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REPRESENTATION OF TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS

“Birds without Wings” by Louis de Bernières

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Podpis:

Jeřábková Silvie

Děkuji panu Dr. Ladislavu Nagymu za odborné vedení mé bakalářské práce.

Anotace

Jako téma své bakalářské práce jsem si vybrala 'Reprezentace řecko-tureckých vztahů v díle „*Ptáci bez křídel*“ od autora jménem Louis de Bernières', protože mě tato kniha upoutala. „*Ptáci bez křídel*“ jsou zajímavé v mnoha ohledech. Zabývají se řecko-tureckými vztahy, které jsou na základě konfliktů, se kterými se Řecko a Turecko potýká, obecně vnímány jako kontroverzní předmět diskusí, a popisují nejen události 20. století na území dnešního Turecka, kde Řekové a Turci dříve žili harmonicky pospolu, ale také příběh jednotlivých obyvatel. Kombinace těchto dvou rovin spolu s univerzálními tématy jako jsou válka, nacionalismus, náboženství a multikulturalismus činí z románu poselství pro lidstvo.

Ve své bakalářské práci představuji nejdříve obecné informace týkající se autorovy volby tématu a umístění děje románu, poté popisuji strukturu a vyprávěcí styl knihy. Porovnávám knihu „*Ptáci bez křídel*“ s „*Mandolínou kapitána Corelliho*“, což je Bernièresův nejslavnější román, který byl navíc také zfilmován.

Dále vysvětluji metaforický název knihy v návaznosti na postavy v knize, kterými jsou převážně Turci a Řekové. Jedna z postav je založená na skutečné historické osobnosti, která sehrála důležitou roli v historii Turecka. Tou postavou je Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Ve své bakalářské práci uvádím historické události jako řecko-tureckou válku a vznik Turecka, které vedly k výměně turecké a řecké populace a k vyvraždění arménských obyvatel. Prostřednictvím úryvků z knihy „*Ptáci bez křídel*“ poukazují na následky fanatického nacionalismu a náboženství. Pokouším se ve své bakalářské práci

vysvětlit, jak multikulturní společnost dokázala žít v harmonii až do doby, než zasáhly vnější okolnosti a rozdělily ji. Zásadní je v této části téma tolerance.

V průběhu své bakalářské práce porovnávám knihu „Ptáci bez křídel“ s jinými romány, které mají podobnou formu nebo které pracují s podobnými tématy.

Hlavním zdrojem inspirace pro moji bakalářskou práci je bezesporu kniha britského romanopisce Louise de Bernièresse „*Ptáci bez křídel*“. Porovnávám historická data v knize s dějepisnou literaturou (např. s knihou „*Řekové a Turci – nepřátelé nebo spojenci?*“ od Pavla Hradečného), s životopisy Mustafy Kemala Atatürka (především s „*Atatürk's Legacy*“ od autora jménem Nur Bilge Criss a s „*Portréty – Kemal Atatürk*“ od Karla Pravce) a s internetovými stránkami, převážně s těmi, které jsou spravované tureckými organizacemi. Co se týče arménské genocidy, čerpám užitečné informace z knihy „*Worse than War*“ od autora Daniela Jonaha Goldhagena.

Vyjadřuji se k několika rozhovorům s Louisem de Bernièresem a rozvíjím myšlenky některých kritických recenzí. Jak rozhovory, tak autorovy názory, které začleňuji do své bakalářské práce, jsou k dispozici na příslušných internetových stránkách, které jsou uvedeny v seznamu citovaných elektronických zdrojů (Works Cited Page: Electronic Sources) a také v literární kritice „*Louis de Bernières: The Essential Guide*“, jejímiž autory jsou Margaret Reynolds a Jonathan Noakes.

Většina citované tištěné bibliografie, ze které cituji (Works Cited Page: Bibliography), je dostupná v Jihočeské vědecké knihovně a v Akademické knihovně Jihočeské univerzity v Českých Budějovicích.

Annotation

For my bachelor thesis, I decided to choose the 'Representation of Turkish-Greek relations found in the novel "*Birds without Wings*" by Louis de Bernières'. I selected this topic because the book really caught my attention. "*Birds without Wings*" is interesting in many aspects. It deals with Turkish-Greek relations that are generally understood as a controversial issue because of the conflicts Turkey and Greece have come through. It describes not only the events of the 20th century in the area of modern day Turkey, where Greeks and Turks used to live in harmony together, but also the story of the individual inhabitants. The combination of these two parallel threads within universal topics such as war, nationalism, religion and multiculturalism creates a message from the novel for all humanity.

In my bachelor thesis, I introduce at first general information concerning the author's choice of theme and setting, and then I describe the structure of the novel and its narrative style. I make a comparison of "*Birds without Wings*" with "*Captain Corelli's Mandolin*", which is de Bernières' most famous novel that was also made into a film.

Later on, I explain the metaphoric title of the book, making links to the characters, who are predominantly Turks and Greeks. There is also one character, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is based on a real life historical figure and who played an important role in Turkish history.

I present in my bachelor thesis historical events such as the Turkish-Greek war and the rise of Turkey that led to the Turkish-Greek population exchange and the Armenian genocide. By quotations from the novel "*Birds without Wings*", I

demonstrate the consequences of fanatical nationalism and religion. I try to explain in my bachelor thesis how a multicultural society was able to live in harmony until the outside forces intervened and separated it. The topic of tolerance is crucial at this point.

Throughout the thesis, I compare “*Birds without Wings*“ with other novels that have a similar structure or that deal with similar topics.

The main source of inspiration for my bachelor thesis is evidently the novel “*Birds without Wings*” by the British novelist Louis de Bernières. I verify the historical data in this book with true historical sources (e.g. with “*Řekové a Turci – nepřátelé nebo spojenci?*” by Pavel Hradečný), biographies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (first of all “*Atatürk’s Legacy*” by Nur Bilge Criss and “*Portréty – Kemal Atatürk*” by Karel Pravec) and web pages, mainly those ones that are run by Turkish organisations. As far as the Armenian genocide is concerned, the book “*Worse than War*” provides me with some useful information.

I comment on some interviews with Louis de Bernières and I develop the ideas of some critical reviews. Both the interviews and author’s opinions which I incorporate into my bachelor thesis are available on the web pages indicated in my Works Cited Page: Electronic Sources and also in the book of literary criticism “*Louis de Bernières: The Essential Guide*” by Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes.

The majority of the printed bibliography from which I cite (Works Cited Page: Bibliography) is available in Jihočeská vědecká knihovna and in Akademická knihovna JU in České Budějovice.

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Introduction

Louis de Bernières portrays in the novel *"Birds without Wings"* the ideal situation of a mixed society consisting of Turks and Greeks who are also Christians and Muslims, and are able to live peacefully together taking advantage of their religious and cultural differences. The author intentionally presents first the harmonious environment, and then lets outside forces intervene and change the peace and idyll into chaos and suffering, in order to make the reader think about the dangers of politics and insufficient tolerance.

The book portrays the events that lead to the forced separation of Turks and Greeks who had previously lived together. Nationalistic tendencies and wars at the time of the Ottoman Empire collapse destroyed the harmony. This resulted in a population exchange because it was believed this could unify the nations and solve the intercultural conflicts. However, this separation caused many problems, not least of which was the Armenian genocide.

Discrimination and racism are unfortunately deeply rooted in society in general. People usually do not trust foreigners because they represent an atypical element in the society and many people are greatly influenced by prejudices. Some nations do not have a good reputation in the world for reasons of both prejudices and history. Turks are, as such a prime example. Many European people are afraid of them because Turkey is a Muslim country that has been associated with the Ottoman Empire and violence. De Bernières wanted to do the Turkish people justice in his novel. The novel is therefore portrayed from the Turkish point of view and the author sympathizes with the Turks, not with the Greeks.

Representation of Turkish-Greek relations

“Birds without Wings” by Louis de Bernières

1. NOVEL *“BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS”*

1.1. General information

1.1.1. About the author

“Birds without Wings” is a contemporary British novel. It was written in 2004 by the British author Louis de Bernières and is his sixth novel. Almost all of his works are situated in distant countries and deal with the topic of war. *“Birds without Wings”* is no exception. Furthermore, Louis de Bernières has a personal experience with the army.

He was born in London in 1954 and joined the army at 18 but left after spending four months at Sandhurst Military Academy. In 1993, he was selected as one of the ‘20 Best of Young British Novelists’. (Reynolds, Noakes 18; louisdebernieres.co.uk; Section ‘About’).

Although his novels take an anti-war stance, Louis de Bernières is not a pacifist. *“Birds without Wings”* sheds light upon the events that destroy human life and lead to atrocities and suffering. The author criticizes in the novel, among other things, the violence of ideologies, and wars fought for the purpose of remaking the world.

“I am not anti-war per se. For example, I thought the Second World War had to be fought. It would have been shameful not to fight against Hitler. I know

sometimes you have mortal duty to resist oppression, that's it. But what particularly vexes me is when you get great ideas, often in the name of God or in the name of communism or whatever. Possibly even in the name of democracy. ... You get these great big ideas which sound terribly noble and even patriotic but which actually produce a fantastic amount of evil. ... I hate it when people do evil things in the name of big ideas.” (themorningnews.org).

1.1.2. Setting

This novel deals with universal and timeless issues such as wars, religion and intercultural relations. It could therefore be set in many eras and places throughout history. Louis de Bernières decided to set the story in the Turkish village of Eskibahçe in South Western Anatolia during the 1900s. This setting is ideal for a historical novel because the area went through many geopolitical and social changes at that time.

Although Eskibahçe is a fictional town, it is based upon Kayaköy/Kayaköe town (Greek: Levissi or Karmylassos; it was once ancient Lycia) near the popular tourist destinations of Fethiye and Ölüdeniz in southwestern Turkey, the ruins of which still exist today. Kayaköy is a tragic monument to how Christians and Muslims can live side by side in peace. (americanturkishsociety.org).

Historically, Turks and Greeks had lived together in this region for centuries, the Turks as farmers in the Kaya valley and the Greeks living on the hillside dealing in crafts and trades. It used to be a thriving Greek village but it was completely deserted in 1923 (population exchange following the Turkish War of Independence) and it had become a ghost town after the Greeks had been driven out. (kayakoy.net).

It was part of the former Ottoman Empire but now belongs to Turkey. The story takes place in the last days of the Ottoman Empire, before, during and after World War I. The book captures the rise of Turkish nationalism that went along with the killing of Armenians and Muslims in the 19th and early 20th century.

De Bernières dedicates his novel to:

"...the unhappy memory of the millions of civilians on all sides during the times portrayed, who had become victims of the numerous death marches, movements of refugees, campaigns of persecution and extermination, and exchanges of population." (Bernières, "Birds without Wings" Preface).

1.1.3. Author's inspiration

Louis de Bernières explained in the 2004 interview by the Observer what inspired him for writing "*Birds without Wings*":

"I went to south-west Turkey and there's a ghost town there. It used to be a mixed community, as described in the book more or less, and they obviously had a wonderful way of life, quite sophisticated. The town was finally destroyed by an earthquake in the Fifties, but it really started to die when the Christian population was deported. It was walking around that very special place that gave me the idea." (guardian.co.uk/"I know...").

The author had, among others, personal reasons for the choice of the novel's theme. His maternal grandfather was severely wounded at the battle of Gallipoli

(this is also portrayed in the book) and he retraced his steps while researching part of this novel. (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” Preface).

1.2. Structure

1.2.1. “Birds without Wings” as a palimpsest

In the novel, several layers of history are captured. “*Birds without Wings*” is a kind of a palimpsest, writing into the empty gaps in history. In the original meaning, a palimpsest refers to a writing material (as a parchment or tablet), a manuscript page, scroll, or book that has been written on more than once, scraped off, and used again. The word ‘palimpsest’ comes from two Greek roots (palin + psEn) meaning "scraped again." The earlier writing is incompletely erased, often legible and therefore resulting in an intermingling of texts. (freedictionary.com).

The term palimpsest is also used as a metaphor to describe the "overlapping of texts with one another," and the ways that meaning is "gradually built upon previous meanings in a continual process of intertextual linkages". It contains diverse layers or aspects which are apparent beneath the surface. (merriam-webster.com).

1.2.2. Combination of plot threads

In spite of this apparent complexity, the plot of “*Birds without Wings*” can be divided into two subplots. The historical background depicting the rise of the Republic of Turkey overlaps with the story told by various characters. This combination makes

the book interesting because it is not merely a historical novel with dry descriptions of historical events, but a novel with a message.

Louis de Bernières: “A book is a message to the world, and it would be nice to think that people might still hear the message after my death.”

(americanturkishsociety.org).

“Louis de Bernières dislikes the image of historiography as an abstract and cruel branch that views human suffering from an unconcerned perspective like an ‘anthill observer’.” (Lidové noviny review).

“I do distrust history very much for a number of reasons. One is that new evidence, new testimony, new witnesses are always coming to light. The other is that most history is written by people who have an interest in their side coming well out of the story... We are always revising history, you see, so it’s difficult to write as if there’s a final version.” (Reynolds, Noakes 15).

For this reason, not all the historical data in the book is accurate. The harmonious depiction of multicultural cohabitation is too idyllic. Intermarriage was not as common as is mentioned in the novel and Christians usually had to convert to Islam, not the other way round.

According to “*Birds without Wings*”, it looks as if the Kurds were primarily to blame for what happened to the Armenians. Louis de Bernières is pro-Turkish and therefore he describes mainly the atrocities committed by Turkish enemies. The bloodshed caused by the Greeks when they occupied Asia Minor is described in a detailed way.

“In all the hundreds of years of occupation the Turks never did anything to us that was half as bad as what we Greeks did to each other in the civil war.”

(Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 20).

“The Franks were lucky, because Greek traders arrived and set up stalls on their beaches, and didn't care about the shrapnel shells bursting all around them. We had very few Greek traders coming to us, because we had no money anyway. This trading with the Franks made many of us hate the Greeks, because we were sure that many of them were from Ottoman lands. Greeks will trade with anyone, even the murderers of their own mothers.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 364).

Since the author is not objective, he steps into the narrative, expressing his own ideas. When commenting on the Turkish-Greek War, he portrays the Turks as victims and those who took their revenge for past events.

History plays a special role in most of de Bernières' novels. History itself changes but some things remain the same – e.g. basic human characteristics. It is no wonder then that such horrible events as wars happen. According to philosophy, evil is not entirely bad because it helps us to appreciate the good. Bad experiences can serve as a means to avoid repeating mistakes. Unfortunately, humankind is incorrigible, as history proves. Louis de Bernières is known for his sense of humour. First of all irony is one of his favourite means of expressing his opinions.

Interview with Robert Birnbaum who is The Morning News' contributing writer:

RB: "Is it possible for any Muslims to find your story blasphemous?"

LdB: "The book should offend everybody." (themorningnews.org).

Louis de Bernières makes fun of people because they are imperfect like the world itself. It is easy for the reader of "*Birds without Wings*" to see what the author is criticising. Sometimes, he expresses it openly and sometimes he uses irony in the characters' speech to bring to attention the absurdity of particular historical events.

"No, from now on you are Greeks, not Ottomans. And we are not Ottomans any more either, we are Turks." The sergeant held out his hands and shrugged. "And tomorrow, who knows? We might be something else, and you might be Negros, and rabbits will become cats." (Bernières, "*Birds without Wings*" 527-28).

Some parts of the book may remind the readers of folk tales. Louis de Bernières tries to imitate the way people think and talk. The characters are essential to him. Throughout the book, many foreign words and sentences can be found. The author uses primarily Turkish, but also French, Greek, and Italian. This helps to make the atmosphere of the book more authentic.

De Bernières wanted to put by the oriental Turkish culture closer to the readers. He therefore tried to copy in his book the rhythm and word order of the Turkish language. This "illusion-making" has been criticized, partly due to the false usage of this language. (jsse.revues.org).

He could have let it checked before publishing and it would also be practical if the novel contained a glossary. It is however not difficult to deduce the meaning of most

of the Turkish words from the context, because mostly they refer to some foods or clothes, such as 'cacik', 'pilav' or 'fez'. This experimenting could partly represent Turkish identity because these are words that belong to this culture.

In this case, Louis de Bernières analyses relationships among people who are separated violently. It is a historical fiction showing the influence of events that concern not only states and societies as a whole, but also the lives of individuals. The readers can see the post-war effects and the consequences of Turkish-Greek conflicts. The village remains in a bad state - the Turks were brutalised, the Armenians murdered and the Greeks deported. The novel captures not only the past but it also contains hints about what could happen in the future, because it provides an insight into human nature.

1.2.3. Narrative

De Bernières' quote regarding his writing style gives the reader an idea about his method: "I never think of the setting first. I think the setting is dictated by the narrative and I am mainly interested in narrative. That's really what drives my writing." (jsse.revues.org).

The narrative of "*Birds without Wings*" consists of many parts (there are over one hundred chapters in the book), and the story is told by a large number of different characters. The style of the narrative changes depending on who tells it and there is no definable central character in the novel. The plot is very complex, it is written in both first and third persons. It contains many shifts in time. Particular events are retold by more than one character, and consequently, the stories overlap. The book may seem choppy at first because these stories are told from different perspectives, but in the

course of time, the wider picture is understood by the reader because these stories are interconnected. The novel could be categorised as a record of life constructed of various experiences. It is almost like a painting – many small parts together, creating a meaningful whole. The depth of the novel is in the impact it has.

“*Birds without Wings*” was referred to as ‘*a War and Peace for our time*’. (guardian.co.uk/”I know...”). Not only the structure of “*War and Peace*” by Leo Tolstoy, but also its significance is similar to that in “*Birds without Wings*”. Both of these works contain a large cast of characters and they combine more plot threads from which many of them are based on real events. “*War and Peace*” does not take place in the 20th century as “*Birds without Wings*” but in the 19th century during the French invasion of Russia at the time of the Napoleonic wars. In contrast to Louis de Bernières, Leo Tolstoy was a pacifist, he was against all wars, no matter whether offensive or defensive. (tolstoy.org.uk).

1.2.4. Comparison with “*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*”

Partly thanks to the structure of the narrative, “*Birds without Wings*” is de Bernières’ own most favourite book. The reading public, however, appreciates more his fourth novel “*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*”. (independent.co.uk).

The subject of both of these books is very similar because they have a common topic: changes caused by modernity. The plots are set in isolated Mediterranean villages. There are a large number of characters and some of them appear in both novels. Each of these characters has an individual life but they are all affected by shared historical events. In both of these novels, real historical figures as well as fictional

characters can be found. In “*Birds without Wings*”, the real historical person is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in “*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*” Benito Mussolini. As portrayed in these novels, the price for modernity is too high and mostly innocent people have to suffer because of the egoism of the authorities.

In contrast to “*Birds without Wings*” that is set in modern day Turkey during the First World War, “*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*” takes place on the Greek island of Cephalonia during the Second World War. The description of historical events overlaps with a love-story in both books.

“Where ‘*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*’ was the work of a romantic young man, ‘*Birds without Wings*’ is the sadder, grimmer novel of a mature writer, whose rage at human cruelty and stupidity is Tolstoyan.” (louisdebernières.co.uk).

In contrast to “*Corelli’s Mandolin*”, where the author draws attention to a couple of lovers (the daughter of a Greek doctor Pelagia and Italian soldier Antonio), in “*Birds without Wings*” he presents various couples, both ideal and problematic ones, and he also describes more kinds of love (children and their parents, friendship etc.).

Louis de Bernières was disappointed after the 2001 film adaptation of “*Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*” because it was too commercial and it contained significant differences from the novel. (Reynolds, Noakes 7).

For this reason, he decided not to write a movie script of “*Birds without Wings*” for a British or a Hollywood studio but for a Turkish one. (independent.co.uk.).

This is quite striking because on one hand, it is largely known that de Bernières sympathises with the Turks, on the other hand, however, the movie will probably not be objective, first of all in terms of the Armenian genocide (Turkey could deny it).

1.3. Plot

1.3.1. Characters

The stories in “*Birds without Wings*” are told from different points of view depending on which character tells them. With each chapter, the reader learns more about the events therein. The story-telling consists predominantly of characters’ feelings and thoughts. Mostly they are touching and sad as if it helped the figures to share their worries with the reader. Although the author pays attention to detail, the characters are not described in a detailed way. They are only known for a few striking features but otherwise they are a bit mysterious. The reason why it is like this may be due to the large number of characters. All of them have good and bad qualities, no one is just good or just bad.

“That’s how I feel about the human race. None of us are entirely good or bad. The beast within is very easily let out, if given permission.” (themorningnews.org).

The novel begins in Eskibahçe with descriptions of the everyday life of its inhabitants. The stories are in the beginning full of harmony, they are reminiscent of fairy-tales, for example those of *The Arabian Nights*. The reader however starts to anticipate a change for worse, when **Iskander the Potter**, one of the characters, who likes to tell proverbs, mentions the tragedy of a couple. "Destiny caresses the few, but molests the many..." (Bernières, “*Birds without Wings*” 5).

Philothei is a beautiful Christian girl, and **Ibrahim** her childhood friend and Muslim to whom she is betrothed. The author follows them from childhood to adulthood. Ibrahim must go to war and when he comes back home, he argues with Philothei. After this, he kills her accidentally, and goes mad.

War has a negative influence on all relationships in the book. Childhood friends **Karatavuk** and **Mehmetçik** are inseparable until the Ottoman Empire declares war on the Allies. The simple life of the inhabitants of Eskibahçe turns into chaos. The young men of the village are sent to fight, or to work in labour camps. “Jihad” (holy war) is declared against the Christian Greeks and because of it the Turks cannot trust the Greeks. For this reason, Mehmetçik is not accepted to fight in the war because he is Greek and only Karatavuk becomes soldier. The horrors of war are thus portrayed from the Turkish point of view. The battle of Gallipoli has a negative effect on Karatavuk, he experiences many brutalities. This part of book deals with ethnic and religious prejudices and it describes a soldier’s life. The war has a destructive effect not only on those who fight but also on civilians. In order to emphasise the futility of war, some scenes of the novel are paradoxical. For instance, before killing each other, the enemies exchange food and they even play cards together.

Louis de Bernières also uses symbols in “*Birds without Wings*”. As for example, poppies have an allegorical meaning in the book.

“...in spring the poppies came up like a corpse makes maggots. I imagined that each poppy was a message from a soldier, and each poppy was scarlet because of a soldier's blood, and I remembered all those years back home when for some reason all the poppies came up pink, and people used to remark on it and wonder what it meant...” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 407-8).

One of the most popular and most quoted poems from the war, “*In Flanders Fields*” by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, written during the First World War, also uses the image of red poppies as a reference to fallen soldiers.

Mehmetçik is deported with other non-Muslims to a labour battalion but he defects and becomes a brigand. The war causes dramatic changes to the village. The villagers are desperate, they do not know how to deal with the new difficult situation.

Karatavuk is at first very supportive of “jihad”, but after witnessing and committing the senseless horrors, he changes his mind and views war as absurd.

“If you are a soldier, you are forced to think about God more than those who are at home... You believe that God caused every second of your destiny to be written on the fortieth day after conception, and so you do not complain about hardship and horror, and you know that every single little thing that happens is because God wills it. This is a great comfort, knowing that God carries us in the palm of His hand, just as a man might carry a fledgling in the palm of his hand. You realise that there is no point in resisting the will of God, and so you recite the martyr's prayer for the hundredth time, and so you say to yourself and your comrades 'Allah koruson', and you go over the trench parapet shouting the name of God, knowing that whatever horror comes upon you, it is only the first difficult step to paradise. There are very few people, and I was one, who begin to wonder why God wishes such cruelty and suffering upon His flock, and, when people say 'God is merciful', feel perplexity and a contrary feeling stealing over them. It is only people like me who wonder why God does not do just one good miracle, and make the world perfect in an instant.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings“ 384-85).

Similarly, **Rustem Bey**, the landlord and town protector (aga = the leader) is rather sceptical towards war:

“I have seen battlefields strewn with the bodies of young men, and old ones too. I have smelled the corpses when there wasn't enough time to bury them before they began to rot. I've seen what happens to the women and the children...”
 (Bernières, “Birds without Wings“ 298-99).

Rustem Bey could be perceived as another “bird without wings” of this novel. He takes revenge on both his unfaithful wife **Tamara** and her lover. After he kills the lover, he drags Tamara to the town square to be stoned. This scene proves the impact of crowd psychology. All the people present join in, including people who are until now portrayed as kind-hearted. Individuals mostly behave differently from what is typical for them when they are among a crowd of people.

Author's interest in the human ability to kill and hate one another is clear throughout the novel: “I'm interested in where violence comes from and how perfectly decent people can be dragged into committing it.” (guardian.co.uk/”I know...”).

Tamara survives only thanks to **Abdulhamid Hodja** (the local imam = Muslim spiritual leader), because he saves her. Then, Rustem Bey goes to Istanbul to find a mistress. He chooses a Circassian courtesan Leyla, who is in reality Greek and only pretends to be Circassian. In life, things are sometimes different than what they seem to be. People are usually too trusting and others exploit it for their own profit. The chapters about Rustem Bey can be found throughout the whole book. When it comes to the population exchange between the Turks and the Greeks, Leyla reveals her identity, leaves Rustem Bey and goes with other Greeks to Greece. She is the only one looking forward to going there. Rustem Bey makes friends with the Italian first lieutenant **Granitola**, but this friendship ends when the Italian troops are sent back to Italy.

Rustem Bey represents persistence and solitude. He experiences unpleasant situations from which it is difficult or impossible to escape and no matter what he does, he is alone.

Every character in *“Birds without Wings”* can be classified according to religion, except for the odd character **Dog** who lives in the ancient tombs near the village. We only know about him that he cannot speak because someone damaged his mouth by putting hot iron into it. The book depicts many examples of brutalities people commit against each other and this is one of them. With these almost naturalistic images, the author wants to shock people by what brutalities some people are capable of. He intentionally did not specify Dog’s personality:

“Because his identity is such a mystery, nobody can use his identity against at the end of the book. He can’t be deported or anything. Nobody knows what he is, they don’t know if he is a Christian or Muslim or what.”

(themorningnews.org).

Although the novel reflects contemporary world, some scenes show the differences in people’s understanding of the world. The novel contrasts modern-day thinking and the traditional one that is based on superstitions. **Ayse** and **Polyxeni**, two friends (one Muslim, the other one Christian) want to send a message written in tears on the wings of a dove to Polyxeni’s dead mother. As they are both illiterate, they decide to ask **Daskalos Leonidas** (Christian schoolmaster passionate for Greece) for help.

“It’s incredible! A man with that much education, and he didn’t even know about how to get a message to the dead.” (Bernières, *“Birds without Wings”* 85).

1.3.2. *Birds' metaphor*

The “wingless metaphor” is quite popular among authors. As for example, George Gordon Byron expressed himself that “Friendship is Love without his wings”. (famous-quotes.com). The novel by Louis de Bernières deals with a large number of philosophical issues such as the contrast between good and evil, the topic of happiness, the sense of human existence and death. The image of birds represents human weakness.

The title of the book refers to the saying by Iskander the Potter: "Man is a bird without wings and a bird is a man without sorrows." (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 48).

“That is actually a saying from the Middle East. ... There is also a song by [Mikis] Theodorakis, who wrote the music to Zorba, called “I Am an Eagle without Wings,” and I know perfectly well what he means by that. We want to be splendid and free and beautiful, but we are earthbound. And it’s a metaphor for the condition of mankind.” (themorningnews.org).

The birds appear in various forms throughout the novel. Their singing is often mentioned in order to draw the reader into the plot, and remind them of the book’s title. They can be found in a cage in front of almost every house in Eskibahçe, Ibrahim gives a dead bird to Philothei, doves carry letters to dead people and Mehmetçik and Karatavuk got their names after clay whistles shaped into birds that Karatavuk's father made for them. Mehmetçik’s real name is Nicos and Karatavuk’s Abdul. Mehmetçik means in Turkish ‘Red Robin’ and Karatavuk ‘Blackbird’.

The birds also have a symbolic meaning in the book. The villagers in Eskibahçe are portrayed as wingless birds that are unable to escape from the reality that is full of uncertainty and disorder. They themselves are aware of the fact that there is no chance to flee the suffering and their fate, although they would like to.

“Arms aren’t wings,” said Polyxeni... “If we had wings, do you think we would suffer so much in one place? Don’t you think we would fly away to paradise?” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 59).

Karatavuk compares at the end of the novel people with birds:

“We were birds without wings... For birds with wings nothing changes; they fly where they will and they know nothing about borders and their quarrels are very small... But we are always confined to earth, no matter how much we climb to high places and flap our arms. Because we cannot fly, we are condemned to do things that do not agree with us. Because we have no wings we are pushed into struggles and abominations that we did not seek...” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 621).

People generally dream of a place or state of great happiness where everything is as they would like it to be. We are human beings and in our dreams, we can fly and do whatever we want but in real life, we are unable to get free from certain situations such as suffering and death. Man is a bird without wings and for this reason can never be completely free.

De Bernières uses the image of birds also as a meditation on the progress of technological developments. He clearly divides nature from industry, doubting the

possibility of a symbiosis between them and he depicts man as the source of the problem.

“I expect that by now you will have seen an aeroplane also, and we wonder what you think of such things. We are not sure that they are good, because God gave it to birds to fly and to us to walk. If we are to become like birds, what will the birds become?” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 356).

As the book advances, the story contains more and more historical events and the topic of war becomes one of the central subjects. “*Birds without Wings*” portrays the efforts of political independence as the trigger of the struggle between Greeks and Turks.

1.3.3. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

The stories told by the characters of “*Birds without Wings*” overlap with the biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The author uses the biography as description of both Kemal’s life and historical events that in the book influenced the life of people in Eskibahçe. Mustafa Kemal plays an important role in the book because he represents the outside forces such as wars and the rise of Turkey, that caused immense social and political changes. (Recenze Sever).

Louis de Bernières describes Kemal’s life from his childhood to his death. He focuses first of all on the events that have something to do with his role in the wars and in the modernization of Turkey but he also mentions details about his life. As for example, he explains the origin of his name (Mustafa = ‘The Chosen’, Kemal = ‘Perfection’, Atatürk = ‘Father of the Turks’), he mentions his friends and lovers and

the people who he hated, he writes about his alcoholism and many lucky events in times of war from which he survived. It is clear that the author cannot know the actual details about Kemal's life, mainly about the way he spoke and behaved. He is therefore partly an unreliable narrator because we as readers have to decide what facts are based on history and what is fiction.

Louis de Bernières has mixed feelings concerning Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He labels him "the man of destiny" and he admires his strength and ability to predict things:

"He is practically a mythical figure. He is almost superhuman like a god or something." (themorningnews.org).

On the other hand, he criticises his human weaknesses such as addiction to alcoholic beverage rakija and his ruthless struggle for power at any cost.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) is known as 'The Father of the Turks' and considered to be 'the nation-builder' and 'the national hero'. Thanks to his military genius, he defeated the invading Western European forces and reshaped the whole region in his image. (Pravec 5-6).

He rose through the ranks of the Sultan's army, led many successful battles (he was a victorious commander of the Gallipoli War in 1915) and finally emerged as the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey (1923-1938) under the name Atatürk. (Criss 7).

He was an important person in the Great War and in the Turkish War of Independence. His decisions affected life of many people. He led the Young Turks' revolution and established Turkey as a modern, secular country, which

was ethnically cleansed of its Greek-Christian population. Thanks to Kemal's reforms, Turkey received a relatively substantial European character. (Pravec 105).

“Revolutions take place in a relatively short period of time and change dramatically the life of all country by changing the country's ruling system. Reforms only improve the life of citizens by changing or correcting existing laws. Revolutions are mostly more violent than reforms.” (Random House Dictionary; 1621, 1649).

Mustafa Kemal decided to apply both revolution and reforms. He became convinced that Islam was holding the Turkish people back, 'locking them behind the door that separates the medieval from the modern age'. (Bernières, "Birds without Wings" 42).

“Sultan was no longer Muslims' religious head. Sharia (the Muslim law) was replaced by the public code which was based on Switzerland pattern; the church was separated from the state and women gained the same rules as men had.” (Encyklopedie osobností 46).

Mustafa Kemal was obsessed by his idea of modernizing Turkey. De Bernières mentions in the chapters about him Kemal's love-hate relationship with Turkey. On one hand, he was willing to die for Turkey, he wanted the Turks to have their own state because he was convinced about the big potential Turkish people have. On the other hand, however, he criticised many things. He was disgusted by the fanatical way Muslims pray to God, he wanted them to wear clothes that would look European (he was first of all against 'fez' - head covering) and he was also aware of Turkish illiteracy of that time.

Kemal was aware of significant problems of multi-ethnic and multi-national state with a range of confessions as the Ottoman Empire was. He wanted to create a new national identity. In order to solve the literacy problem in modern Turkey, he decided to reform the existing language. In 1928, he abolished the Arabic script and incorporated the Latin alphabet with the Turkish. (Lanning 201, 203).

When he asked how long it would take to implement the new alphabet into the Turkish language, most of the professors and linguists said between three to five years. Kemal was said to have scoffed and openly stated, "We shall do it in three to five months". (themorningnews.org).

Mustafa Kemal always wanted to realize his plans as soon as possible and he hated when things did not go in the way he planned them. He was however not such an emotionless man as de Bernières presents. Many times, de Bernières comments on the futile deaths of soldiers who fought under Kemal's leadership and describes the situations where Kemal sacrificed his soldiers just in order to gain more time for a larger number of soldiers to come.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: "Some leaders, who fail to consider what a terrible tragedy war is, have been pursuing aggressive objectives... In these difficult times, the destiny of the world should be in the hands of leaders who have a conscience and character." (Criss 114).

"Although fiercely nationalistic when it came to upholding Turkey's prestige and progress, Atatürk never displayed xenophobia [fear of foreigners]. As for example, he welcomed and employed foreigners." (9).

In de Bernières' description, Kemal did not trust other nationalities than the Turkish. During the wars, he relied only on himself. Instead of supporting Turkey's ally Germany, he kept repeating how clear it was that Germany would lose.

“His worldview that he constantly employed for the future of his country was ‘to catch up with contemporary civilization’ (muhasır medeniyete erişmek). (7). According to him, it is necessary to respect one another. “There are many countries, but a single civilization. In order to make progress, every nation must join this one civilization.” (114).

“More than seventy years after his demise are his name, values and worldviews still alive. It is questionable whether Turkey would have received the independency without Kemal and in what form it would have existed nowadays.” (8).

He was a great defender of the idea of peace at home and in the world. He explained his ideals about the responsibilities of humankind to each other by saying "Humankind is a single body and each nation a part of that body. We must never say 'What does it matter to me if some part of the world is ailing?' If there is such an illness, we must concern ourselves with it as though we were having that illness". (allaboutturkey.com).

“Atatürk was a man of peace not just because he witnessed much misery and devastation that wars brought. He reiterated on many an occasion that war was murder unless it was fought for defensive purposes.” (Criss 8). Louis de Bernières shares the same opinion on war as Mustafa Kemal.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1. The Ottoman Empire

“*Birds without Wings*” is based on contrasts. Louis de Bernières creates for the reader a harmonious environment where diverse nations such as Turks, Greeks and Armenians live together peacefully for centuries. They all call themselves ‘Ottomans’. Thanks to friendship and love, they are able to overcome their cultural differences. Both Christians and Muslims pray to the saints of the other’s religion and they intermarry. All of them speak Turkish. Christians learn the Greek alphabet in order to read and write Turkish in the Greek script. Muslims are illiterate, they only learn to recite the first lines of the Koran in Arabic.

The Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society which remained loyal to the Sultan (the Ottoman “aga”). Considering that different religions and races mixed together, there was a relative tolerance in the Ottoman Empire.

It started to crumble by corruption and the national 'Young Turks' revolution, when the radical nationalists (Kemalists after their leader Mustafa Kemal) revolted against the political order of that time. They refused to be controlled and ruled by the old Ottoman government but first of all, they wanted to enable Turkey to become part of modern civilization. (The Oxford Encyclopedia, Volume 7).

2.2. The Turkish-Greek War and the rise of Turkey

The village of Eskibahçe and its inhabitants were violently divided after generations of intermingling. It came to the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War in 1918. Parts of Turkey started to be occupied by the victorious powers. At first the Western Europeans came, the Ottomans called them 'Franks' or 'Frankish people'. The British, the French and the Italian occupied Anatolia from all directions. The Italian invaded Eskibahçe to forestall the aim of the Greeks to create a Greater Greece of the Byzantine Empire, but they finally established good relations with the Muslim villagers. (turecko.org; guardian.co.uk/"I know...").

Louis de Bernières refers to it in "*Birds without Wings*" in the sections called '*First Lieutenant Granitola*'. Instead of the Italian Army, the Greek Army started to plunder Turkish cities and the villages.

The Greeks made a claim on large areas in Asia Minor. There were large Greek populations across the whole of western Turkey - in Smyrna, now Izmir, there were more Greeks than in Athens. (turecko.org; guardian.co.uk/"I know...").

The Sultan declared a holy war against the invaders. The Muslims were conscripted as soldiers and the Christians were sent into labour battalions. Louis de Bernières leaves in "*Birds without Wings*" the impression that the Turks' revenge can be justified.

"In Smyrna the last great catastrophe of the war takes place. It is now time for the Christian population to become the mirror of the Muslim one. Having seen

what the Greek troops did to Anatolia, the Turkish troops are in the mood for revenge.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 503).

“Be that as it may, one day we discovered that there actually existed a country called “Greece” that wanted to own this place, and do away with us, and take away our land. We knew of Russians before, because of other wars, but who were these Italians? Who were these other Frankish people? Suddenly we heard of people called “Germans,” and people called “French,” and of a place called Britain that had governed half the world without us knowing of it, but it was never explained to us why they had chosen to come and bring us hardship, starvation, bloodshed and lamentation, why they played with us and martyred our tranquillity.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 4).

The Turkish War of Independence against Greece ended with Greek defeat and thus confirmed the rise of the Turkish state. Mustafa Kemal became the first President.

2.3. The Treaty of Lausanne; population exchange

The population was too heterogeneous in the Republic of Turkey. Among the Turks, there were also Greeks. It was no longer possible for them to live in a Turkish state. The Greek delegation suggested a "Christian and Muslim populations' exchange programme" and the Turkish side accepted it. This agreement called “The Treaty of Lausanne” (or “Lausanne Treaty”) was signed by the governments of both states in July 1923. The criterion of the mutual citizen's exchange was not nationality but religion, which was a remarkable feature of this arrangement. (turecko.org).

“The space for free decision-making is narrowing. The decisions are made for us (and without us) by different people.” (Ganthaler, Hodovský, Zima 41).

The treaty of Lausanne served as a means of demarcation because it should have led to a more unified character of the states but it was a ruthless act that brought about among other things many deaths. The Treaty of Lausanne could be basically characterised as a religious cleansing. From a moral perspective, it is even nowadays a controversial issue. The people involved in this treaty were forced to leave their homeland and they did not have any say in the matter.

First the Armenians were deported. They were dragged off from the region in a death march. Christians, who were considered to be Greeks, even though they spoke only Turkish or only an archaic form of Greek, were shipped to Greece (Crete) to live as strangers amongst people who called them Turks, in spite of their shared Greek Orthodox religion. As a result, many new migrants were herded into ghettos where they remained isolated and jobless for a long time. They were transplanted to replace the Greek Muslims, who did not speak a word of Turkish in return and who were meant to repopulate Kayaköy, but it never happened. There were not enough of them. The Turks were distrustful of Christian houses. After the Greeks left, the village started to be vandalised and soon it fell apart. There was talk of Christian 'ghosts'. The place was completely abandoned in 1957 after a huge earthquake. (guardian.co.uk/”Chasing the ghosts...”).

The Christian villagers of Eskibahçe learnt about the Lausanne treaty at the last moment. De Bernières’ depiction of Turkish-Greek cross-border deportations is very

sad. The Christians who were forced to move to Greece did not want to leave the bones of their relatives in their homeland and insisted on carrying the bones with them. The Muslims helped the Christians carry their loads.

The central point of the book is the village of Eskibahce and not a particular character. According to Louis de Bernières, “people’s identity is together with the place in a symbiotic relationship. People influence the place they live in and it helps them to create their identity.” (jsse.revues.org).

Both the people who had to leave the country they were born in and also the people who stayed, suffered a loss of identity. In his prologue, Iskander the Potter says that he misses the Christians after they were removed from Eskibahce:

“Life was merrier when the Christians were still among us...” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings“ 1).

“Without them our life has less variety, and we are forgetting how to look at others and see ourselves. Also, since they took their icon of Mary Mother of Jesus with them, there are some who think that we have had less good luck than we did before.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 5).

As far as the Lausanne Treaty is concerned, it is obvious that it was not easy to incorporate the large numbers of Greek and Turkish citizens involved, into society. Both countries had to face many problems, not only the Governments but first of all the people who were deported and had to get used to their new situation.

At the time the exchanges took place, the Greek population in Anatolia was about 2.6 million, about 1.5 million of which (= more than a half) were

uprooted and sent to Greece.

Greece at that time had a population of about 4.5 million people, was defeated in Asia Minor and economically almost bankrupt. The inflow of 1.5 million Anatolian Greeks caused major social problems to the Anatolian Greeks returning to Greece as well as the Greek population of Greece. Most of the displaced people lacked proper housing, medical and social care and work.

Reintegrating into Turkey was less of a problem for those Turks coming from Greece, about 500 thousand in number. At that time Turkey had a population of about 20 million, a much larger land mass than Greece and was therefore more able to absorb the migrants. The relatively low numbers of returning Turks, the availability of land and housing in Turkey relative to Greece made the reintegration of Turks into Anatolia less problematic.

From the long-term point of view, this population exchange turned out to be advantageous for both Greece and Turkey despite the above mentioned difficulties. Both states have become nationally and religiously more homogenous to a large extent. The relocation of the Ottoman Greeks from Turkey to Greece helped to enrich the economic and cultural life of Greeks in the Greek state. The exchange of the two populations led to the reduction of internal ethnic and religious conflicts, which would probably break out on a larger scale if the Greeks and Turks, Christians and Muslims, lived in big numbers in direct personal contact for a greater length of time. (Hradečný 52).

According to the statistics, the population exchange turned out to be positive for Greece as well as for Turkey but Louis de Bernières emphasizes that profit at any cost is not good and with his novel *"Birds without Wings"* he tries to show how desperate the

victims of the deportations were. During these hard times, many people lost their homes and loved ones and they had to walk with heavy loads to a distant place where a life of isolation awaited them.

This book portrays both the positive and the negative side of humanity. People of different cultures were able to live peacefully together but everything changed after the wars. The Balkan wars followed by World War I, and then the conflict between Turkey and Greece led to religious and racial prejudices. Lawlessness and ethnic cleansing in particular is another important theme of the book.

2.3.1. *The Armenian Genocide*

The Armenians were a threatened minority in Ottoman Turkey. They were Christians with a distinct and separate culture. The Ottoman Empire committed a series of violent acts against this minority in 1894-1896 and 1909 but the massacre that occurred in 1915 is probably one of the worst crimes of our age. The tragedy happened in what is now Turkey but to this day, Turkey refuses to admit there was a genocide.

The militant nationalists who ruled Turkey in 1915 regarded the Armenians as a non-Turkish treacherous minority. With the false accusation that during World War I the Armenians had revolted against Turkey to help Russia, the Turkish Empire embarked in 1915 on a systematic program to drive out Armenians. Before or shortly after they sent the Armenians marching away, the military-age men were rounded up and slaughtered. During the systematic expulsion and extermination of Armenians, the Ottomans confiscated the

property and possessions of dislocated and deceased Armenians and destroyed many historical and religious sites. These massacres resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians – estimates run from between one hundred to three hundred thousand – and the dislocation and impoverishment of many thousands more. The state used starvation as well as execution to kill the Armenians. By 1922, approximately 1, 5 million people had been killed. The Armenian Genocide is considered to be the first genocide ever.

The Turks are haunted by the past as well as the Armenians. Turkey defends the Ottoman rulers accused of genocide as if they were still alive. The argument that it was a relocation on a large scale has been used to justify the genocide.

The area in southwestern Turkey is full of villages once occupied by Armenians. Today, the population is largely Kurdish. When Armenians were driven out, the homes were taken over by Kurds.

Countless numbers of Armenian children and women were adopted. They only survived by abandoning their identity, taking Turkish names and converting to Islam. There is a saying among survivors: 'To have the genocide denied is to die twice.' (The Oxford Encyclopedia, Volume 3; youtube.com).

Our time, dating from the beginning of the twentieth century, has been afflicted by one mass murder after another, so frequently and in such massive destructiveness, that the problem of genocidal killing is worse than war. Until now, the world's peoples and governments have done little to prevent or stop mass murdering. Today, the world is not markedly better prepared to end this

greatest scourge of humanity. The evidence of this failure is overwhelming. It is to be found e.g. in Tibet, North Korea, the former Yugoslavia, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Rwanda, southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Darfur. In others, although no warning signals suggest immediate danger, mass slaughter could begin precipitously. Even the most civilized nations are capable of dehumanizing other races. (Goldhagen Preface xi).

It is more probable that a person growing up in a society considering a certain group of people to be evil or dangerous will be more likely to say yes to using violence to rid the society of them. (13).

Another influential aspect of a genocidal thinking is nation-building. It has encouraged our age's mass slaughters, from the Turks' annihilation of Armenians during World War I to the Serbs' various slaughters of the 1990s. Nation-building is a complex political process that includes states consolidating and extending control over territory, and forging in a heterogeneous society a dominant national identity. It often leads to the elimination of groups that do not fit the new nation. The Turks' annihilation of Armenians, the mass murders in various countries of postcolonial Africa, and others, even the Germans' slaughter of the Jews, have been attributed to nation-building. (24).

War can facilitate the mass extermination and elimination of hated or unwanted people. In various ways war makes people more likely to consider eliminationist initiatives. It encourages people to see violent and lethal measures as appropriate for dealing with real or imagined problems that had or would have been previously managed differently. War predisposes people to magnify threats, to believe tales of enemy crimes, and to attack suddenly in fear. It

provides readily believed justifications for mass slaughter, such as an enemy's organized attempt by a group of people to defeat their government or the needs of national security. War also creates new practical opportunities to act on eliminationist desires, by giving perpetrators better access to the potential victims, and by lessening the perceived cost of committing mass murder (one is, after all, already at war). (40).

The genocidal killing of Armenians has also become a controversial topic to some writers. One example comes from the German novelist Franz Werfel who wrote the book "*The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*". This story may remind us of Jews during the Second World War who were turned as well into scapegoats but were exterminated on an even larger scale.

2.4. Impact of outside forces

The author presents in "*Birds without Wings*" at first a peaceful atmosphere which he damages by the description of the problems and suffering caused by nationalism and religion. This contrast makes the reader feel sympathetic about the people involved in the process and it makes them think about the causes of the negative change.

Events portrayed in "*Birds without Wings*" are related to what happens nowadays. The striving for power has shaped history. The establishment of new states in the early 20th century caused many changes that have continuing consequences and ethnic conflicts that are current as well. The killing of Armenians during the period of

the Ottoman Empire may remind us of the holocaust of the Second World War and many other atrocities committed due to religious faith or ethnicity. The suffering and division of people in Eskibahçe can be compared to that in Iraq where both the civilians and the soldiers are affected by the selfish and silly actions of the people who are in control of the state.

“Birds without Wings” is a novel that can change reader’s point of view. It contains contrasting examples of human emotions and behaviour, the positive ones such as those showing sympathy, sadness for the suffering of others and the willingness to provide help and also the negative ones, for example cruelty during times of war. This difference emphasises both the absurdity of war and the happiness of peace. The novel shows that the costs of war are both political and personal. De Bernières presents the village before war, during the war and finally he describes the consequences of the war and deportations. Time plays an important role here. As time passes, things change for the worse. The reader may get the impression that characters’ life is too short because the book deals rather with emotions than with the description of actions. The characters wait for their loved ones and their memories are disjointed chronologically. They have to cope with feelings of loss and sadness when they are forced to leave their homeland.

2.5. Universality of the novel

Louis de Bernières could have chosen another historical event that demonstrates a change for worse but this is a good example of one of the most complex eras in the most unstable area of the world. Despite the distant setting and time period, some events in the novel may remind us of the current situation in the Middle East, former USSR or

the Balkans. The story deals with human feelings and it tries to make a whole from the parts. It describes the human nature by means of various characters who are different but basically the same. Since the story can be applicable to the events that happen even nowadays, the reader may feel himself a part of the book. This identification makes the comprehension of the strained Turkish-Greek relations easier and it helps to acknowledge the meaning of the novel. The story raises feelings of sympathy and sadness over people's suffering.

“This novel tells us more about our flawed human condition than is comfortable to know, and that is its greatest strength.” (powells.com).

De Bernières is interested first of all in human character and reactions of people to difficult situations. The book contains sad as well as happy moments of life. Cruel behaviour alternates with good. The author makes the reader aware of the fact that wars and political decisions affect not only individual people but also and more importantly the communities as a whole. The book could be seen as a warning for people living in modern times. It deals with the consequences of unfair behaviour and unwillingness to accept different behaviour and beliefs.

THE CAT

She was licking the opened tin for hours and hours without realising that she was drinking her own blood.

Spyros Kyriazopoulos (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” Preface).

We are often our own biggest enemies. Mostly, we complicate our own lives. People usually make mistakes, we are not machines. However, some acts are very bad and spoil

the lives of innocent people, such as wars that turn people into killing machines. *“Birds without Wings”* portrays characters who are forced to live their lives during hard times.

3. RELATED TOPICS

3.1. Nationalism and its consequences

According to Louis de Bernières, the excessive nationalist movements of the early twentieth century, first of all the Greek ones, brought discrimination and spoiled intercultural relations: “Nationalism has been a scourge that brought misery and suffering to millions and continues to do so.” (thriftbooks.com).

In fact, both the Turks and the Greeks were nationalistic. “It is one of history's little ironies that in one century the Greeks should have fought a war of independence against the Turks, and in the following century the Turks should have fought a war of independence against the Greeks.” (Bernières, *“Birds without Wings”* 503).

The two main nationalists of *“Birds without Wings”* are Mustafa Kemal and Daskalos Leonidas. Mustafa Kemal represents Turkish nationalism and he is based on a real historical figure. Although he has to struggle hard to fulfil his vision, he is successful and he manages to be the head of the newly founded state of Turkey. Unlike him, Daskalos Leonidas is a fictional character, he makes efforts to teach the Ottoman Greeks in Eskibahçe Greek, he is a member of a ‘secret society’ and he vainly tries to spread his vision of the reunification of Greece.

“There were many who said that Thrace, the Black Sea coast, the west coast of Turkey, and, of course, Constantinople, were historically Greek, and mainly

populated by Greeks, and ought to be Greek again. It was all about reconstructing Byzantium ..., and bringing about "Greater Greece," ..., and the whole caboodle was known as 'The Big Idea'." (Bernières, "Birds without Wings" 258).

Louis de Bernières calls nationalism "that specious patriotism of the morally stunted," and says about the Greek Leonidas in "*Birds without Wings*":

"Like all who have such beautiful visions, his were predicated on the absolute belief that his own people and his own religion and his own way of life were superior to others, and should therefore have their way. Such people ... are the motor of history, which is finally nothing but a sorry edifice constructed from hacked flesh in the name of great ideas." (Bernières, "Birds without Wings" 131).

Both Mustafa Kemal and Daskalos Leonidas were fanatics, who believed that their nationalistic views were right.

The novel depicts how fanatic nationalism and religion can dehumanise people. It contains many examples of nationalist tendencies: "Serbia for the Serbs, Bulgaria for the Bulgarians, Greece for the Greeks, Turks and Jews out!" (Bernières, "Birds without Wings" 16).

The nineteenth century French historian Ernst Renan wrote that a nation is "a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours." (wilsoncenter.org). This quotation shows by means of hyperbole that the nationalistic dislikes have no reasonable explanation and that they are based on the influence of history and myth.

3.2. Multiculturalism

“*Birds without Wings*” is a parable of the fact that the cohabitation of people with different beliefs and origins can be harmonious given that they respect one another and accept their differences. This story tries to prove that people with different roots can live together. It therefore expresses the concept of multiculturalism.

The term ‘multiculturalism’ refers to the coexistence of many cultures in a locality, without any one culture dominating the region. (Ganthaler, Hodovský, Zima 41).

Multiculturalism is a philosophy of the twentieth century rooted in the social protests that accompanied decolonization and the civil rights struggles of the Cold War era. More distantly, it is a consequence of the heterogeneous societies created by immigration, settlement, slavery, and colonialism, which have struggled to create a single national culture without diminishing minority traditions.

Multiculturalism argues that every “culture” within a nation deserves respect, recognition, and the protection of civil society. Multicultural societies can protect, for instance, a person’s right to be a dual citizen, to wear religious or ethnic clothing, to speak any one of several official or unofficial languages, or even to maintain separate historical traditions of the same event. (The Oxford Encyclopedia Volume 5; 292-93).

The first half of the twentieth century is noted for numerous sad events and changes. Many countries started to develop multiculturally because of population exchanges. In the course of time, under the influence of nationalism, some of the countries wanted to get rid of the influence of other cultures. The transformation of the

Ottoman Empire into Turkey after the First World War could serve as an example of this phenomenon. After that, Turkey developed a homogenous character but as we can see in *“Birds without Wings”*, it also caused the division of the inhabitants into two groups.

3.3. Fundamentalism

“Birds without Wings” contains episodes such as blind patriotism, fundamentalism and greed, which often result in war.

Fundamentalism wants to go back to the principles that used to be safe and reliable. It mostly results from the feeling that everything was better before. This attitude, which is adopted first of all by elderly people, has probably something in common with the general human tendency to forget unpleasant things and keep in mind only the good ones. Idealisation of the past always appears in hard times when it accompanies, for example, social and economic changes. Considering the fact that fundamentalism perceives the present to be defective and future to be dangerous, they are too strict with themselves and also with their contemporaries when searching for salvation in the past. It creates the tendency to take holy words for granted, word by word, in order to avoid any new false step. Fundamentalists easily get on the wrong track when trying to assert their principals (the holy word, nation's virtues etc.). The holy war turns then quickly into an inner war and crusades against other groups or nations are launched. It is said in the Koran (= the holy book of the Islamic religion) that

whoever dies in this war, gets into the seventh, highest heaven. (Ruediger 123-24).

“It's a holy war,” said Iskander resignedly. “It's been declared a holy war. God will provide, God willing. What can I do? I've got to go. The Franks have declared war with us, and tomorrow I've got to go. If I die I go to paradise, God willing.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 291-92).

The word combination ‘holy war’ is paradoxical, too. It is terrifying how ruthlessly fundamentalists deal in the name of God. They are willing to use violence or even to kill people when asserting their ‘holy’ ideologies because they believe their aims reflect God’s intentions. For non-fundamentalist people, it seems absurd and incomprehensible. When we recall one of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder”, we may get the impression that fundamentalists in fact ignore God and that they themselves feel like God or someone who has been ‘chosen’ and has the right to take decisions about other people’s lives and about what should happen.

De Bernières is against all fanatical concepts. Some of his characters, such as Rustem Bey in this paragraph, express what the author himself thinks:

“I have an opinion about holy war, which in general I must keep to myself. I have no wish to be known as a heretic. It is ... that if a war can be holy, then God cannot. At best, a war can only be a necessity.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 299).

Fundamentalists live in constant extreme danger, because they believe that God is on their side. Even though they are against the whole rest of the

world and moreover even against the most of their own members of a religion, they feel strong and prepared to face any challenge. (Ruediger 125).

3.3.1. The role of religion

“*Birds without Wings*” portrays both the positive and the negative effects of religion. At the beginning of the book, Louis de Bernières presents the positive effects. He tells stories about how the inhabitants of Eskibahçe mixed their religious habits and how happy they were. The Greeks and Turks were able to turn their religious differences into advantages and that is how they lived in harmony. They mixed their customs and rituals together because they believed in the power of this “doubled” faith. For example, they tied rags on the red pine, ate olives from a “special tree” and pregnant Christians drank from a bowl that was engraved with verses from the Koran and slept with a cross on their bellies. They all wanted to make their life safer and they believed this could help them.

Gradually, however, the author describes the struggle that different religions caused after the intervention of outside forces such as wars and nationalism. The list of the negative effects of religions is greater than that of the positive ones.

People in Eskibahçe were used to living in peace. They kept praying and believed in the power of their religions but after experiencing suffering, most of them started to feel betrayed thinking about why God had punished them, and gradually, they started to lose their faith.

During the deportation of Greeks from Eskibahçe: “Ahead of them, leading them away, almost unable to see through his tears, bearing the icon before him,

pausing in his orations to kiss its silver frame, Father Kristoforos continued to intone every prayer for mercy that he could remember... he sang, acutely pained by the irrepressible suspicion that his prayers were winging up to an empty sky.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 541).

“Abdulhamid Hodja had all his life accepted that anything that happens is the will of God, and therefore one must learn acceptance, but in the face of his afflictions he had discovered a certain rebelliousness. He had questioned God a great deal in his moments of lucidity.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 427).

The whole book circles around the words ‘religion’ and ‘faith’. Ottoman Greeks are not allowed to fight in a ‘Holy War’ and Armenians are viewed as untrustworthy. The different religions that are at first tolerated and even perceived as something positive from which people of other faiths could learn, change in the course of time into the main source of conflict.

“It is one of the greatest curses of religion that it takes only the very slightest twist of a knife tip in the cloth of a shirt to turn neighbours who have loved each other into bitter enemies.” (Irb.co.uk).

“If I ever get to meet God In Person I shall suggest quite forcefully that He impartially abolish their religions, and then they will be friends for ever.” (Georgio P. Theodorou – one of the characters in “*Birds without Wings*” commenting on the Turkish-Greek relations). (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 511).

The basic ideas of religion are positive but sometimes people understand certain principles in their own way, which is in some cases the wrong way. The next step is that crimes are committed and people are killed in the name of religion.

“The triple contagions of nationalism, utopianism and religious absolutism effervesce together into an acid that corrodes the moral metal of a race, and it shamelessly and even proudly performs deeds that it would deem vile if they were done by any other.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 286).

Fanatical religion is harmful. Louis de Bernières expresses doubts about the value of religion in our modern times because of the huge shift in human thinking. According to him, religion divides people and complicates their lives. Because of this, he is very radical and even blasphemous in some parts of the book.

“...the primary epiphenomena of any religion's foundation are the production and flourishing of hypocrisy, megalomania and psychopathy, and the first casualties of a religion's establishment are the intentions of its founder. One can imagine Jesus and Mohammed glumly comparing notes in paradise, scratching their heads and bemoaning their vain expense of effort and suffering, which resulted only in the construction of two monumental whited sepulchres.” (Bernières, “Birds without Wings” 157-58).

3.4. Tolerance and prejudices

Louis de Bernières gives in “*Birds without Wings*” many examples of both religious and cultural tolerance and hatred. He overemphasises them intentionally in

order to build up a cautionary message highlighting the importance of tolerance. In the harmonious environment of Eskibahçe, de Bernières wanted to present the picture of how ideal life could be if people respected each other. This creates an impression of 'artificiality' on the reader, the story reminds us of a fairy-tale rather than a reality whilst, at the same time, stirring feelings of nostalgia and longing for such an idyllic way of life.

Tolerance is a very important element in the society. It is the starting point of meaningful dialogue and it can improve interpersonal relationships. Due to its importance, this topic is popular with many writers. For example "*Nathan the Wise*" (1779) by the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing is a ring-parable which contains similarly to "*Birds without Wings*" a message. The central topic is the religion. In "*Nathan the Wise*", there is one more religion in addition to Christianity and Islam: Judaism. The ring-parable is about a man who had three sons but only one ring. He was unable to decide which of his sons should get the ring and he therefore had two more rings made. It was impossible to distinguish the original ring from the new ones. This parable suggests that the religions are related, it is a metaphor to the fact that all religions are basically the same and that they come from one 'father'.

The story of "*Birds without Wings*" by Louis de Bernières represents a parallel with our current times. There are many violent disagreements between nations, and among racial people groups, currently happening all over the world. Most of them are based on prejudices.

Stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination influence people's thinking and have negative consequences for the quality of life. They are anchored in their minds

and thus certain social categories are discriminated due to negative attributes.

(Hnilica 206).

In "*Birds without Wings*", many of the characters are affected by prejudices, for example the Greek teacher Leonidas. He hates the Turks and shows his contempt of them because he is convinced that they lack intelligence. After he reads a letter sent from the war by the Turkish boy Karatavuk, he changes his mind.

"I must say I was very surprised when I was told by your parents that you have learned to read and write Turkish in the Greek script, apparently taught by one of my own erstwhile pupils. I had become accustomed to believing that Turks are intellectually idle to the last degree, and it was salutary to discover that there is at least one among you with both brains and initiative, causing me to speculate as to whether the backwardness of your race is more explicable in terms of deficient education than natural inability." (Bernières, "*Birds without Wings*" 354).

Conclusion

There are many history books that deal with the topic of Turkish-Greek relations. Surprisingly, there is almost no fiction on this issue. The novel "*Birds without Wings*" by the British novelist Louis de Bernières is therefore an exception and moreover, it reminds the reader of the fact that Turkey and Greece were not always enemies in the past, because the author does not only point to the periods of conflicts but he emphasises the period of time, when both the Turks and the Greeks lived peacefully together. At the same time, the novel helps to understand why Turkish-Greek relations are not ideal currently.

To find a way to peace, it is important to know the causes of conflicts. Turkish-Greek relations are complicated first of all because of unsolved problems that have their roots in history. People have the tendency to remember mainly the negative experiences and historical events. Trying to reach certain goals, the periods of conflict between the Greeks and the Turks have been emphasised. The history of cooperation between these two nations has not been remembered very often for this reason, and consequently, Turkish-Greek relations are commonly associated with hostility.

Louis de Bernières emphasises in his book that Greeks and Turks were able to live in a mixed society together, because they respected one another. By means of the story he wrote, he wants to make people aware of the fact that all humans are equal, no matter what their origin or religion. The novel "*Birds without Wings*" contains a message because it makes the reader aware of the fact that it is possible to live in a peaceful environment even if the people are culturally diverse.

People with different attitudes towards Turkish-Greek relations can be found. Some of them are very aggressive and try to spread intercultural hatred e.g. on the Internet and some of them try to emphasise the similarities and the importance of a respectful relationship. Unfortunately, the former case is much more common due to ingrained prejudices.

It would be wise to stop looking back on the negative events of the past and try to take advantage of the multicultural influence as portrayed in "*Birds without Wings*". As we could see in the example of "*Birds without Wings*", the influence of different cultures can be positive and people should therefore try to make the best of their differences.

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