway. For instance *journey*, which serves one of the principal functions of the tales, represent the obstacles of the protagonist who leaves home to obtain a desired object, his process of overcoming the obstacles, fulfilling the hard tasks and obtaining the desired

object, turning back home, getting married and heading to the throne. Therefore, making a journey as such is the first cause of the narration to move vertically and horizontally, i.e. in the time and place. In this respect, Butor suggests that all types of fiction intrude in our lives as a journey and considers the main theme of the novels to be journey (1991: 64). Yet journey in his terms is the 'journey of the reader', who by means of the narration, travels to a different time and place and back. Milan Kundera, who addresses the same journey from the perspective of historical development of the genre novel, suggests that the first European novels comprise of journeys in a world seemingly infinite and the path of the novel goes in parallel with that of the modern age, then she asks the question with the path from Cervantes to Kafka on mind: "Is it not Don Quixote who turned back to his village under the disguise of a land survey officer after the journey of 300 hundred years?" (Kundera 1989: 17).

Journey enhances the permanence of the narration, as well as its internal and external dynamism keeping the curiosity and energy high through the theme of journey. These go for the multi-vocal, multi-dimensional deep and intricate narrated structure of the novel, as well as its linear and single-dimensional narrative structure. The two main necessary and important elements of narration analysis are *story* and *plot organization*. The journey in tales constitute the story of the traditional folk narration. Cause and effect relation which keeps the plot and functions in order and the climax and curiosity, which keep the reader alert are the principal elements of the plot organization of the tales. Keeping the story going, a cause and effect relation to form the plot organization, climax and curiosity, an interesting and fascinating element of mystery always constitute a matter of concern for the novel. Thus, there has not been a substantial change in the principal points of departure for the narrative needs of the mankind during the transition from traditional narration to modern. In this respect, E. M. Forster (1985: 65) greets Sehrazat of *1001 Night Tales* and praises her skills of keeping the climax high and the audience curious and alert in these terms.

> "Sehrazat escaped death thanks to the curiosity of her husband which she managed to keep running. Seeing the sunrise, she would just stop telling, leaving the sultan in craze. 'All of a sudden Sehrazat realized the day break, and she was wise enough to stop.' This ordinary phrase constitutes the back bone of 1001 night tales, and the line, which connects all the stories to each other as well as saving the life of the talented princess. We all resemble her husband in that we need to find out what is coming up next. This is a universal desire."

While Forster regards curiosity, the *narrative dynamism* (activity), as a cross-road where tale and novel meet, Italo Calvino (1995) lists the six fundamental characteristics of any narration – even any artistic work – as the following: *lightness, pace, certainty, visibility, multiplicity, intensity.* Here, Italo Calvino finds some common features between tale and novel in terms of lightness and pace. Suggesting that the flying carpets, horses on wings, genies in bottles in tales introduced *lightness* and horizons to Western fantasy, Italo Calvino states that the desired object is horizontally too far away and vertically too high above or too down below, which necessitates the protagonist to go beyond distance on the wings of a horse or a bird, fly over the shoulders of a giant or turn into a bird to fly the distance ahead, and this way the shamanist function transforms into literary world. It entails "lightening and flying away the deprivation to a world where all needs of the people are magically met" (Calvino 1995: 39–44).

The *pace* of the narration is partly related to the narrated events and partly to the rhythm of the narration. Pointing the rhythm, narrative economy, poetic implicature, narrative effect, harmony of the prose which is complemented with repeated situations/events/formulas/sentences, storage of only the notable functions/details in narration, which are necessary and critical to the plot organization, implicature of the relativity of time which is running out, allegory of the time, implicature of the permanence and breaks of permanence through frame narrations... etc., which have always been mentioned among the characteristics of modern narration, Calvino (1995: 51–63), selects tales, specifically the Eastern tales, as sample. Therefore, it is by no means difficult to find something in common between tale and novel, even when the narrative possibilities and fiction order are studied alone. Even if the common features are set aside, fictitious opportunities (to be) offered by tales to novels constitute *per se* a source of study both for the science of literature and literary creativity! This may be the principal reason behind the orientation of the contemporary authors and theoreticians in the world back to the tale!

Conclusion

Tale and novel, which exist in the fictitious reality of art works with their own narrative possibilities and logical system, make up the literary works of an internal rhythm and harmony, which is capable of coinciding reality with dream, man with society, and singular with universal. Despite the prominent differences in between, there is a bond between tale, the unanimous product, and novel, the individualistic product, which constitutes a ring in

the strong chain extending from the oral accounts of culture to the written ones. As Ong (1995: 144) points out, it is our attitude which changes, thus needs to be explained. The constant common feature of tale and novel is that both are the ways of the mankind to search for and find the truth, whether they are studied on grounds of narrative possibilities and fictitious features, or of the historical and social conditions under which they were produced, and creation-production features. If the fight of the tale hero against the outside and his efforts of success turns into the internal conflict of novel character, is it not the expression, which has only changed, of man's reality, which stands still? Has not the mankind searched for the "formula to give the meaning to their lives" for thousands of years?

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