ABSTRACT. What is the effect of a society’s culture on the creative writers living there? Few cultures have had such an event as Atatürk’s 1920 revolution that changed Turkey from a monarchy ruled by sultans into a republic. How would such a dramatic shift in a country’s history be reflected in the accomplishments and characteristics of its writers? In this study, the authors investigated 948 eminent Turkish writers. Variables of gender, era, type of writing, education level, profession, and winning an award were all analyzed. The type of writing (fiction, poetry, plays, or nonfiction) and the era in which the writing was produced were both predictive of whether an author won a literary award. Before 1920, fiction writers received more awards than poets; after 1920, poets received more awards. In addition, professional writers were more likely to win awards than were professional politicians. Reasons for these findings are discussed with an emphasis on cultural and historical influences.

Key words: creative writers, creativity, cross-cultural, Turkey

IF YOU LIVE IN TURKEY, many times you will exclaim with mirth that the situation you have observed is “just out of Aziz Nesin.” Aziz Nesin (1915–1995), one of the most eminent Turkish writers, was famous for his unique satire. He was an outstanding writer with insightful observations and criticisms about the distortions in the changing social norms, political and economic structures, and cultural formation. Nesin was famous not only in Turkey...
but also in many Western countries. He was vocal about his atheist beliefs and left-wing politics, and as a result he was often the target of political and religious persecution. Nesin grasped and reflected the social anguish of the Turkish people and was regarded as a cultural idol (Jacobson, 1995; Kiray, 1995).

Nesin’s life as a successful writer in Turkey was entirely different from the life of a successful creative writer in Western society. It is rather difficult to imagine Stephen King being sent to jail for his political views or John Updike being the target of a firebomb. Yet studies on creative writers usually focus on Western writers, perhaps without an awareness that generalizations to writers in other cultures may not be appropriate.

A turn in Turkish history offers a particularly rare opportunity to study the impact of culture and environment on a writer’s work. For as many troubles as Nesin endured, he was still luckier than writers who belonged to earlier generations. In 1920, Ataturk led a revolution that changed Turkey from a monarchy ruled by sultans into a democratic republic. This radical change in the social structure presents a chance to examine how the creative life of a country is shaped by its sociopolitical life.

The creative life of non-Western cultures is rarely examined in and of itself. Although there have been several studies comparing different types of creative writers (e.g., Kaufman, 2001b; Ludwig, 1995; Simonton, 1975), few have specifically examined similarities and differences in creative writers across different (non-Western) cultures. Mohan and Tiwana (1987) studied creative writers from India and found that writers were more likely to be introverted, whereas Hu and Gong (1990) found that Chinese writers were more likely to be extraverted. In both studies, writers were found to be more neurotic and psychotic than non-writers. Most Western studies, in contrast, have found that the personality variable most likely to be associated with creative writers is openness to experience (e.g., Kaufman, 2002; Perry, 1999).

Niu and Kaufman (2003) studied Chinese writers and found two results of note: Chinese writers who experienced political persecution (such as imprisonment) were more likely to win an award than writers who had not suffered any persecution, and female fiction writers and poets were more likely to have experienced a personal tragedy than male writers. However, Niu and Kaufman were not able to replicate earlier findings on mental illness in Western writers (Kaufman, 2001a, 2001b) that found higher rates of mental illness in female poets and award winners than in male writers, female fiction writers, and writers who did not win awards.

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These results indicate that creative writers from different cultures do not seem to possess the same personality characteristics. Differences in conventional rules and societal norms between Western and Eastern cultures might result in different roles being ascribed to their writers. Culture may well play a central role in how writers develop and the ways in which they are productive.

Political persecution may be another important determinant of writers’ identities and professional development. Writers who were politically persecuted in China during the Cultural Revolution were, in fact, the most successful writers in a democratic environment. This finding seems to demonstrate the association between social norms and regulations on creativity. A strict political environment and lack of tolerance may suppress creativity, even if only for a particular time period. And whereas Western female poets were more likely to suffer from mental illness, Eastern female poets were more likely to have experienced personal or politically based tragedy (Kaufman, 2001b; Niu & Kaufman, 2003).

These findings raise interesting hypotheses about the relationship between culture and individual differences in writers, but further analyses of different cultures and creative writers are needed to make generalizations about the characteristics of creative writers, especially of writers in non-Western cultures. Questions about the relationships between different types of writers (fiction writers, poets, playwrights, and nonfiction writers), a writer’s occupation, awards won, gender, and education level have never been addressed empirically in the Turkish population.

These questions carry further weight because of Ataturk’s revolution. From 1517 to 1920, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by sultans who were viewed as both political and religious leaders in Islamic countries. Islam became the dominant factor in the culture and life-style of the Ottomans. The symbolic function of the sultans was intended to protect and maintain the power balance among the Islamic countries; however, it also distorted social and cultural development. The use and application of the Arabic alphabet to Turkish writing led to a series of practical problems, such as illiteracy and ambiguous communication. Ideas were more likely to be expressed orally instead of being written down. Perhaps as a result, literature and creative writing were less appreciated by the general public (Aydin, 1993).

Some sultans wrote poetry, but they considered the written word to be the realm of the elite. Many sultans discouraged the population from pursuing the written arts (particularly poetry), preferring instead to encourage storytelling and singing. This situation lasted until 1920, when Ataturk established modern Turkey and helped create a democratic republic.

How would this new liberty affect the lives of Turkish writers? We predicted that writers, particularly poets, would be more successful in the new era. We also examined background data on individual writers (the type of writing, gender, profession, education level), cultural variables (coming from a prominent family, being politically persecuted), and awards won.
Method

Our sources for biographical data were the Dictionary of Names in Turkish Literature (Necatigil, 1999) and Poets and Writers in Turkish Literature (Ceyhan & Kurdakul, 1999), which contain information on 948 Turkish creative writers. The two sources overlapped. The Dictionary of Names in Turkish Literature included the names of all the writers in our sample, and although the number of writers in Poets and Writers in Turkish Literature was smaller, we used this source for additional biographical information of writers for which the first source was insufficient. Four different types were included in these books: fiction writers (of both novels and short stories), poets, playwrights, and nonfiction writers. (See Table 1 for a full breakdown by gender and type of writer.)

Several different variables were identified for each writer. Some variables focused on the individual writer’s background (gender, type of writing, education level, and profession). Other variables were cultural, such as era of birth (before or after 1920), family prestige (being a member of a royal or famous family), and political persecution (imprisonment or death sentence). Another variable was winning an award either in national (e.g., Sedat Simavi Literature Awards or Turkish Language Association Awards) or international competitions (e.g., Del Duca Award in France or Legion d’Honneur Award).

Gender, all cultural variables, and winning an award were scored as dichotomous variables. We categorized the type of writer into the four groups: 1 for fiction writers, 2 for poets, 3 for playwrights, and 4 for nonfiction writers. We categorized their professions in 5 groups: 1 for those who were professional writers; 2 for those with a profession in politics; 3 for those with a profession in science; 4 for those with a profession in social science; and 5 for those involved in clerical work. For level of education, we used 5 groups: 1 for those who did not graduate from high school; 2 for those who had a high school education; 3 for those who had an undergraduate education; 4 for those who had master’s degrees; and 5 for those who had PhDs.

We conducted several analyses on the basis of these biographical data. We tabulated the demographic data, after which we examined the interaction between the type of writer (fiction, poetry, plays, and nonfiction) and the era in which they wrote (born before or after 1920). We used the information of whether or not a writer won an award as the dependent variable. After this, we analyzed the relationship between the writer’s profession (politics, science, social science, writing, and clerical work) and winning an award. Finally, we studied the relationship between individual and cultural variables and winning an award.

Results

Sample demographics showed that for education level, 4% had less than a high school education, 29% had a high school diploma, 53% had an undergraduate
degree, 3% held master’s degrees, and 11% had doctorates. For the cultural variables, 8% came from a prominent family, and 10% were persecuted politically. A slight majority (53%) were born after 1920, with 43% born before 1920. The remaining 4% had missing data on this dimension. Female writers made up 10% of the sample (see Table 1). A substantial minority (40%) of the sample had won an award.

We performed a chi-square analysis to determine whether winning an award differed by era. We expected that awards would be more common after the 1920 change in leadership because of the end of cultural repression. As expected, more awards were received after 1920 than before 1920, $\chi^2(1, N = 904) = 114.85, p < .01$.

For the next analysis, we used logistic regression. Logistic regression is an appropriate analytic approach for situations in which the criterion variable is dichotomous. Predictor variables in a logistic regression equation can be either continuous or categorical and need not be normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Logistic regression yields a probability that an event (the dependent measure) will or will not occur. For these analyses, this event was whether a writer won an award or not.

We performed a direct logistic regression equation with the type of writer and era (pre- or post-1920), predicting whether or not an award was won. We used data from 404 pre-1920 writers and 500 post-1920 writers. There were 44 writers who were excluded from the analysis because of missing data. The results showed a statistically significant model, $\chi^2(2, N = 904) = 139.73, p < .01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .19$, indicating that the type of writing and the era in which a writer was born predicted whether or not that author would win an award. The overall prediction success rate was 67.3%. Table 2 shows the regression coefficients, Wald statistics, and odds ratios for the predictors. Both of the Wald statistics were significant at the $p < .01$ level, indicating that they both predicted whether an award was won.

As a follow-up, we performed a chi-square analysis on those who won an award to compare the type of writing and the era. The result revealed a significant effect, $\chi^2(3, N = 371) = 12.85, p < .01$. As predicted, after 1920 there was a marked increase in the number of awards given to poets, as well as to playwrights, compared with awards to fiction and nonfiction writers, whereas before 1920, more fiction writers received awards.

<p>| TABLE 1. Gender Breakdown for Four Groups of Writers |
|---------|------|------|-----|-------|------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Plays</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>948</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To investigate how predictive the individual variables of gender, type of writing, education level, and profession are on winning an award, we performed another direct logistic regression. We included all 948 writers in the analysis. The fit of the model was very good, $\chi^2(8, N = 948) = 55.73, p < .01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .08$, showing that the individual variables did predict whether an award was won. The prediction rate was 64.1%. The type of writing, education level, and to some extent, profession, were more predictive of winning than was gender. Professional writers were more likely to win an award, and professional politicians were less likely to win an award. Writers with a higher level of education were somewhat more likely to win an award. Regression weights, Wald statistics, and odds ratios are shown in Table 3. A closer examination of the education level data showed that among those who won an award, those with a bachelor’s degree were most numerous (56.1%), followed by those with a high school diploma (26.7%). Writers with master’s degrees and doctorates had lower rates of success (4.3% and 9.9%, respectively.)

We used a final direct logistic regression equation to test the importance of the cultural variables of era born, coming from a prominent family, and whether or not an author was persecuted politically. This model had a good fit as well, $\chi^2(3, N = 948) = 119.91, p < .01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .17$. The percentage of correct prediction was 66.3%. The model shows that era was especially predictive of winning; family prominence and political persecution were not very predictive. Statistics are shown in Table 4.

**Discussion**

The results of the present study showed that the type of writing (fiction, poetry, plays, or nonfiction) and the era in which the writing was produced both had significant effects on winning awards. These two variables may offer important clues about the cultural progress in Turkish society. Before 1920, fiction writers received more awards than poets. Three possible reasons may explain this finding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Wald test</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of writing</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>19.65</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Era</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>102.19</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Writer type: fiction; poet; playwright; nonfiction.
The first speculation involves the practical problems in the use of language. As mentioned earlier, during the Ottoman Empire, the native language was Turkish, but the Arabic alphabet was used. This written alphabet was inconsistent with the sounds of the spoken language and created an inconvenience in rhyme and linguistic properties of the poems written in that era, which led to many practical problems in the design of poems. This linguistic problem may have hurt the success of poets in the era before 1920.

The second possibility focuses on the attitudes of sultans toward writers. There was no stable or systematic reward system in any area of writing at this time. Rather, personal views or interests of the sultans in literature were the basic determinants for the future of literature. Although some of the sultans were very talented poets, the future of poetry depended on the attitude of the sultans toward the messages conveyed in poetry in general. Writers who wrote more positively about the sultan were rewarded by money or prestige, whereas those who were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Wald test</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of writing</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>26.41</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social scientist</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office/clerk</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Writer type: fiction; poet; playwright; nonfiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Wald test</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Era born</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>102.19</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominent family</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically persecuted</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negative were punished. Although poetry was also present in public life, poets often had to censor themselves to avoid insulting the sultan. This was another difficulty in the evaluation and rewarding of creative writing.

The third speculation includes the influence of the Koran, the holy book of Islam, on poets and poetry. The Koran was written in Arabic. Therefore, it did not have the same disparity between the letters and sounds that existed in Turkish writings. Because of its harmony and strong quality of rhyme, the Koran was considered the “perfect” poem. The fluency of the messages in the Koran was considered to be highly musical and phonetic, and the prayers in the Koran were read by Islamic authorities as lyrics rather than as written texts. The Koran was not just perceived as a religious book but also as a book of poetry. This link between the Koran and poetry may have increased the association between mysticism and the arts. If poetry is thought of as a mystical art, then an individual poet might receive less personal credit for a brilliant work. Fiction writers, in contrast, may have been more readily accepted and appreciated by the public. This dichotomy may have increased the difference in awards between fiction writers and poets.

After 1920, when the Turkish republic was established, democratic and secular political structure in the government was ensured. Freedom and reinforcement for all kinds of art, including creative writing, increased. For example, there was an increase in playwrighting. Before 1920, based on Islamic guidelines, women were not allowed to participate in social and artistic venues, and men and women were not permitted to participate together in any social event or meeting. Theater, therefore, was performed with no Muslim women; either non-Muslim actresses performed, or men performed as women (much as in Shakespeare’s time). Yet, although Shakespeare’s plays—and European plays of this time—appealed to all levels of society, Turkish plays were considered a low-level form of entertainment. Playwrights may have been able to make a living, but they were not highly respected (Kibris, 2001).

After 1920 however, Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, devoted special efforts to develop art and culture. He focused on increasing funding for theater, and he established conservatories that trained both male and female writers and actors. Playwrights became more respected and valued in Turkish culture (Kibris, 2001).

Another finding of this study was that professional writers were more likely to win an award than were professional politicians. Professional writers winning more awards makes sense, as writers who were talented enough to make their living at writing would also be talented enough to win more awards. But why would professional politicians win significantly fewer awards than other professionals? One possibility can be found in the research on leadership and personality. Those who are inclined to be leaders, such as politicians, are more likely to be extraverted and emotionally stable (Lindley & Borgen, 2000). Yet people who fit the profile of a successful politician and are extraverted and emotionally stable do not
fit the profile of a successful creative writer. In most cultures, people who are creative in the arts are more likely to be introverted and neurotic (see Feist, 1998). In other words, the personality factors that are associated with being a successful politician may be at odds with the personality factors associated with being a creative writer.

We found no significant relationships between gender, political persecution, and coming from a famous family. However, we found that level of education was an important determinant for winning an award. In the present study, we observed that whereas some measure of educational success, such as having a college degree, had a positive influence on a writer’s success, too much education, such as having a doctorate degree, seemed to inhibit success. Reasons for this inhibition may originate from the scholastic thinking patterns that are enforced in most PhD programs. Too much specialization in an area may lead to technical thinking that is not creative; thinking within the boundaries of a particular field of interest may lead one to become too convergent. Indeed, these findings are consistent with research on creativity and intelligence, in which intelligence is found to help creative performance up to a point (usually around an IQ of 120), after which point the relationship is either not significant or slightly negative (Getzels & Jackson, 1962; Simonton, 1994).

The findings of the present study shed some light on understanding creative writers in a different culture, particularly one in which such a dramatic revolution occurred. In Turkey, the era of a writer’s birth had an effect on his or her success. Fiction writers and playwrights were much more likely to be rewarded than poets and nonfiction writers, and professional politicians were less likely to win an award. And, as in other cultures, education helped creative performance up to a point. This study shows how cultural variables can affect which writers are successful in the public eye. A writer such as Aziz Nesin was able to survive and flourish in a culture in which creativity was often not rewarded or was greatly proscribed. How might his writing have been changed had he lived in New York? And how might John Updike’s writing be different if he lived in Turkey?

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