

The Ideal of the West, the Reality of the East. Towards a New Poetics of Ottoman Modernization in the Novels of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* (1890s-1900s)*

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In the introduction to his acclaimed collection of short stories called *Küçük Şeyler* (*Little Things*, 1891) Sâmipaşazâde Sezâi claims that nowadays novels –obviously referring to both the European and the Ottoman ones– “left behind their childish form of strange stories and odd narrations” (“garâib-i hikâyât ve acaib-i rivâyât”), are written in a “superb poetic style” and based on the “triumphs of science against the secrets of nature” and on the analysis of human heart and mind. Thus, he continues, the writing of novels today should be called “the science of literary anatomy” (“ilm-i teşrih-i edebî”).¹ Other contemporaries remember what decisive impact the texts of the new generation of writers who produced their first fruits in the late 1880s had on them. Mehmet Rauf (1875-1931), later a major figure of the New Literature (*Edebiyat-ı Cedide*) movement, tells us in his memoirs that as a teenager he devoured everything what there was new in Turkish literature, from Namik Kemal to Abdülhak Hamit, and a good number of French novels, too. However, it was only when he happened upon the newly published *Nemide* by Halit Ziya (1889) that he discovered a completely new world of fiction. Enraptured by the story, its style, its plot, its beautiful language, he felt that it changed the way he had used to view the Turkish novel. When reading a work by a French or an English author, he was always bemoaning the fact that there was no one like them among the Ottomans. It was Halit Ziya who, as he put it, “saved me from this orphanhood”.²

Statistical evidence suggests that there was a notable shift in the production of novels in the late 1880s and especially in the 1890s.³ What is yet more important is that



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1. The text is reprinted in Zeynep KERMAN (ed.), *Sami Paşazade Sezâi'nin Hikâye – Hâtıra – Mektup ve Edebî Makaleleri*, İstanbul, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1981, pp. 1-2.

2. Mehmet RAUF, *Edebî Hatıralar*, İstanbul, Kitabevi, 2008, p. 13. Hüseyin Cahit (YALÇIN) shares a similar recollection in his *Edebiyat Anıları*, İstanbul, Türkiye İş Bankası, 1975, p. 80.

3. Based on my own research in libraries and –for the period between 1908 and 1918– on the bibliographical data provided by Osman GÜNDÜZ in his *Mesrutiyet Romanında Yapı ve Tema II*, Ankara, Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1997, pp. 999-1048, I calculated the number of original Turkish novels and novellas published between 1850 and 1870 as 11, rising to 38 between 1871 and 1880, then to 77 in 1881–1890 and finally to 134 in 1891–1900, before dropping to 41 for the period of 1901–1910 and subsequently reaching an all-time high of 229 in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire (1911–1922). It should be noted that these numbers are provisional and will certainly be replaced by more accurate ones by further research. The calculation is complicated by the fact that it is sometimes very difficult to identify the publication dates, distinguish between adaptations/translations and original works and decide what to classify as a novel (*roman*, *hikâye*) or a novella (labelled by the authors as *nouvelles*, *küçük/ufak roman*, *uzun hikâye*, *büyük hikâye*). We can, however, safely assume that these variations would not significantly alter the picture I am presenting here.

the increase in quantity soon translated into a broad diversification of the genre and in the 1890s also into a structural change. As witnessed by a number of accounts and memoirs of Ottoman intellectuals and prospective writers, Ottoman-Turkish novel writing was in the 1890s undergoing a major transformation. It might be argued, at least vis-à-vis narration, that the Ottoman cultural metamorphosis culminated at the turn of the century, replacing the didactic, moralizing, pedagogic, socially engaged Tanzimat modes of writing. Referring to Reinhart Kosselleck, Şerif Mardin says that this era might constitute a “Sattelzeit”, a threshold, when history seems to be accelerated.⁴ In 1896, the first Ottoman-Turkish literary group was born. In February of that year, the poet Tevfik Fikret became, at the instigation of the highly respected novelist and poet Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem, chief editor of *Servet-i Fünun* (*The Wealth of Sciences*), a magazine published already since 1891 to popularize scientific knowledge. Under Fikret the journal tilted strongly towards belles-lettres and became the most important organ for a young generation of littérateurs, who created their own distinctive esthetics.⁵ The term that they used to describe themselves and by which they have been called by others is quite telling: *Üdebâ-yı cedide* (later *Edebiyat-i cedideciler*), or the exponents of New Literature.⁶

Authors of the younger literary generation, whose poetics crystallized at the turn of the century on the pages of *Servet-i Fünun*, strove towards the establishment of a new tradition of novel writing, which would have nothing in common with classical Near Eastern genres anymore and –at least in theory– draw solely on French realism. *Edebiyat-i cedideciler*⁷ were denounced by literary critics for their alleged elitist estheticism and mimicking of Western models, for the derivative character of their works and blatant disregard for Ottoman-Islamic realities. As this article will try to show, however, these authors succeeded –with much more artistic skill than their predecessors– in creating a unique “Istanbul version of the realistic novel”⁸ and, by looking into the depths of human soul, played an indispensable role as mediators between social changes and their psychical processing. We pay attention especially to

4. Şerif MARDİN, “Insights about the Servet-i Fünûn Movement”, unpublished text of a lecture held in September, 21, 2006 at the symposium *Novel as a Medium of Change: Cultural Transformation in the Tanzimat*, Princeton University, p. 1. I am indebted to the author for providing me with the text.

5. The journal was closed by the censorship in 1901. It resumed publication in 1925 and continued its activities until 1944. In the second period of its existence, however, it had long lost its prominence as a leading modernist literary magazine. The principle figures of the *Servet-i Fünun* movement were the poets Tevfik Fikret (1867-1915), Cenap Şahabettin (1871-1934) and Süleyman Nazif (1870-1927), and the prosaists Halit Ziya (Uşaklıgil, 1865-1945), Mehmet Rauf (1875-1931), Safveti Ziya (1875-1929), Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın, 1875-1957) and Ahmet Hikmet (Müftüoğlu, 1870-1927).

6. For *Edebiyat-i Cedide* / *Servet-i Fünun* see for instance Bilge ERCİLÂSUN, *Servet-i Fünunda Edebî Tenkit*, Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1981; Cahit KAVCAR, *Batılılaşma Açısından Servet-i Fünun Romanı*, Ankara, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1985; Selçuk ÇIKLA, *Kültür Değişmeleri ve Servet-i Fünun Romanı*, Ankara, Akçağ, 2004; Ali İhsan KOLCU, *Servet-i Fünun Edebiyatı*, Ankara, Salkımsöğüt, 2005.

7. Throughout the text, I use the terms *Edebiyat-i cedide* (New Literature) –or *Edebiyat-i cedideciler* for the members of the movement – and *Servet-i Fünun* / authors of the *Servet-i Fünun* interchangeably, as it was common already at the turn of the century. Turkish literary scholars preferred the term *Edebiyat-i Cedide* into the 1950s, while today preference is rather given to *Servet-i Fünun Edebiyatı*. For the emergence of the term *Edebiyat-i Cedide* see also the memoirs of Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL, *Kirk Yıl*, İstanbul, Özgür, 2008, pp. 628-629.

8. I borrowed this term from Ahmet Ö. EVİN, “Novelists: New Cosmopolitanism vs. Social Pluralism”, in Metin HEPER, Heinz KRAMER, Ayşe ÖNCÜ (eds.), *Turkey and the West. Changing Political and Cultural Identities*, London/New York, I. B. Tauris, 1993, p. 96.

the question of what new conceptions of *East* and *West* there emerged in the Ottoman-Turkish novel at the turn of the century, what purposes they served and how the epistemological change in Turkish literature of the 1880s affected the formation of a new esthetics of modernization. Investigating the major novels of the *Servet-i Fünun* period⁹, the aim of the article is to discuss the ideas about West and East produced by these literary texts and to look at the roots of these ideas. We suggest that despite the ostentatious l'art-pour-l'art-ism of authors like Halit Ziya, Mehmet Rauf of Safveti Ziya, their writings vividly capture the problems and tensions arising from the cultural transformation of the Ottoman Empire, and thus could be studied not only for their undeniable literary qualities, but also as a source for intellectual history or history of mentalities. However, we are more concerned with the practice of literature. Our goal is to identify ideological patterns –or, more generally, the world-view– hidden in the novels of this period and connected with the process of modernization rather than to present a social history of the *Servet-i Fünun* group and its place in late Ottoman social and political life.

Towards a post-Tanzimat epistemology of the Ottoman novel

At the beginning of the formation of a new paradigm in the perception and interpretation of West and East in Ottoman-Turkish literature, at the intersection of Tanzimat epistemology¹⁰ and esthetics and their dramatic transformation in the so-called *New Literature (Edebiyat-ı cedide)* there stand in the 1880s two important works: the theoretical study *Victor Hugo* (1885) by Beşir Fuad and Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem's novel *Araba Sevdası* (Carriage Affair, written 1889, published 1896). Both can be seen as the culmination of Tanzimat literature (1860s to 1890s)¹¹, bringing its premises to an absurd end and negating and overcoming its fundamental postulates.



9. The main sources of investigation are Halit ZIYA's *Mai ve Siyah* (1897) and *Aşk-ı Memnu* (1900), Mehmet RAUF's *Eylül* (1901) and Safveti ZIYA's *Salon Köşelerinde* (1898).

10. On the epistemological foundations of Tanzimat literature see Jale PARLA, *Babalar ve Oğullar. Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1993.

11. The literary Tanzimat does not correspond to the political Tanzimat (the reform era of 1839-1876). In the broader sense of the word, the term *Tanzimat literature*, or more specifically *Tanzimat novel* embraces authors who published primarily between the 1860s and early 1890s. These include, among others, the novelists Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Mizancı Mehmet Murat, Nabızâde Nazım, Şemsettin Sâmi, Fatma Aliye and Sâmipaşazâde Sezâi. Most of the authors of this time believed in the synthesis between Western technological achievements and some Western ideas on the one hand and Ottoman-Islamic spirituality and morality on the other. Their texts are a fascinating blend of both *Eastern* and *Western* narrative elements. Convinced about the social function of the novel as a guide through the stormy waters of the new era, they were preoccupied with delimitating the boundaries of modernization, constantly negotiating between identities and narrative forms and trying to open a new space between what they called *alafranga* (*alla franca*, the European way) and *alaturka* (*alla turca*, the Turkish way). More often than not, Tanzimat authors lament the incursion of destructive *alafranga* habits into the Ottoman society and, in the same breath, denounce evil-minded and ignorant people for labeling every immorality as *alafranga* and thus creating a bad image of Europe in the eyes of the public. However, they were also very critical of many practices, habits and traditions of the Ottoman-Islamic civilization that they considered an obstacle to reform and progress (like the *irrational* classic narrative forms of the Middle East, to name just one example). For the Tanzimat literature see for instance Güzin DINO, *Türk Romanının Doğuşu*, İstanbul, Agora Kitaplığı, 2008.

Written immediately after Hugo's death and more a defense of Zola's naturalism than a critical biography of Hugo, Beşir Fuad's *Victor Hugo* (1885)¹² is a stunning piece of cultural and literary critique, setting out a theory of the realistic novel, which for Fuad was a laboratory, in which the novelist-cum-scientist on the basis of a precise observation of his surroundings creates verifiable models of probable development. What made Beşir Fuad¹³ so exceptional among his peers is the fact that he did not criticize only some aspects of Ottoman society, but the whole Ottoman way of being, and saw the reforms of the Tanzimat (1839-1876) as an important, yet absolutely insufficient step forward on the way to a total acceptance of European civilization. He did not share his fellows' faith in syncretism. Opposite to the Tanzimat literati like Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844-1912), who were obsessed with translating, domesticating and integrating some selectively adopted Western elements into the Ottoman-Islamic society,¹⁴ he was convinced about the necessity of a radical transformation of Ottoman mentality which would encompass a definitive break-up with the *Eastern* way of life and a move towards what he saw as the highest stage in the development of human history: positivism in thought and naturalism in art.¹⁵

22 *Araba Sevdası*¹⁶, written two years after Fuad's death, is a literary reflection of Fuad's legacy, a “textual relativization of two contradictory epistemological systems”, rebutting the idea that these two systems could coexist.¹⁷ One can read Ekrem's novel on two levels. First, it can be seen as a critical portrait of Ottoman society at the turn of the century, a society facing a crisis of identity, and, second, as a literary representation of the collapse of the fundaments on which Tanzimat culture was built, as an expression of the impossibility of a meaningful communication and an *innocent* exchange between the Ottoman and Western civilizations that was until that time (at least in the eyes of many Tanzimat reformers) taking place. The principle tragedy of the novel's hero, Bihruz, does not lie, as is the case with the main protagonists of Tanzimat novels, in his uncontrollable emotionality or excessive *alafrangalik*, or Westernization, but in his constant misinterpretation of reality through Western texts. The lack of proper education and knowledge (be they *Western* or *Eastern*) prevented Bihruz to truly know the West, and, having no support in and grasp of his own culture either, he remained

12. The text is reprinted in Beşir FUAD, *Şiir ve Hakikat. Yazilar ve Tartışmalar*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi, 1999, pp. 34-156.

13. Beşir FUAD (1852-1887), a military doctor by training, was a major proponent of positivism and naturalism among Ottomans. He learned French, English and German and published translations from French (among them Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*). Later he became editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Ceride-i Havadis (Journal of News)*, published the scientific magazines *Hâver (East)* and *Güneş (Sun)* and wrote popular articles and books on mathematics, medicine, physiology, psychology, philosophy and literature. The main source on Beşir FUAD's life is the biography written by his friend Ahmet MIDHAT (*Beşir Fuad*, 1887; new edition published by Oğlak, İstanbul, 1996). For a scholarly biography see Orhan OKAY, *Beşir Fuad. İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Naturalisti*, İstanbul, Hareket, 1969.

14. On Midhat's views on the West, see Orhan OKAY, *Bati Medeniyeti Karşısında Ahmet Midhat Efendi*, İstanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1991.

15. A thread running through FUAD's *Victor Hugo* and his other writings is the clash between the “world of dreams” and “truth” or between “poetry” (*şîir*) and “reality” (*hakikat*) which lies at the core of the development of human thought and is expressed indirectly in the clash between East and West. Only rationality, science, positivism have an epistemological value, whereas poetry and metaphysics are characterized by arbitrariness, volatility and absurdity.

16. Recâizâde Mahmut EKREM, *Araba Sevdası*, İstanbul, İnkılâp, n.d.

17. PARLA, *Babalar*, p. 128.

trapped in a net of texts without context. The textual pastiche Bihruz was imprisoned in did not consist only of European texts. Pieces of texts of local provenience –be they parodical references to other Tanzimat texts or fragments of Ottoman poetry– were scattered there, too. In a very refined manner, Ekrem is able to achieve a *Verfremdungseffekt* (in regard to both the personality of the main hero and the action of the novel) in moments where he lets these two (or more) textual residua interact. Tanpinar aptly speaks about “a strong anti-poetics” (“*kuvvetli bir anti-poetik*”)¹⁸ of the novel, which travesties both Turkish and European authors and paints a tragic picture of society at the end of an era. *Araba Sevdası* is not only a novel of misreading taking place in the semantic abyss at the borders of two *texts* belonging to different traditions. It is also an act of mistranslation of cultural signs, leading to a total breakdown of the Tanzimat communication and translation process at the limits of two semiotic/cultural systems.

Both Beşir Fuad’s *Victor Hugo* and Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem’s *Araba Sevdası* introduced a new esthetics through the prism of which the following generation of authors would observe cultural and existential questions accompanying the transformation of their society. The two texts can be read parallelly as an incisive critique of the whole Tanzimat reform process, as the deconstruction of the epistemological foundations this culture was built on. And this critique was brought to its furthest limits: Beşir Fuad committed suicide and with a cynical accuracy noted the final moments of his life (producing another ‘story’ to hunt Ottoman writers for a long time to come), the novel *Araba Sevdası* ends in a total apathy. The peculiar interspace between *alafranga* (Eastern way of life) and *alaturka* (Western way of life) where one can place the Tanzimat novel disappears, and nothing meaningful takes its place. The productive border¹⁹ turns into an abyss, liminality into emptiness. Thanks to Beşir Fuad and Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem, the estheticization of the *question of West and East*²⁰ received a new dimension to be masterfully elaborated by the following generation of writers.



18. Ahmet Hamdi TANPINAR, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, İstanbul, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1956, p. 487; see also Beatrix CANER, *Türkische Literatur. Klassiker der Moderne*, Zürich, Olms, 1998, pp. 102-106.

19. I mean the productive frontier –be it real or imagined– between two cultural, semiotic and epistemological systems (*East* and *West*) at which socio-cultural identity of *us* in opposition to *them* comes into being. This is the space into which we must, in my opinion, place the Tanzimat novel: as part of intricate intertextual relations running vertically and connecting it to European literatures and European ideas, as well as horizontally, binding it to ideas, texts and institutions that represent the Ottoman-Islamic heritage and the Turkish version of modernity. Its position on the intersection of both axes is dialogical – constituting dialogue with other *texts* (in both directions, vertically and horizontally) – and ambivalent in the sense of its existence on the *borders of modernity*, as I call it, where it had to define itself vis-a-vis two semiotic systems, two narrative traditions. I developed this argument in my “Na hraničí modernity: Západ a Východ v turecké próze od Tanzimatu po hnutí Modrá Anatolie / On the Borders of Modernity: West and East in Turkish Prose from the Tanzimat Period until the Blue Anatolia Movement”, unpublished PhD dissertation, Charles University in Prague, 2008, esp. pp. 20-118.

20. In a very influential book, Berna MORAN sees the “question of East and West” and the “issue of Westernization” (*Batılılaşma sorunsalı*) as the principal theme of the Turkish novel from its very beginning until the 1950s. See Berna MORAN, “Türk Romanı ve Batılılaşma Sorunsalı”, in B. MORAN, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış I*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1999, pp. 9-20.

A new generation of literati

Despite the Panislamist tendencies and the conservative outlook of the Hamidian regime and its firm grip on political and cultural affairs, including extensive censorship, the continuous transformation of Ottoman-Turkish prose-writing towards more European realist and autonomous modes of expression did not stop –on the contrary, it accelerated in the last decade before the Young Turk Revolution (1908). This has to do, to a great extent, with a generational shift. The members of the literary group that gathered around the journal *Şerbet-i Fünun* –most of them born in the 1860s and 1870s– had usually received modern education in one of the new Tanzimat schools²¹ (or, as in the case of Halit Ziya, in a francophone Mekhitarist lycée²²) and were raised in the Westernized milieu of upper or middle classes in the spirit of the Tanzimat reform ideals. As Ahmet Ö. Evin put it, “[f]or this generation the learning of French was no longer an extension but the core of their humanistic curriculum; French had replaced Arabic while Persian remained as an endless resource from which could be gleaned striking words and phrases to enrich the imagery of Turkish poems written under Parnassian influence.”²³ The young men of letters were better versed in French novels than Diwan poetry and found greater pleasure in European music, painting and literature than in Ottoman-Islamic art.²⁴ The prosaist and journalist Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), editor-in-chief of *Şerbet-i Fünun* after 1900, alleges in his memoirs that he owed his “whole culture to the West, and especially to France. Eastern works had no influence whatsoever upon me.”²⁵ According to the novelist Şemsettin Sâmî his generation definitively realized that the Ottoman Empire fell behind Europe not only in technological development, but also in the spiritual sphere, in sciences, in literature and language, and was well aware that it was absolutely necessary that “we in our own literature develop the prose, the genres of the short story, the drama and the novel as in European literature.”²⁶ Even an author like Hüseyin Rahmi (Gürpınar, 1864-1944), who

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21. Mehmet Rauf studied at the modern naval academy (*Mekteb-i Bahriye*) with English instructors and an English training system, Tevfik Fikret, Safveti Ziya and Ahmet Hikmet at the francophone Galatasaray High School (*Mekteb-i Sultanî / Lycée de Galatasaray*), modelled on the French lycée system, Cenap Şahabettin at the Military Medical School (*Askerî Tibbiye*).

22. In his hometown, the cosmopolitan Izmir, the young Halit Ziya soon gained a reputation as an ardent admirer of all things Western. He devoured French books, dressed according to Parisian fashion and, in a short-lived journal called *Nevruz* (1884) that he published together with his friend Tevfik Nevzat, promoted Western manners and etiquette (cf. KAVCAR, *Batılılaşma Açısından*, p. 51 and p. 158).

23. Ahmet Ö. Evin, *Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel*, Minneapolis, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1983, p. 129.

24. Cf. Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL, “Mehmet Rauf”, in H. Z. UŞAKLIGİL *Sanata Dair*, Ankara, Özgür, 2014, pp. 668-679, esp. p. 672 (Mehmet Rauf and his passion for Western music and literature) and p. 676 (no interest in Ottoman literature and in Arabic and Persian).

25. YALÇIN, *Edebiyat Anıları*, p. 39. Cf. Hüseyin Cahit [YALÇIN], *Kavgalarım*, İstanbul, Tanın Matbaası, 1326 [1910], p. 12, where he says that with the exception of a few texts by Namık Kemal “we owed Turkish works absolutely nothing. Our intellectual upbringing (*terbiye-yi fikriyemiz*) took place between French books of literature, critique and philosophy.”

26. Şemsettin Sâmî, “Lisan ve edebiyatımız”, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat ve Musavver Şerbet-i Fünûn*, special issue, 1895, pp. 89-91, qt. in Niyazi BERKES, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi, 2004, pp. 381-382. Unlike the previous generation, Sâmî continues, the new generation knows European languages and literatures and became aware of the fact that every culture forms a whole and that material progress must be by necessity accompanied by cultural development: “The previous literary generation used to dress the West in an Oriental garb. Today’s generation looks at the West more closely and by doing so it is coming even closer to contemporary civilization.”

mocked the excessive Westernism of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*, speaks in the foreword to his novel *Şipsevdi* (*Quick to Fall in Love*, 1911) about the role which Western literature and thought played in the spiritual awakening of Ottoman youth: “The Western civilization has become a torch of awakening (*meş’ale-i intibâh*) for us [...]. When, in the period of autocracy, the light of our thinking and understanding was about to go out completely, it was kept alight by sparks that jumped here from the perfection of the West (*kemâlât-ı garbiye*). Authors who nowadays think and write well and protect freedom, these are exactly the brains that have been illuminated by these sparks of the West”.²⁷

Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler differed from the previous Tanzimat generation in several aspects.²⁸ If we look at their social position, we see minimal involvement in politics or higher bureaucracy. In contrast to the likes of Namık Kemal –yet to some extent similarly to the most productive late Ottoman novelist Ahmet Midhat– these intellectuals found the sense of their existence outside the bureaucratic apparatus or the public sphere and could imagine and tried to create for themselves a space in society as autonomous as that of their role models, French *hommes de lettres*. Pointing to the appearance of this new social role –that of the writer/novelist–, Şerif Mardin emphasizes their cohesiveness as a distinct social group with its own practices that replaced traditional social links still prevalent during the Tanzimat, but already eroding since the beginning of the reform era.²⁹ *Edebiyat*, literature, as if only now freed from its original meaning of *edep* (Ar. *âdab*)³⁰, or good manners/morals, meant for them a private space separate from the structures of the state, in which they could fully express themselves intellectually and artistically.³¹ And, as we shall see, it was also a space where they, disappointed by their own society, suffocating in the brooding climate of the Hamidian despacy and struggling with the bitterly perceived condition of being on the periphery of modernity, dreamt their dream about an idealized Europe. Didacticism and the perception of the novel as a tool for social mobilization were replaced by an analysis of human behavior, explorations of psyche and the concept of talent, or, as Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem expressed it, the “sublime innate quality” (“*hassa-i celîle-i fitriyye*”) of being able to “penetrate the veil of nature”.³² Despite their imperative of art for the art’s sake, *Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler* were, too, cultural mediators like their Tanzimat predecessors. However, they “concentrated upon the refinement and integration of forms introduced by the Tanzimat generation”³³ and were inherently opposed to social didacticism. Rigorous study of literary theory and efforts to find the perfect artistic expression were natural consequences of this reorientation.

27. Hüseyin Rahmi [GÜRPINAR], *Şipsevdi*, İstanbul, Mihran Matbaası, 1327 [1911], pp. 5 and 8. The foreword is dated 1909.

28. See footnote 12 for a brief description of the Tanzimat generation. A good introduction offers Orhan OKAY, “Tanzimatçılar: Yenileşmenin öncüleri (1860-1896)”, in Talât Sait HALMAN (ed.), *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi 3*, İstanbul, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2006, pp. 53-74.

29. MARDİN, “Insights”, p. 8.

30. For the way *âdab* became literature cf. Michael ALLAN, “How *Adab* Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institution of World Literature”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012), pp. 172-196.

31. MARDİN, “Insights”, p. 5.

32. Qt. in İsmail PARLATIR, *Recaîzâde Mahmut Ekrem*, Ankara, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, 1995, p. 56.

33. Jeniffer NOYON, “Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil’s *Hikaye* (the Novel) and Westernization in the Late Ottoman Empire”, in Walter ANDREWS (ed.), *Intersections in Turkish literature*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 127.



The novelists of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* did not utilize the adopted genre of the novel as a technology that was –like other imported technologies– to bring about social progress by instructing readers in the achievements and practices of *modern civilization* or warning them against the dangers looming in falsely understood Westernization. They rather aimed at a harder to describe and less palpable domain of individual pleasure, esthetic satisfaction and spiritual self-realization in Western-like art and culture. These men of letters wanted to write novels, not *Ottoman* or *local* novels, and be part of the universal novelists' experience, to contribute to the development of the art of the novel, not anymore bound by time and circumstances or social/didactic roles. They were not interested in creating an Ottoman version of naturalism (as Ahmet Midhat in his *Müşahedât*, 1891³⁴), nor producing a *national novel* (as Mehmet Murat in his *Turfanda mı Yoksa Turfa mı*, 1891)³⁵; they were striving towards a complex acceptance of European literary tradition while remaining original in the sense of closely observing their own society and relying on their artistic talent (in contrast to *translating* the West or moralizing and teaching). Their goal was not to put limits to Westernization and to *Ottomanize* modernity.³⁶ They wanted to fully integrate with the Western artistic experience, to establish ties to its traditions and become part of it.³⁷ Differently from Tanzimat authors, morals and judgment were excluded from this concept: a novelist must make use only of the instruments of experience (*tecrübe*), analysis (*tahlil*), comparison (*mukayese*) a synthesis (*terkib*).³⁸

In the introduction to *Hikâye* (*The Novel*, 1888),³⁹ the most important piece of literary theory penned out by the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* collectivity, Halit Ziya complains that “[f]or other civilized nations, the novel (*hikâye*) occupies the most important, the most distinguished place in literature. / A novelist (*hikâyenüvis*) is counted among the great men of his age like a philosopher or a scientist.” Alas, in the Ottoman Empire this genre is still in its “childhood age”, “at the level of fairytales”.⁴⁰ His work was supposed to present the genre of the novel with all its literary, social and historical ramifications to induce change in the perception of the novel among the Ottomans. *Hikâye* does not try to outline a peculiar, local form of narration which would conform to the Western

34. Cf. Ahmet MİDHAT's foreword to the novel, “Kariîn İle Hasbihâl” (*Müşahedât*, Ankara, Türk Dil Kurumu, 2000, pp. 3-8).

35. Cf. Mehmet MURAT's foreword to the novel, “İfade-i Mahsus” (*Turfanda mı yoksa Turfa mı*, Ankara, Akçağ, 1999). See also Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL's (undated) essay “Millî Roman” in his *Sanata Dair*, İstanbul, Özgür, 2014, pp. 115-118 (a “national novel” could be at best an *étude de moeurs*).

36. Contrast this to the practice of Ahmet MIDHAT, who was trying to adapt and domesticate the Western *text* in order to bring it in line with the Ottoman-Islamic world-view. In his novel *Çengi* (*Dancer*, 1877), for instance, Ahmet MIDHAT claims to be “translating” the story about Don Quixote into the Ottoman environment. An Ottoman reader, not versed in the history of late medieval Europe, would not be able to interpret cultural signs of a foreign culture and could not enjoy reading the novel. “Moreover, the story in our book does not consist only of the novel about Don Quixote. The strange stories of a Don Quixote (*bir Don Kişot'un garâbeti*), which we will arrange within (*dahilinde*) Ottoman morals and Ottoman demeanors, will occupy only the beginning of our novel, and this way we can keep distance from a translation of Cervantes' work.” (Ahmet MIDHAT, *Çengi*, İstanbul, Selis, 2003, p. 12).

37. Cf. Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL's essay “Tercüme Roman” in his *Sanata Dair*, pp. 62-65. Even in their design, the books published in the Edebiyat-ı Cedide Library series were to assume “European appearance”. Cf. YALÇIN, *Edebiyat Anıları*, p. 123.

38. Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL, *Hikâye*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi, 1998, p. 100.

39. The book was first serialized in *Hizmet* (1887-1888) and published as book in 1307 h. (1891/2).

40. UŞAKLIGİL, *Hikâye*, p. 20.

version of the novel to the local habitat, practices and narrative traditions. As envisaged by Halit Ziya's *Hikâye*, the synthesis between East and West, finding a fragile balance between both cultural spheres was not on the agenda of the authors of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*. Their efforts were guided by the aim of creating a new sort of art that would emanate from and chime in with Western esthetics.⁴¹ The West became a model for them that was to be followed in its complexity and not to be sifted through the strainer of Ottoman-Islamic morality separating *the good* from the *deplorable*, as was the case with many Tanzimat reformists.

In what follows, we will turn our attention to the question of what kind of West these *new literati* imagined and how this idea and its counterpart, the image of the East, were incorporated into their literary texts.

The West as an ideal

The question of how to define and canonize modern national literature, where to look for its origins and where to put its limits, has been one of the major preoccupations of Turkish literary criticism.⁴² Its beginnings are often seen in the development of the literary current bearing the same name (*Millî Edebiyat*), or in the works of *the people's authors* like Hüseyin Rahmi (Gürpinar, 1864-1944), who seemed to have shaken off their indebtedness to the foreign cultural capital and draw on popular Anatolian traditions and the life of common people. This is not merely an esthetic problem. It also has to do with the handling and delineating of modern Turkish identity. The stubborn endeavor to find "our own literature" is one of the many facets of the fear of belatedness that interconnects different authors and works across currents, ideologies and epochs. It is an anxiety that develops "due to the admiration, despite the admiration and together with the admiration [for the West], and it includes an appreciation of the foreign model to the same extent as the fear that [the local text] would remain only its copy."⁴³ Authors of the *Servet-i Fünun* group made this anxiety the central theme of their texts and tried to come to terms with this feeling through a meticulous analysis of inner conflicts in the individual's psyche. Hence, *West* and *East* appear in their works more as two states of mind than physical entities, as two poles of consciousness, and symbolize the conflict between, on the one hand, triviality and mediocrity of the localness and, on



41. This was exactly what the collectivity of authors later to form a group called FECR-İ ÂTİ (Dawn of the Future) called for in their manifesto published on the pages of *Servet-i Fünun* in 1910. Even a decade after the revolution brought about by *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*, the *Fecr-i Âti* group still felt the necessity to stress that literature must be freed from "practical" purposes and complained that in Ottoman society, literature and art are still "a pleasant companion of free time" and their role in "cultivating feelings" had not been fully appreciated. Their aim was, they claimed, to found a group similar to those existing in Europe in order to cast "a green shadow onto this desert of science and literature", to found a "library", which would present indigenous works of the new kind and translations of important Western novels to the Ottoman readership, to improve "the literary taste of people", to establish links with similar literary societies in the West and to "fulfil the sound and sublime mediating role of bringing the literary fruits of our land to the West and the lights of the West to Eastern horizons" (*Servet-i Fünun*, No. 977, 1910, p. 22; reprinted in İsmail ÇETİŞLİ et all., *II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Türk Edebiyatı*, Ankara, Akçağ, 2007, pp. 517-518.)

42. For an original insight see Ulus BAKER, "Ulusal edebiyat nedir?", *Toplum ve Bilim* 81 (1999), pp. 7-25.

43. Nurdan GÜRBİLEK, *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark. Edebiyat ve Endişe*, İstanbul, Metis, 2004, p. 33.

the other hand, the ideal of the West radiating creativity and originality but also entailing the danger of sinking into mere imitation.

The West had probably never been so idealized in the pre-Republican Turkish literary history as in the *Şerbet-i Fünun* period, when the Ottoman state under Abdülhamit II was ideologically going into the other direction, displaying a rekindled conservatism stressing Ottoman-Islamic values and the togetherness of the Muslim *umma* to outbalance the growing nationalism of non-Muslim Ottoman peoples. For many intellectuals of this time, Europe was, in the words of the sociologist Niyazi Berkes, a “world of freedom, personal dignity, reason, honesty, comfortable life, beauty and art”, while in their surrounding they could not find many things worth affection or admiration.⁴⁴ Due to their personal disposition and under the pressure of the conditions of the time (Hamidian despotism and censorship), these authors turned inward and, plunging into the psyche, very accurately and finely examined the impact of the Westernization process on the individual. In their strange blend of realism and romanticism, the *East* became an anti-ideal, stifling their dreams and desires and hindering them from being carried away by their poetic genius. *Orient* was for these *hommes de lettres* a rich past⁴⁵ that could be admired in museums, studied by scholars and its artifacts could be bought in antique shops, but due to its lifelessness, ornamentality and formality, this cultural heritage was tying down artistic powers of an author who wished to express his innermost feelings and examine the mind of man in the same way as did Paul Verlaine or Honoré de Balzac.

The most emblematic fictional projection of this concept is the figure of Ahmet Cemil in Halit Ziya's *Mai ve Siyah* (*Blue and Black*, 1897). The aspiring poet burns with desire to create an original work but soon has to realize that the Ottoman literary tradition weighs heavily on his poetic spirit and that he must first cultivate his feelings by reading *real* (i.e. Western) literature and by analyzing its historical development. Together with a friend, he drafts a “genealogy of literary history”, which they are determined to thoroughly read through. The chain starts with *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, followed by a selection from Greek and Latin literatures, a few works from the Middle Ages, and ends with the core curriculum –Goethe, Schiller, Milton, Byron, Hugo, Musset, Lamartine, the Parnassians, Symbolists, Decadents, de Heredia, de Banville, Prudhomme, Coppée, Haraucourt, Sylvestre and Paul Verlaine and his followers.⁴⁶ Despite being permanently hunted by feelings of insufficiency and shame vis-à-vis his Western paragons, Ahmet Cemil manages, after a long struggle, to finish his opus. His companion introduces Cemil's poems at a festive meeting of writers by giving a brief overview of the development of Western poetry and then presents the work as a “bouquet consisting of flowers that came into bloom under the Eastern sun from the seeds collected there [in the West].”⁴⁷ This passage is, indeed, a fitting metaphor for the literary undertaking of the *Şerbet-i Fünun* group, which was, after

44. BERKES, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, pp. 378-379.

45. Cf. Halit Ziya's exclamation: “The Orient? All right, maybe a very rich past...! But the future belongs to the West; paying off the debt of gratitude to the past by not belittling it, the Turk must fulfill his/her duty of progress vis-à-vis his/her existence (*kendi varlığına karşı terakki vazifesi*) by going to the West.” UŞAKLIGİL, *Kirk Yıl*, p. 666.

46. Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL, *Mai ve Siyah*, İstanbul, Özgür, 2001 (the novel was serialized between 1896 and 1897 in *Şerbet-i Fünun* and published as a book in 1900). The importance of this “genealogy” (*silsile*) is attested to by the fact that the author gives it twice in the book (p. 63 and pp. 174-175).

47. *Ibidem*, p. 256.

having diligently studied Western literatures, sowing the seeds of the West into the soil cultivated by the Tanzimat so that they could finally give their ripe fruits in the East.

We should not, of course, isolate *Edebiyat-i Cedide* as a purely artistic collectivity not embedded in the social structures of the late Ottoman society. It was part and parcel of a broad intellectual current closely related to the development of the Ottoman Westernization movement (*Garbçılık*) at the end of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century. Among other things, *Servet-i Fünun* published articles by Ottoman positivists like Ahmet Şuayip (1876-1910) and Hüseyin Cahit, who followed the course given by Beşir Fuad and saw modern Western science and its methods as the only source of true knowledge about human existence. The Westernists did not believe anymore in the *self-redemptive* nature of the idea of progress (*terakki*), catching up with the technical superiority of the West on the way to civilization (*medeniyet*). One had to go deeper into the structures of society and start its real reconstruction so that it would westernize in every aspect.⁴⁸ To be sure, a literary historian would search in vain for clearly formulated political and social visions or proclamations by the members of the *Servet-i Fünun* circle. Yet given the context of the time (censorship, suppression of opposition), the temperament of these authors, who preferred more sophisticated forms of enunciation to didacticism, and also their programmatic estheticism, their works, seemingly completely apolitical and isolated from every-day life, tell us a great deal about their world-view. Close reading of their texts could reveal that the figures, tropes and symbols in their novels and poems hide remarkable notions and ideas through which the authors tried to cope with the question of Westernization. To put it differently, *Edebiyat-i Cedideciler* turned to something that Hilmi Ziya Ülken calls “literary ideology”⁴⁹ that served as a vehicle for mediating political and social ideas, too.⁵⁰



48. One would find many similarities between the *Garbçilar* and their leading figure Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) and *Servet-i Fünun* authors like Hüseyin Cahit, Ahmet Şuayip, Cenap Şahabettin or Mehmet Rauf, admirers of the West and promoters of Westernization. However, the *Garbçilar* became an organized movement only after 1908. On the connection between *Servet-i Fünun* and Westernism (especially its contribution to the development of the positivist movement) see Hilmi Ziya ÜLKEN, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi*, İstanbul, Ülken Yayınları, 2001, pp. 139-156. For the post-1908 development of Westernism see M. Şükrü HANIOĞLU, “Garbçilar: Their Attitudes Toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic”, *Studia Islamica*, 86(1997), pp. 133-158.

49. ÜLKEN, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş*, p. 160.

50. Hüseyin CAHİT [YALÇIN]’s “Arab’dan istifade edeceğimiz ulûm” (1898) and “Edebiyat-i Cedide, menşe ve esasları” (1898), reprinted in YALÇIN’s *Kavgalarım* (pp. 95-109 and pp. 37-50 respectively) are exceptionally clearly formulated *manifestos* that all members of *Edebiyat-i Cedide* could probably undersign without hesitation. The first one is a sharp settling accounts with “Arabophilia” and its representatives, traditionalists opposing the modernization process and looking up admiringly to the Arabo-Islamic past. The Eastern civilization had, according to Hüseyin Cahit, congealed together with Arab sciences in the Middle Ages. The only path the Ottoman society must follow is Europeanization. Nothing could be learned anymore from “Arabic books” and traditional sciences. In the other article, Hüseyin Cahit criticizes Tanzimat reformists for trying to set limits to Westernization and adopt only positive aspects of Western civilization. This to him was only a way of how to secretly cultivate hatred against the West. It was 1312 [1896], the year in which *Servet-i Fünun* came into being as a literary group, which marked a clear shift towards West.

Westernization of literary topography

A phenomenon that was becoming apparent already earlier, namely that of what one might call the Westernization of literary topography, reached its climax in the novels of *Edebiyat-i Cedide*. Action in these stories is restricted to the milieu of *konaks* and Bosphorus *yalis* of upper-class families displaying a modern life-style and to the Europeanized neighborhood of Beyoğlu (Pera), while Muslim *mahalles* with their mosques, caravanserais, hammams, madrasas, poor wooden houses and traditional forms of life disappear from the narratives almost entirely.

In a retrospective part of *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love, 1900) by Halit Ziya, Mlle. de Courton, an elderly lady from an impoverished Parisian family, comes to Istanbul in the hope that she would be hired by a rich family as governess and French teacher. Her big dream is to penetrate the mysteries of an authentic Turkish family and learn about “Oriental manners and customs” that she has known merely from reading Pierre Loti. When she, following a recommendation, finds herself in Adnan Bey’s chic villa on the shore of Bosphorus, she can hardly suppress her disappointment. With its elegant drawing room furnished with crystal chandeliers, tall floor lamps, marble statues and walnut chairs, its dining hall equipped with modern furniture and all the paintings on the walls, the house is almost identical to the mansions of French aristocracy or the houses of Parisian bourgeoisie. In surprise, Mlle. de Courton turns to her guide: “Sahih! Are you sure you have brought me to a Turkish house?”⁵¹ The functioning of the household and the everyday habits of Adnan Bey’s family, consisting of daily trips in a mahogany boat on the Bosphorus, picnics in the nature and shopping in Western-style stores (*Bon Marché, Lebon, Allemand*) in Beyoğlu, only contributes to her waking up from romantic fantasies about the Orient.⁵² Moreover, Adnan Bey’s adolescent daughter daily practices piano and, suffering from migraine, finds relief in playing her beloved Chopin, Schumann and Mendelssohn, while Adnan Bey’s nephew Behlül spends his spare time reading the novels by Paul Bourget, visiting theaters and enjoying himself in the company of operetta singers.⁵³

A very similar *topos* can be found in Mehmet Rauf’s *Eylül* (September, 1901). The novel’s main protagonists, the married couple Süreyya and Suat and Süreyya’s cousin Necip, also live in the solitude of a Bosphorus *yali*, their quiet life being interrupted only by occasional trips to Beyoğlu. Like in many other novels, it is again classical European music that plays a prominent role in the story, whereas the life-style *alla turca* does not enter the splendid isolation of this romanticized world at all. Piano music –pieces by Verdi, Chopin, Beethoven, Schumann or Schubert– is a vehicle which translates the feelings of the heroes and enables them to express “the incommunicable needs of their spirits”⁵⁴. Suat, for whom playing piano is the only way how to

51. Halit Ziya UŞAKLIGİL, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, İstanbul, Özgür, 2002, p. 86.

52. On the other hand, the other, more distant Orient is wrapped up in exotic fantasies by the Adnan Bey family. The daughter, Nihal, dresses like what they imagine a Japanese girl must look like, with long needles in her hair and waving a fan in her hand (p. 262). Behlül refers to Japan as “that strange country of the Orient” (p. 261).

53. The same picture can be drawn about the neighboring villa of the widowed Firdevs Hanım, who dyes her hair blond and, together with her daughters, regularly makes forays into fashion stores like *Pygmalion* or *Au Lion* in Beyoğlu.

54. Mehmet RAUF, *Eylül*, ed. Ankara, Akçağ, 2003, p. 232 (the novel was first serialized between 1900-1901 in *Servet-i Fünun*).

communicate her forbidden love to Necip and music of European masters the “primary, greatest pleasure in the world”⁵⁵, remembers gratefully how once her father, after returning from a trip to Europe, forbade her playing the *Oriental ud* and *kanun* and forced her to play piano.⁵⁶

In the to a large degree autobiographical novel *Salon Köşelerinde (In the Corners of the Salon, 1898)* the desire to resemble Europeans and conform to their practices, attitudes, behavior and mentality develops into a pathological obsession in Şekip, the novel’s tragic main character. His story, narrated in a manuscript that he, lying on the deathbed, entrusts to a friend, is a masterfully unfolded register of an endless roaming around balls and salons of Beyoğlu where European residents and visitors of the Ottoman capital meet for entertainment. Being aware of Western prejudices against “coarse Turks”, Şekip compulsively takes care of his appearance: “What shall I do? Going to such places, I wish that we, the Turks, also attract attention by our elegance, our demeanor, our posture, our manners and politeness. I wish that those who see a man with fez dancing waltz with a nice woman pause for a moment and say: ‘How nicely is that young Turk dancing waltz!’”⁵⁷ Şekip is well-versed in the newest fashion, speaks perfect French and English, is well-read in European literature, skilled in the art of dining and, above all, he is an excellent dancer –all this in order to perfectly mesh with the distinguished European families in Beyoğlu, to be accepted by their society and to perfectly assimilate to their world. His existence is confined to the pseudo-European world on both sides of the *Grande Rue de Pera*, to tea parties, soirées, balls and strolls organized by English and French ladies, and acquires meaning only when recognized, approved of and confirmed by the gaze of the European Other. He is caught in a circularity of mediated desires, borrowed fantasies and transmitted ideals at whose center stands Lydia Sunshine, an Englishwoman, which he is in love with, and an embodiment of all that Europe is to him.

Referring to *Salon Köşelerinde*, Nihayet Arslan claims that the romanticization of the Turkish hero in the novel, whose world is structured solely by the ideal of the West, can lead to the emergence of a “strange kind of romanticism”, which –despite the intention of its author– fills the Western form with an “Eastern” content. The West of the *Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler* becomes a space onto which their desires are projected, a space of dreams and fantasies, which exoticize and romanticize the very West that the littérateurs seemed to have known so well. This, in Arslan’s view, leads to a certain “thingification” or “objectification” of characters and relationships in the artificial, lifeless milieu of European-style salons where the protagonist fades out under the weight of objects of Western provenience. Even the romantic love of Şekip to Lydia reveals itself as an effort to get possession of yet another object with the brand name “West”.⁵⁸ Şekip might behave like a gentleman educated in the West but never becomes a personality, Arslan concludes. He remains a featureless, lifeless copy, which lacks the complexity of an individual anchored in the space and time of the society he lives in.⁵⁹

55. *Ibidem*, p. 210.

56. *Ibidem*, p. 144.

57. Safveti ZİYA, *Salon Köşelerinde*, İstanbul, Türkiye İş Bankası, 1998, p. 14 (serialized partially in 1898 in *Servet-i Fünun*. The full, non-censored version was published as late as 1912).

58. Nihayet ARSLAN, “Safveti Ziya’nın *Salon Köşelerinde* Romanında Nesneler ve Nesneleşen İnsanlar”, *Türkoloji Dergisi*, XIV/1 (2003), pp. 177-192.

59. *Ibidem*, p. 191.



Similarly, pointing out to the setting of the novels dominated by artifacts of Western culture, Cahit Kavcar takes the *Servet-i Fünun* novel as a proof of how much the Europeanization of Ottoman upper classes at end of the 19th century had already advanced in education, knowledge of foreign languages, reading habits (we hardly see any protagonist reading Ottoman, Arab, or Persian authors, whereas references to French writers and perusing of European periodicals are abundant), in fashion, taste, music, furnishing of households, eating habits and spending leisure time.⁶⁰

The *Occidentalist romanticism*⁶¹ in the novels of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* naturally nourished the critique that these texts were derived, inauthentic, foreign, excessively worshipping the West and mindlessly adopting Western concepts.⁶² This criticism was based partially on the misapprehension of the literary strategies of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*, partially on nationalistic notions about what a true national literature ought to be. Condemning *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* for its dependency on external sources and alien traditions was not the invention of Republican literary critique. It was an opinion which seemed to have been widespread even among the contemporaries. Hüseyin Rahmi insinuated that the authors of *Servet-i Fünun* “think French and write Turkish”⁶³, while Ahmet Midhat called them “decadents”.⁶⁴ Of course, nationally inclined writers and critics were those who were mostly disturbed by the poetics of *Servet-i Fünun*, seeing this movement as completely antagonistic to the true expression of the national spirit. The leading theoretician of Turkish nationalism and one of the spiritual fathers of *Milli Edebiyat*, Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), called the authors of *Servet-i Fünun* “sick souls” and their writings the product of “French taste” which contradicts the “national taste”.⁶⁵

60. KAVCAR, *Batılılaşma Açısından, passim*.

61. I use the term *Occidentalism* in the sense Xiaomei CHEN defines it, i.e. in analogy to Orientalism as “a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others.” (*Occidentalism. A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p. 2). This sort of Occidentalism was not a strategy aimed at dominating or gaining control of the Other; it was rather directed at the own society and served domestic purposes. In this respect, it was a discourse that to a great degree overlapped with Ottoman Westernism (*Garbçılık*).

62. The members of the group were labelled *efrencperest* (idolaters of the Franks, i.e. of the West) and accused of not being national. See the memoirs of UŞAKLIGİL, *Kirk Yıl*, p. 724.

63. He is actually comparing his overly Westernized antihero Meftun Bey to “some of our writers” (*Şipşevdi*, p. 714). See also Hüseyin Rahmi (GÜRPINAR)’s 1920 essay “Edebiyatta Millet”, republished in his *Sanat ve Edebiyat*, Ankara, Oğul Yayınları [n.d.], pp. 38-49, where he asserts that completely everything, even emotions and feelings in the *Servet-i Fünun* novels were filtered through “European templates” (*Avrupa kalipları*).

64. Ahmet MİDHAT, “Dekadanlar”, *Sabah*, Nr. 2680, 22 Mart 1897, reprinted in YALÇIN, *Kavgalarım*, pp. 126-138.

65. It must be said that in GÖKALP’s view *Servet-i Fünun* was only the culmination of earlier tendencies already inherent in the Tanzimat literature. On the other hand, Diwan poetry was to him a product of “Persian taste” (see Ziya GÖKALP, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, İstanbul, Bordo Siyah, 2005 [1923], esp. p. 66 and p. 149). In the same vein –although years later– the well-known philosopher Cemil MERİÇ (1916-1987) speaks about *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* as “shadow literature” whose most common genres were “imitation, plagiarism, translation”, its authors being “Turkish speaking Frenchmen” (*Bu Ülke*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1974, p. 137).

A great deal of modern Turkish literary critics try to explain the persistence with which the isolated Westernized milieu of Istanbul's upper classes is depicted in the novels of *Servet-i Fünun* as a consequence of the author's interest in *forbidden liaisons* and love triangles which they knew from French literature and which excited them, but which were hardly conceivable in Ottoman society or even completely foreign to it.⁶⁶ The reproach of not being authentic enough is often combined with the accusation that in these works, Europe is unduly idealized and that this idealization hinders its proper understanding. Along these lines, the sociologist Niyazi Berkes speaks about a "utopian individualism" that (mis)led the *Edebiyat-i Cedideciler* to force out of their minds everything that did not conform to their highly idealized and desired idea of European civilization: "[I]n their fantasies, they were not embellishing the European *society*, but rather an *individual's* material life, comfort, the sophistication of his milieu and the liberty he enjoys in his life."⁶⁷

This criticism is to some extent justified. Nevertheless, it ignores two important aspects of the *Servet-i Fünun* fiction. First, it is true that these novels have quite a limited topography, but on the other hand, they do depict –and they do so quite realistically, with all hues and shades– the local environment that their authors knew well and were part of (i.e. Istanbul's high society) and the complexity of interpersonal relations in this milieu, and thus cannot be only faded copies of European templates. Moreover, in most cases, the West does not figure there as a real place but as an elaborately crafted metaphoric space, which serves as a backdrop onto which the authors project the wounded, fragmented consciousness of their heroes. In this respect, these texts tell us more about the state of mind and psychic tensions of the younger Ottoman generation of literati than their critics are willing to assign them. After all, authors like Halit Ziya were much better and deeper acquainted with Europe than their predecessors and were conversant with its cultural and historical underpinnings. Their idealization and romanticization of Europe should be, in my view, read rather as part of their literary strategy than as a failed attempt to bring European reality to Istanbul. This is evident also in the authors' meticulous cultivation of the Ottoman language, the renewed interest in the rich Arabic and Persian lexis and even the creation of new artistic expressions drawing on long-forgotten Ottoman or Arabo-Persian expressions, almost in the spirit of the Ottoman poetic tradition. We find more French words in Ahmet Midhat than in the oeuvre of Halit Ziya and his colleagues.⁶⁸ The criticism that the novels of this group are not local enough, that they are too Western and derived rests on the assumption that only Western authors are entitled to depict the universally human, whereas non-Western writers are condemned –or, with the gradual development of national institutions of literary scholarship, demanded to– create mere "national



66. Nihat ARSLAN comes to the conclusion that Ottoman society lacked the conditions necessary for the birth of the novel, namely the existence of an indigenous bourgeoisie and individualism. Since these were practically non-existent in Ottoman society, the Ottoman novel could survive only as a product of imitation, foreign to the mentality of the society. Up to Halit Ziya, the Turkish novel in the European sense of the word does not exist; there is no novel in which people would act as members of society. With Halit Ziya, the "imitation" of the art of Western novel reaches perfection – at the cost of not being authentic. Cf. Nihat ARSLAN, *Türk Romanının Oluşumu. Dış Gerçeklik Açısından Bir İnceleme*, Ankara, Phoenix Yayınevi, 2007, pp. 57-59.

67. BERKES, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, p. 380.

68. NOYON, "Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Hikaye*", p. 132.

“allegories” (in the Jamesonian sense of the expression)⁶⁹, to depicture the local color and socio-political peculiarities of their countries. In such an interpretative framework, everything that goes beyond this concept is by default derived and secondary. However, the form of the Western novel served the literati of *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* much more than the previous generation as a perfectly mastered instrument, with the assistance of which a writer can capture the conditions of human relations and existence. Robert Finn rightly observes that “[t]he application of European, almost exclusively French concepts of the novel to Ottoman society did not result in the appearance of French novels set in Istanbul, however. That function properly belongs to Pierre Loti. Rather, there is the unveiling of a pseudo-French society which is inevitably Turkish and reveals itself unconsciously as a cultural palimpsest at every turn.”⁷⁰

To be sure, even those who look for the local flavor in this *pseudo-French society* would find fictional worlds that comply with the demands of authentic description based on careful observation and synthesis. In the way these texts portray the cosmopolite milieu of Istanbul’s upper classes at the turn of the century, they are very realistic, with an almost documentary quality. We can, for instance, read *Aşk-ı Memnu* as a private history of an Istanbul family in the second half of the 19th century and at the same time as a profile of Ottoman society at the “crucial moment of its transformation”.⁷¹ Despite its secludedness, Adnan Bey’s mansion offers quite a broad panorama of figures representing different social strata and ethnic groups that are captured in accordance with all rules of the Realist school, in a perfect interplay between the minute attention to the detail and the sense for the whole. Halit Ziya, as Ahmet Evin very accurately observed,

34

instead of adopting selectively certain concepts and methodologies from European writers, [...] considered carefully the Western literary tradition as a whole and derived from it his own formulation of fictional realism. The result was [...] what I propose to call the classic Turkish novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, in which human relations are examined in terms of the prevailing *moeurs* as well as psychological states and the destiny of a family belonging to a certain social category during a particular historical era is carefully plotted.⁷²

69. I am of course referring to Fredric JAMESON’s famous 1986 essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, *Social Text* 15 (1986), pp. 65-88. For a response to this essay cf. Aijaz AHMAD, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”, *Social Text* 17 (1987), pp. 3-25. For a defense of Jameson in relation to Turkish literature see Murat BELGE, “Üçüncü Dünya Ülkeleri Edebiyatı Açısından Türk Edebiyatı”, in Nazan and Bülent AKSOY (eds.), *Berna Moran'a Armağan. Türk Edebiyatına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1997, pp. 51-63.

70. Robert FINN, *The Early Turkish Novel. 1872-1900*, İstanbul, Isis Press, 1984, pp. 163-164.

71. EVİN, *Origins and Development*, p. 219.

72. *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134. Hasan Bülent KAHRAMAN noted an interesting link between Ottoman-Turkish novels and modern Turkish painting, whose origins are to be found in approximately the same time. Painters like Şeker Ahmet Paşa (1841-1906) or Osman Hamdi (1842-1910) studied in Paris with leading professors of fine arts and perfectly mastered the technique of painting. Despite that, critics have described their paintings as “flawed” in terms of not being realistic: they have, for instance, a wrong perspective, display huge still lives set into a landscape and not into the interior, the size of objects and figures in the pictures does not correspond to real proportions of the models, etc. Rather than having failed in appropriating the *correct* technique, these artists present their own way of depicting objects and express a different understanding of perspective, a different hierarchical order, and different perception of landscape and human figures (“The ‘Mistake’ of Şeker Ahmet Paşa: The Epistemological Origins of Tanzimat Perception of the World and Nature”, lecture given on September, 21, 2006 at the Princeton University’s symposium *Novel as a Medium of Change: Cultural Transformation in the Tanzimat*). Something similar can be said about the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* version of the realistic novel.

Yet this still does not explain why we find in the novels of *Şerbet-i Fünun* so many lonely, emotionally torn young men (and to a lesser degree women) who adore Western culture and feel alienated from their society and its traditions. It probably has to do with the strange blend of realism and romanticism that these novels display. They are, on the one hand, very realistic in the way they depict the milieu where the stories take place and the psychology of individual characters, on the other, however, they are imbued with a strong romantic spirit.⁷³ The motifs of death, illness, suffering, escapism, resignation and disillusion seem to be haunting the fictional worlds of the *Şerbet-i Fünun* period. The *catastrophic nature* of *Edebiyat-i Cedide* could be interpreted in terms of borrowing from European romanticism, where disappointment, melancholy, despondency and discrepancy of reality and ideals induced a similar pessimistic worldview, or *Weltschmerz*, but it certainly has its local roots, too: the condition of “belated modernity”⁷⁴ the “anxiety of influence”⁷⁵ –to be part of the Western literary tradition and at the same remain original– played a crucial role here. There is a longing for an ideal, an almost mimetic desire which was aroused to a large degree by the lecture of French novels and mixed with the unsatisfactory reality of the late Ottoman Empire and the pessimism felt by many intellectuals in Istanbul vis-à-vis the unattainable ideality of *modern civilization*. Europe operates here frequently as an almost metaphysical quantity (a source of beauty, nobility, goodness and happiness) in juxtaposition to which the gloomy actuality of one’s own society bereft of any ideals is measured.⁷⁶ Necip in *Eylül* is overcome by grieve, convinced that “there is no fixed, ordered reality in the world, no *noble idea*”⁷⁷ and seeks refuge from society in the solitude of his cousin’s Bosphorus villa where he finds sublimity and beauty in classical European music and his romantic love to Suat. Şekip, the hero of *Salon Köşelerinde*, firmly believes that nobility and greatness are hidden in his love to Lydia (a substitutive object for his beloved Europe). The fact that most of these heroes end tragically⁷⁸ does not arise from moving beyond the safe ground of Ottoman-Islamic norms and being exposed to the seductive new way of life *alafranga* or from the penetration of a foreign culture that the novel’s protagonists do not fully understand and, fatherless as they are,



73. One can hardly not notice Goethe’s, de Musset’s, Nerval’s, Lamartine’s or Hugo’s influence on *Edebiyat-i Cedide*, although the group claimed allegiance to the Realist school (see Halit ZIYA’s almost dismissive treatment of the romantics –whom he calls *hayaliyun*, or DREAMERS– in his *Hikâye*, pp. 128-133). On the influence of French literature and language on *Edebiyat-i Cedide* see Gül Mete YUVA, *Modern Türk Edebiyatının Fransız Kaynakları*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi, 2011, pp. 82-153.

74. I am referring here to Gregory JUSDANIS, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture. Inventing National Literature*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

75. Cf. Harold BLOOM, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973].

76. We would also find other motifs typical for romanticism, like the concept of genius, the sublimity of nature and of pure love not corrupted by societal conventions. A typical example is *Eylül*, a novel about an almost Wertherian love set in the sublimity of nature and ending, of course, tragically.

77. Mehmet RAUF, *Eylül*, pp. 159-60 (italics mine).

78. Suat and Necip (*Eylül*) die in a burning house, Bihter (*Aşk-i Memnu*) commits suicide, Ahmet Cemil (*Mai ve Siyah*) ends up, completely hopeless and spiritually dead, in the Arabian desert, Şekip (*Salon Köşelerinde*) dies with a broken heart, Nemide (in Halit ZIYA’s novel of the same name, 1889) dies of tuberculosis and the hero of Halit ZIYA’s *Bir Ölümün Defteri* (1889) is a dying men, to name just some examples.

easily fall prey to its dark sides⁷⁹. It is rather to be attributed –as in European and American romanticism– more generally to societal norms and conventions hindering the development of true feelings, to disillusion with the conservative and repressive regime, and to a clash between the boundless desires of the self, which lives in a fictional world of fantasies and noble ideas, and the limiting authority of social and historical conditions.⁸⁰ In this sense, we don't find in the *Servet-i Fünun* novels any reference to Ottoman-Islamic moral values, be it in the form of a polemic or acceptance, and this despite the fact that their topics are in many cases extramarital relations, passion, and admiration of the foreign Other. In other words, the psychological and moral dilemmas of the novels' characters and their emotional and spiritual conflicts are not structured by an implicitly or explicitly formulated clash between Ottoman-Islamic morality or the norms of the Ottoman society with the desires, aspirations, and efforts of dandies adoring the West and being falsely Westernized. This is attested to by the fact that the favorite figure of the devilish seductress (whose prototype is Mehpeyker in Namık Kemal's *İntibah, Awakening*, 1876) or that of the falsely Europeanized dandy, lampooned in dozens of Tanzimat novels (Ahmet Midhat's Felatun in *Felâtun Bey ile Râkim Efendi*, 1875, and Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem's Bihruz in *Araba Sevdası* are epitomes of these *ziüppes*), vanished from these narrations.⁸¹ The message of these novels is universal, addressing the human condition as such, while even such concepts as *namus*, at the first sight burdened with Islamic connotations, usually serve, in the context of the novels, only as Turkish variants of similar European terms (honor, morality, honesty) without referring to the Islamic *ahlâq*. Bihter, the tragic heroine of *Aşk-i Memnu*, seeks the way out of the deadlock of unhappy marriage, shattered illusions and an affair with the young womanizer Behlül in suicide. Her death is, however, not a punishment for transgressing the norms of Ottoman society, send by the omnipotent author onto the culprit (like in the case of Ali Bey in Namık Kemal's *İntibah*, or Ceylan in Ahmet Midhat's *Jön Türk*, Young Turk, 1910) to serve as a warning to the reader against stepping outside of the realm of the permissible, of losing touch with the ethical imperatives of 'Eastern' society and accommodating to falsely

79. Cf. PARLA, *Babalar*. The author observed that a lot of Tanzimat novels lack the figure of the father, who leaves his orphaned sons enter a dangerous world of change unprotected and liable to harmful influences of the new life coming from the West. The missing authority –of the father, of the sultan, of canonized texts– must be therefore replaced by a firm embedment in Ottoman-Islamic values, which would prevent the malleable and feeble –almost childish– hero from transgressing boundaries of the known and the ordered towards the unknown and uncontrolled, towards passion, luxury, decadence, that is boundaries beyond which chaos and destruction lurk and relations, time-proven values and behavioral patterns are disturbed and turned upside down. PARLA points to the great effort the Tanzimat novelists make in order to set clear limits to modernization –limits within which the reform of Ottoman society was to take place so that the existing order would not be destroyed and turned into chaos.

80. A prototype of the romanticism of *Servet-i Fünun* is Ahmet Cemil from *Mai ve Siyah*, who exemplifies the romantic escape from reality, naïve enthusiasm and optimistic belief in the victory of lofty ideas, but is soon cruelly disappointed by life and sinks into utter despair (see further). This romantic condition might have been induced by the disillusion with the development of the Ottoman state under Abdülhamit II, by the haphazard nature of the modernization process, the disenchantment with the half-hearted Tanzimat reformism, and by the frustration caused by the artists' perceived deficiency in comparison to their idealized West. The lecture of European romantic literature might have attributed to the *romantic feeling* as well.

81. For the figure of the overly westernized *ziuppe* see Şerif MARDİN, "Superwesternization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century", in Peter BENEDICT, Erol TÜMERTEKİN and Fatma MANSUR (eds.), *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives*, Leiden, Brill, 1974, pp. 403-446.

understood Western patterns. It is a free decision of a lovelorn woman, who is deeply disillusioned with her life and unable to carry the burden of shame caused by the prospect of having possibly to return to her mother after her adultery is revealed –the frivolous mother whose influence she was trying so hard to shake off. The novel's goal is, after all, not to convey a social message or criticize the workings of Ottoman society, but rather to analyze the feelings of the heroine torn between sensual passion and pure love, between a sense for order, loyalty, family and lust and liberty, between her ideals (derived possibly from French romantic novels) and her genetic heritage.⁸² All this neatly shows the transition from the pulpit to the depths of human soul, bringing along privatization and autonomization of the social space of the individual –in contrast to the communitarian character of traditional society, as it appears, for instance, in Ahmet Midhat's texts⁸³ and the emancipation of literature, now bereft of its didactic-moralistic function⁸⁴.

Emblematic for the romantic gesture of the *Şerbet-i Fünun* fiction is Halit Ziya's *Mai ve Siyah*. Here, the clash of ideals with reality is expressed through the deployment of a color symbolism, through the opposite of blue (a color of happy dreams, hope, beauty and sublimity) –a color that belongs to the West– and black (a color of insipidity, mediocrity, ugliness and death) –a color that belongs to the East. The young Ahmet Cemil is initially filled with desire to realize his dreams, which seem to be just within reach: to gain the love of Lamia (the “luminous”), a sister of his best friend, who lives in a blue villa (*mai köşk*), and to write a poetic masterpiece that would mark the beginning of a new poetic style and bring fame and recognition to its author. But Ahmet Cemil does not want to continue the petrified tradition of Diwan poetry, nor is he interested in the desultory modernizing experiments of Tanzimat poets. His goal is identical to that of the *Şerbet-i Fünun* generation: he wants to find a new artistic expression, not burdened by the past and organically expressing the spirit of the new era and the feelings of the young generation.⁸⁵ Convinced as he initially is about the feasibility of his dreams, he floats in a flurry of blue, standing in a flowering garden, looking up to a blue sky and seeing “a rain of diamonds”, while Émile Waldteufel's waltz is ringing in his ears.⁸⁶ Failing in both his artistic undertaking (constantly feeling

82. The schizophrenia is beautifully captured in the famous scene in which the naked Bihter stands in front of a mirror and talks to the *other* Bihter. This is reinforced by the images of the snow in the garden, whose coldness is entering the room through the open window, and the fire ranging in her young body. UŞAKLIGİL, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, p. 220.

83. Many of the numerous novels by Ahmet MIDHAT, the prototypical Tanzimat writer, are attempts to rewrite the West in the Ottoman Empire, to *Ottomanize* Western modernity. Instead of stressing auctorial originality and interpretative individualism, Ahmet MIDHAT takes his reader by the hand and, as a loving father and mentor, brings him/her into the homely milieu of the *mahalle*, a community with extended family and neighborhood ties, clearly defined social roles and the protecting gaze and ever-present supervision of the father over his household, the sultan over his empire and the tradition over the society. In his self-adopted role of a moral guide and a fatherly figure, who –through the medium of the novel–helped the readers to navigate through the stormy waters of modernity and translated the West for them, Ahmet MIDHAT had a very close relation with his readers, being always at their side, never leaving them alone with their thoughts, sometimes educating, sometimes entertaining, at other times reproaching, praising, showing his affection and respect and patiently explaining everything his readers needed to know. Ahmet MIDHAT himself called this style “*kariin ile hasbihâl*” or “a friendly talk with readers” (cf. MIDHAT, *Mişahedât*, pp. 3-8 and p. 141).

84. See similarly GÜRBİLEK, *Kör Ayna*, pp. 156-158.

85 UŞAKLIGİL, *Mai ve Siyah*, pp. 22-23.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 34



embarrassed, weak and incomplete when comparing himself with his models, the French poets) and his personal life (death of his father and his sister and Lamia's marriage to another man), the blue color turns into black and instead of Waldteufel's music he hears under the windows of his house the plaintive, strange melodies in the song of an Arab beggar. It is at this moment that Ahmet Cemil realizes that he cannot escape the *East*, that he has lost, and burning his work and selling his property, he heads with his mother to a self-imposed exile in the Arabian desert. In the final scene of the novel, he meets in the harbor his best friend Hüseyin, who, more blessed by fortune than Ahmet Cemil, has been appointed ambassador in a Western European country. Whereas Hüseyin embarks on a French steamship to carry him to "blue" Europe, "a world of hope and desire", Ahmet Cemil is to be carried by a slow boat to Suez from where he would continue into the desert, "the tomb of ultimate despair".⁸⁷ The desert evokes here the dead, infertile mystics and poetry of the East, a place without life and outside of time, a place of loneliness and suffering. As soon as Ahmet Cemil's ship leaves the harbor, impenetrably dark, starless night shrouds everything around him and the only thing he sees is a "rain of black pearls".⁸⁸

In *Mai ve Siyah*, as in other *Servet-i Fünun* novels, the East appears as an anti-ideal, a space that promises no future; it is a place that "constantly reminds the protagonists, aspiring to ideals nourished by the West, of their duty and guilt, stands in front of their ideals as an impassable border, [and] causes that all efforts remain in their germinal stage".⁸⁹ Out of this consciousness the omnipresent feeling of fear, inferiority and shame arises. It mostly takes on the shape of an anxious endeavor to break out of mediocrity, provinciality and lack of originality and at the same time not to sink into an uncreative imitation of the West.⁹⁰ Şekip, the very embodiment of the act of imitation, which suppresses his real personality and turns him into an object, realizes bitterly that no matter how much he tries to be *like them* he still remains a *fake*, reminded at every turn of his *Oriental otherness* by his European friends. This alienation and the fact that he knows to be *always late* leads to the above mentioned feeling of shame, humiliation and frustration, a constant companion of the likes of him: "Ah! How could I compete with these people [i.e. the Europeans in Istanbul], who for years, since their childhood, have been growing up in society [...], who had [been given] this way of life, this behavior, this attitude by birth, by descent, [how could I compete] with their refined manners? [...] I started to see myself very little... to see myself very helpless, very deficient and poor."⁹¹

87 *Ibidem*, p. 394.

88 *Ibidem*, p. 398. Interestingly, Safveti Ziya's novel's final scene takes place in the harbor, too. With a deep pain in his heart, Şekip has to watch how his beloved Lydia leaves for London, towards "progress, light, brightness, civilization" (ZIYA, *Salon Köşelerinde*, p. 151), whereas he, tied by the "chains of despotism" remains closed between "the walls of Istanbul like a slave, like a prisoner deprived of freedom" (p. 144).

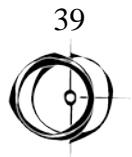
89 GÜRBİLEK, *Kör Ayna*, p. 84.

90 Tevfik Fikret published an article on imitation in the history of literature and in Ottoman literature ("Nazire-perdâzlık", *Servet-i Fünun*, March, 26, 1896, p. 263, qt. in YUVA, *Türk Edebiyatında*, pp. 120-121). He defends the view that without imitation, no work of art could come into being. Whatever the starting point, however, the result must bear the mark of personal creativity.

91 ZIYA, *Salon Köşelerinde*, p. 32. Şekip describes himself repeatedly as "a slave in chains", "a wretch", "an absolute nothing", "miserable and defeated" and shortly after he meets Lydia and falls in love with her, he realizes that "like every Oriental" he has no choice but to submit to fate (pp. 78-79).

Contrasting the “*mensonge romantique*” (romantic lie) with the “*vérité romanesque*” (novelistic truth), René Girard detected an endless and empty cycle of false ideas, derived dreams and unauthentic objects of adoration as the driving force behind the romantic longing –and not, as romantics make us to believe, the conflict between an unmediated ideal and reality, between autonomous desire and the impossibility of its realization. It is the perceived desire of the Other that lends attraction and cachet to the object, rendering it desirable. Those possessed by “mimetic desire”, like many figures of *Servet-i Fünun* novels, can gradually subjugate to “metaphysical desire” which goes beyond the object of desire; more than owning the object they want to become the Other.⁹² Here, it is the Western novel that mediates the Western civilization and its objects of desire. Yet for the *Edebiyat-ı Cedideciler*, it is, so to say, not (only) what the novel refers to that they long for; it is rather the Western novel itself that becomes the object of desire. Longing to be like Western authors, Halit Ziya and his friends borrowed the Western understanding of the novel (not in terms of translating –their endeavor was more about appropriation than translation), and by doing so, they also borrowed the forms, practices, ideas and desires which underlie this epistemology of the novel.⁹³ We should, however, not push this argument too far. To say that in such novels, the Western life is forcedly mounted to the text, that their authors created an imaginary world, in which unlivéd experiences were lived,⁹⁴ is to overlook the way many of these works self-reflectively reveal the structure of the mimetic desire and made it a theme of their novels: Ahmet Cemil or Şekip, for instance, are well aware of the derivative character of their borrowed dreams and tragically pay for their *false desires*.⁹⁵

The *Oriental* past –which makes itself manifest in the way the protagonists of these stories feel to be still bound to and affected by the local life and old mentality which they were persistently trying to free themselves from– and the historical indebtedness to the West (the source of modernity) relegated the artistic existence of these writers to a state of being torn between triviality, tawdriness and narrowness of the local culture, which was not anymore Eastern and not yet Western and which they despised, and the ideal of an imagined West into which they projected their dreams and aspirations. In his excellent analysis of *Mai ve Siyah*, Orhan Koçak interpreted this conflict in psychoanalytical terms as a clash between the historically defined super-ego, whose content was given by the state and tradition, and the equally historically determined ideal of the ego that was identified with the “West”. Yet because the ideal that Ahmet Cemil aspired to was borrowed, and thus already always “missed” (*kaptırılmış*), no reconciliation was possible between different poles on the two axes



92. René GIRARD, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 (tr. Yvonne Freccero).

93. Cf. ARSLAN, *Türk Romanının Oluşumu*, p. 81.

94. *Ibidem*, p. 475.

95 Nurdan GÜRBİLEK speaks (leaning on Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar) in reference to *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* of “bovarysm”: similar to Flaubert’s Emma Bovary, the heroes of *Servet-i Fünun* novels try hard to resemble their models, to identify themselves with the foreign image, the false ‘self’ that they created through reading European literary texts, so that in the end their personality is emptied out and they start to perceive themselves as the Others –they live a life of a “borrowed personality” (*Kör Ayna*, pp. 164-165). For an elaboration on the same topic cf. Nurdan GÜRBİLEK, “Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102: 2/3 (2003), pp. 599-628. However, my point is that the authors were well aware of the dangers of bovarysm, and their novels are an allegoric reflection of this problem.

that his world was organized by: the narcissistic one (a desire to succeed as artist and fulfil his ideals), whose two poles are euphoria of victory and ecstasy (blue color) and shame and a feeling of futility (black color), and the less visible Oedipal one, whose two poles consist of sense of guilt and longing for forgiveness on the one side and animosity and hatred (directed against Raci, a journalist, who defends the classical poetry and represents the tradition) on the other. The local reality (tradition and society) is for Ahmet Cemil a constant reproach, reminding him of his guilt, his belatedness and indebtedness to a foreign model.⁹⁶ The artistic quality of the novels of *Edebiyat-i Cedide* lies exactly in the fact that its protagonists were able to give their feeling of embarrassment and the Bloomian “anxiety of influence” an impressive esthetic expression. Halit Ziya, who has been accused of being unable of expressing the true *national self*, of not describing the reality of his society and following only foreign models, actually succeeded in capturing this *national consciousness*, as a consciousness that was from the very beginning being formed in the fragmentation between two half-worlds, “two *drafts* of the world” of which neither the one nor the other can fill the deficiency of the other and cannot move forward in the framework of a dialectic confrontation: “On the one side there is a foreign ideal that causes the other half to look trivial and shapeless; on the other there is a local reality which makes sure that the ideal look always unattainable and false.”⁹⁷

Conclusion

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With *Şerbet-i Fünun*, Turkish literature entered what Pascale Casanova calls the *World Republic of Letters*,⁹⁸ a transnational literary space, where only the imperatives of art and literature rule and where authors compete for literary existence and recognition and step out of the isolation of their regional centers. By freeing their literary domain from political and social pressures and bowing only to the specific law of literature, the *Edebiyat-i Cedideciler* were willing to accept the practices, rules, standards and criteria of the commonwealth of world literature and by measuring themselves with internationally sanctified writers and classics, they started to claim their place on the international arena and entered an almost Darwinian competition for prestige and credit. Yet being aware of their belatedness and the uneven structure at the very heart of the Eurocentric World Republic of Letters, whose capital, at that time, was undoubtedly Paris, they remained trapped between creativity and emulation, artistic independence and reliance on Western esthetic norms, ideal and reality, shame and self-satisfaction, East and West.

This conflict had been present there, of course, from the very beginning of the Westernization process, which was inherently, as a process of moving towards a foreign paradigm, an act of accepting the awareness of belatedness, i.e. of a historical debt. Yet what differentiated *Edebiyat-i Cedide* from the Tanzimat generation, which, too, had to deal with the process of modernization in Ottoman society, was the fact that in the narrations of *Şerbet-i Fünun* this state of historical belatedness was experienced much more consciously, reflected and perceived as an esthetical problem. The absolutization

96. Orhan KOÇAK, “Kaptırılmış ideal: Mai ve Siyah üzerine psikanalitik bir deneme”, *Toplum ve Bilim* 70 (1996), pp. 94-151, especially p. 129.

97. *Ibidem*, p. 147.

98. Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2004 (transl. M.B. DeBevoise).

of art and the emergence of ideal as an artistic concept (the romantic ideal connected with the anxiety and the awareness of the insurmountable chasm between reality and dreams) created a new framework, in which the Ottoman cultural transformation was interpreted and both the own and the Western civilizations were judged –with the gaze turned rather at the mind of the individual and through it at the collective consciousness of the society. This all naturally led to a change in the perception of the novel and the role of the novelist. In contrast to their predecessors, the authors of *Edebiyat-i Cedide* were not that much interested in the impact of the process of Westernization on the society as a whole, but rather in the way it informed the minds of individuals, especially those endowed with certain sensitivity to the world they perceived, one might say, almost as an artistic composition which resonated or discorded with the images, desires and ideals of the spirit. For this reason, they discussed the impact of Westernization mostly on esthetic questions or psychological conflicts, and thus played an important role in giving expression to and estheticizing the new identity that the metropolitan intellectuals who grew up in the rapidly modernizing world of late Ottoman Empire were assuming in the post-Tanzimat period. If the novel, as Milan Kundera claims, in its own way and logic explores different aspects of human existence, or the *conditio humana*, which is the only justification of its existence, and only the novel can “demonstrate how, under the conditions of the ‘terminal paradoxes,’ all existential categories suddenly change their meaning”⁹⁹, than the turn of the century might be termed as the great age of the Ottoman novel.



99. Milan KUNDERA, *The Art of the Novel*, New York, Grove Press, p. 9 (transl. by Linda Asher).