

Berna Moran, “The Turkish Novel and Problems Related to Westernisation.”

A Critical Look at the Turkish Novel 1: From Ahmet Mithat to A. H. Tanpınar.

14th printing (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003), pages 9–24.

We know that in Turkey, contrary to what happened in the West, the novel did not appear as a narrative genre that slowly evolved under the effect of historic, social and economic conditions, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism and contemporary to the birth of the bourgeoisie. It appeared in the shape of translations and imitations of Western novels; in other words it was an element of the process of Westernisation. When we read articles about literature and novels by the first Turkish literary personalities to write novels, writers like Şemsettin Sami, Namık Kemal or Ahmet Mithat, we notice that they saw European literature in general and novels in particular as a sign of a more advanced civilisation, while Turkish literature and Turkish narrative literature in particular as a sign of backwardness. They did not consider Western civilisation as including only industrial and technical progress; they saw it as something that encompassed also a schooling system and literature. At one point of his article titled, “The Recent Renewal of Our Poetry and Literature”, Şemsettin Sami states that those who know European languages will not condescend to, “writing rough and infantile stories concerning the storks nesting on Mecnun’s head, Leyla’s conversation with the moon or the way Ferhad split the mountains, after having read Shakespeare, Moliere, Racine, Schiller, Goethe or Alfieri” and a little further on adds,

Nowadays, not even a small child will enjoy a story in which Mecnun sits in the middle of an assembly made up of various animals like a wolf and a lamb, a lion and a gazelle, conversing with them or in which Leyla talks with a candle.¹

Thus Şemsettin Sami seems to be of the opinion that civilised and intellectual people will not read Turkish narratives of such improbable events, because they would consider them unsophisticated and infantile.

Also Namık Kemal, in his *Mukaddime-i Celâl*, strongly criticises old Turkish narrative literature for the same reasons. He does accept the fact that Turkish literature has some stories like *İbretnüma*, *Muhayyelat*, *Aslı ile Kerem* and *Ferhad ile Şirin*, but considers them different and inferior in comparison to novels, because novels narrate events that could have happened even though they did not actually happen.

¹ For the latest edition of this article see, *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Antolojisi*, volume III, edited by: Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Birol Emil, Zeynep Kerman, published by the Faculty of Literature of Istanbul University, 1979, pages 321–323.

Turkish stories on the other hand, being based on subjects contrary to nature and reality, like finding treasures thanks to magic spells, disappearing in the sea and reappearing in the inkpot of a writer, burning as a result of a curse or splitting a mountain with a pick (...) are to be considered not as novels, but old maids' yarns. Even poetic narrative like *Hüsn ü Aşk* or *Leyla ile Mecnun* are to be considered as booklets on sufism, given their subjects and the style with which they have been written.²

Namık Kemal does not think that Turkish stories are worthy of a civilised era, but on the other hand considers the work of such European writers as Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas as having such a literary value as to “provide a reason for righteous boasting to this century of civilisation.”³

We know that Ahmet Mithat was also a great admirer of European novels. All this means that according to these Turkish writers, the transition from old narrative genres to the novel also indicated a transition from fantasy to rationality, from infancy to maturity, in other words from backwardness to civilisation. As we shall see later on, the genre of the novel, which Turkey imported from the West as a requisite of civilisation, would also be considered as one of the paths that were supposed to lead it towards civilisation.

The Turkish novel, contrary to the European experience, is not a narrative genre that was born from social circumstances; nevertheless to better be able to understand the shape that the Turkish novel took and the function that it undertook, we shall have to analyse both the traditional Turkish narrative genres and the historical and social conditions of Turkey. Let us not forget that the first Turkish writers of novels, like Ahmet Mithat, Namık Kemal and Mizancı Murat, were all people quite concerned with the political and social problems of their time. I would prefer to leave the relation between our traditional stories and our first novels to another chapter and to concentrate for the moment on the historical and social circumstances during the time when the Turkish novel was born, on the basis of the research by such scholars as Sencer Divitçioğlu, Niyazi Berkes, Şerif Mardin and Taner Timur, on the structure of Ottoman society, on how this structure changed in the 19th century and on other historical developments, but only so far as the subject of the novel requires it.

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The sultan, who according to the principles of the Ottoman state was God's shadow on earth, needed an administrative class to apply his authority. As is common knowledge, this administrative class was made up of military people, civilians and religious scholars. Facing them were the Ottoman subjects, in other words a mass of common people, including, among

² *Mukaddime-i Celal*, 3rd printing (1309), pages 17–18.

³ *Ibid.*, page 18.

others, shopkeepers, artisans, merchants and peasants. The administrative class at the service of the sultan was a privileged class, isolated from its roots in society, specially trained, loyal to the sultan, provided with authority to govern the state in the sultan's name, free from the burden of taxes, and not contributing to productive activities. The point that concerns us is the detachment between the governing classes and the governed classes, within the context of the social structure deriving from the nature of the state. The members of the civilian administrative class, who made the state mechanisms function and who were servants of the sultan, did not reach their position as a result of elections, they were generally admitted when still of a very tender age, trained not for serving the people, but the sultan himself and inevitably as a result of all this they were isolated and estranged from the common people. The language they learned at their *enderun* (inner circle) school was not the Turkish of the people, but Ottoman, a language laden with Arabic and Persian.

As for the religious scholars, having been trained in *medreses* (theology schools), where most of the teaching was done in Arabic, they also were isolated from the people. Since the social structure on which the Ottoman state was based was of such a nature as to isolate the administrative elite from the governed, this also had as a result the development of two very different cultures. Histories of literature always mention the duality between *divan* literature (classical literature) and folk literature, but actually was this duality only seen in literature? The phenomenon of the separation between the upper classes and the common people, implies a much more all-encompassing estrangement. That is why, with the aim of underlining how wide a scope it had, Şerif Mardin describes this duality by using the terms “high culture” and “low culture”.⁴

Even though, as we have already stated, there was an estrangement between the governing and the governed classes, we have to bear in mind another aspect of the matter, so as to be able to compare the situation in the second half of the 19th century with what preceded it. The above mentioned aspect is a general ideology reuniting and mixing these two classes and their cultures. This ideology was Islam, the state religion, and even though popular religion had elements distinguishing it from the official version, the ideology of Islam was the general ideology of the Ottoman Empire and was common to both classes. This commonality was not limited to abstract faith. It also included the practical aspects of the ideology, which in great part gave daily life its shape. In other words, these practical aspects

⁴ “Super Westernisation Following the *Tanzimat* Reforms”, Geographical and Social Research Concerning Turkey, published by the Geography Institute of the Faculty of Literature of the Istanbul University, 1971.

like the festivities, the fasting, the ritual prayers, the commemoration of the dead, the ritual circumcision, were all elements that reunited the governing class with the common people. Since the way relations between the two sexes were viewed derived from the same ideology, there was a separation between the spaces related to the public sphere and those related to the private sphere in palaces and great mansions and among the lower classes there was at least the tradition of concealment from public view as far as the women were concerned.

In addition to the elements of faith and the practical aspects shared by high and low culture, we should also bear in mind the elements of literature which were in common. While *divan* literature and folk literature were two very different things, they also had some points in common. The subjects of products of classical literature like *Leylâ ile Mecnun*, *Yusuf ile Züleyha* and *Ferhad ile Şirin* were used also in folk stories. For example, *Ferhad ile Şirin* was also familiar to the general population through such media as the Karagöz shadow theatre and the *ortaoyunu* (theatrical representation using a central stage). Also, the *meddah* (public storytellers) were active not just in popular coffee-houses, but also in palaces and mansions. Thus, we can state that having listened to the same stories during childhood was another point in common between intellectuals and common people. In other words I would like to say that the two classes had a general ideology in common, customs, traditions and literary subjects, which after all served the purpose of limiting the estrangement between them.

However, a new process during the 19th century strengthened this estrangement by spreading it to the above mentioned fields common to the two classes. This process was the movement in favour of Westernisation, introduced by the governing class as a way of solving the problem of the decline of the empire. Even though the process of renewal had begun in the military field as early as the 18th century and even though such attempts at reforming the state had continued at the beginning of the 19th century, during the reign of Mahmut II, the real process of Westernisation began with the *Tanzimat* reforms, which were introduced with the Gülhane Imperial Edict (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu*) of 1839.

The assumption behind the *Tanzimat* reforms was that the decline of the empire could be stopped by imitating Western institutions and introducing them to the Ottoman lands. With this in mind, attempts were made to introduce pragmatic reforms in many different fields. It is wrong to assert that no reforms were carried out during the *Tanzimat* period, for the advantages of these reforms were felt later, but it is true that this process was not totally successful, because it was based on wrong assumptions. It could not prevent the fall of the empire and it was not able to strengthen it from an economic point of view. The fact is that those who introduced the *Tanzimat* reforms were neither aware of the economic and social

circumstances that gave birth to Western industry, nor of the actions to be taken to ensure the success of the planned reforms. The introduction of economic liberalism, which they believed (or were led to believe) was essential for industrialisation and thus for progress, brought about the commercial decline of small merchants and the almost complete dissolution of small industry, which had already been declining since the end of the 18th century, because of the industrialisation created by European capitalism.⁵ In contrast to this decline, the Christian subjects of the empire, thanks to the new guarantees and rights they had acquired, managed to garner almost complete control of the country's commercial activities by trading with Europe. The empire was on its way towards becoming a quasi colony. Naturally enough, this reform process, which did not have a wide enough social basis, did not concern the common people. Those who benefited from Westernisation were the Western powers, along with the minorities and those in the high levels of the bureaucracy, all of whom saw an increase in their power.

Since the subject of this article is the birth of the Turkish novel, also important from our perspective is the place occupied within the Westernising movement by the Young Ottomans group, among whose members were some of the first writers of novels in Turkey. The Young Ottomans were born both as a reaction to the *Tanzimat* movement, which ignored the institutions and concepts like the constitution and freedom that the Young Ottomans believed were the basis of Western civilisation, and which imitated the West superficially, without putting enough emphasis on religion and *şeriat* (canonical law), and also as a reaction to the governing bureaucracy who applied these reforms in a dictatorial way.

The Ottoman state's policy during the early 19th century centered on stopping the decline by means of Westernisation; this aim coincided with the increase of the empire's relations with Western countries and had as a result the decrease of the influence of the traditional Ottoman elites and the resulting increase of influence of those who were familiar with Europe and Western languages. This is the reason why most top members of the state hierarchy were those who had worked in embassies and acquired experience in diplomatic activities. Reşit Pasha, who had put together the *Hatt-ı Hümayun*, was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and had been ambassador in Paris and London. Ali Pasha, Fuat Pasha and Ahmet Vefik Pasha had also been ambassadors, and knew foreign languages and the West. Since the *Tanzimat* Edict had abolished the tradition by which the wealth of people who died reverted to the treasury, the new bureaucratic elite grew very powerful, took over the administration, and made it so that the highest positions of government were transmitted

⁵ See Ömer Celal Sarç, "The *Tanzimat* Reforms and Industry", *Tanzimat*, 1940, pages 423, 440.

hereditarily.⁶ The Young Ottomans embarked on a struggle against this dictatorship of an elite bureaucracy, because the elements that they would have liked to import from the West were different. Those who had prepared the *Tanzimat* Edict had no democratic aspirations like establishing a constitutional monarchy or introducing freedoms. By introducing the institutions of the West to the Ottoman lands, these people were just copying these institutions, without taking into consideration their philosophical and cultural background. What they were doing was superficially imitating Western culture and life styles. When the Europeanised life style of the mansions of high level government dignitaries like Ali and Fuat Pashas was repeated by others, a new attitude consisting of an imitation of the West became the fashion among the upper classes. Parties, dances and moonlit excursions along the Bosphorus, where both sexes mixed, were an element of Westernisation as seen by the people who initiated the *Tanzimat* reforms.

According to the Young Ottomans, who had been inspired by the French Revolution, and especially according to Namık Kemal, the elements upon which the welfare of Europe were based were freedom, equality and “science”. Things being so, the key concepts of the solution the Ottomans required were a “constitution” that would ensure freedom and equality, and public schooling that would ensure technical and scientific know-how. It was Namık Kemal’s belief that Europeans owed their civilisation to these things. He was not really cognisant of the historical, social and economic circumstances that had brought about the welfare of the West that he himself had seen personally. According to him civilisation was, as Niyazi Berkes put it, “a question of mentality, not related to history or society,”⁷ and thus Western civilisation could be attained by the Ottomans if they acquired this mentality. This means that Namık Kemal believed that the problem of the decline of the Ottoman Empire could be solved by taking part of the technology of the West, or in other words part of the ideology of the West that had derived from its social structure and add it somehow to the ideology of Islam. Clearly, this was the duty of an intellectual elite. Looked at from this point of view, the movement of the Young Ottomans also lacked a wide social basis, but contrary to the Westernisers of the *Tanzimat*, the Young Ottomans did not make the mistake of isolating themselves from the common people or of ignoring them. They did not repeat this mistake, because first of all they wanted to get something from the West without discarding their ideology of Islam and thus by preserving their Ottoman personality, and second because the philosophy of enlightenment, which they wanted to import from the West

⁶ See Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton U.P., 1962, pages 105-125.

⁷ *Türk Düşününde Batı Sorunu*, Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975, page 210.

meant a battle against ignorance, for which they were obliged to turn to the general population. Their success rested on the enlightenment of the minds of the people of the Ottoman Empire and on their schooling. From this point of view, it would not be wrong to state that the Young Ottomans were concerned with the common people.

The Young Ottomans had two evident ways of making themselves heard by the people: newspapers and literature. According to Namık Kemal, “since from the point of view of schooling, our nation is very far from having a university in all of its districts and a scholar in each street, one would not think that there were so many people devoid of the need of a newspaper or of a story.”⁸ Şinasi, who felt that first of all the public had to be educated and that for this to be possible the language had to be simplified, began to publish a newspaper titled *Tasvir-i Efkâr* in 1862 and in this way introduced the use of the newspaper as a school and a new conception of literature, according to which literature should be a medium to educate the public. The intellectuals of the group of the Young Ottomans followed in his footsteps. In his *Mukaddime-i Celâl*, Namık Kemal stated that during the previous fifteen years the number of readers had increased a hundred fold, and after specifying that, “in Istanbul shopkeepers and servants read the newspaper or at least hear about what is written in them,” added that in this way people had learned about many different subjects and about concepts like love of country and the freedom of the nation; Namık Kemal also regretted that notwithstanding these evident truths, some people could say things like, “are we supposed to be educated with newspapers and stories?”⁹ It is interesting, but also natural that Namık Kemal should believe that newspapers and stories had the same function. Let us not forget that in those days, by publishing articles about science, literature, history, geography and other similar subjects, newspapers served as a kind of open school for their readers. Anyway, it is to be expected that in pre-revolution times the instructive and enlightening functions should gain the upper hand in comparison to its other duties. *Divan* literature had as its centre the Palace and the duty of the Palace and the underlying assumption that those who administered the state in the name of the Palace were to preserve the social and economic structure, without bringing any change to it. The situation being thus, one could not expect the poets and writers of “high culture”, with the Palace as their centre, to create works of a nature that could lead to a subversion of the established order. It is true that in old literature there also was a certain amount of works with teachings about morality and wisdom, but it was out of the question that such teachings in old literature should instil the values of Western

⁸ *Mukaddime-i Celâl*, page 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 9.

civilisation. Works like the *mesnevi* collections of poetry that expressed sufi philosophy, like Sheikh Sadi's *Gülistan* that was considered a book about ethics or like the *Velâyetnames* that narrated the religious successes of Hacı Bektaş and Sarı Saltık and that became part of folk literature, could only serve the purpose of recreating the existing ideology of Islam. Consequently, we can easily state that the utility aimed for in *Kelile ve Dimne*, where advice was given through stories about animals or in the *meddah* stories, where there always was a moral at the end of the story, was different from the utility meant by the first Turkish writers of novels when they stated that, "literature should be useful".

As I have previously stated, the novel, accepted as a requirement of contemporary civilisation, was also seen as one of the vehicles that would lead the Ottomans to civilisation. That is why the first Turkish novel writers did not aim only for a moral of the story, even though they ascribed a lot of importance to ethical questions. In the introduction to his novel titled *Nedamet mi? Heyhat!*, Ahmet Mithat states,

A novel is not just the story of pleasant and strange events. Such a story is bound to refer to one of the sciences, to a few of the industries, to some principles of philosophy, to a country making up a chapter of geography or to a paragraph of history and in this way the explanations concerning these subjects will expand the knowledge and culture of those, who will express an opinion about the story.¹⁰

and in this way underlines the fact that a novel should enlighten and instruct the reader in a variety of subjects.

When we take a look at the work of İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ahmet Mithat, Şemsettin Sami and Samipaşazade Sezai, we notice that they aimed to instil into Ottoman society certain Western views, concepts and values, which were deemed to be necessary for a civilising process, and not just in novels, but also in poems and theatre plays. That is why social problems like the procedures leading to marriage, attitudes towards women, the institution of concubinage and attitudes towards commerce were all chosen as subjects to be criticised in novels.

Stating that the writers of the *Tanzimat* period shared the same opinion about the function of the novel does not mean that the kind of schooling through novels they aimed for was of the same nature. The fact that their political views were different reflects itself in the nature of the ideas that they sought to instil in their readers' minds. For example Namık Kemal, who struggled against despotism and who believed in a constitutional monarchy, tried to instil principles like freedom, equality and nation, which had political overtones. On the

¹⁰ *Nedamet mi? Heyhat!*, 1306/1898, page 6.

other hand, Ahmet Mithat, who at the beginning looked as if he agreed with the Young Ottomans, used his writing of fiction and journalistic activities for schooling purposes, but not to influence the people with political ideas, like Namık Kemal did, preferring to provide his readers with knowledge of an encyclopaedic nature so as to expand their culture. This is due to the fact that he was not a revolutionary like Namık Kemal and he thought that progress required a rise in the general cultural level. The principle he most of all wanted to instil in people's minds was diligence in commerce and success in business. It cannot be said, however, that he was content with this. Even though his thoughts evolved in a religious and moralistic way after having compromised with the authoritarian regime of Sultan Abdülhamit II, he also had progressive ideas concerning women's rights and slavery.

Mizancı Murat of the succeeding generation also thought that literature had to be instructive, but his aim was not to use literature as a means of spreading encyclopaedic knowledge among the people, since according to him the only way to save the nation was to train an honest elite with strong morals. The idealistic, honest and patriotic Mansur Bey character in his novel titled *Turfa mı Yoksa Turfanda mı* (1891), represented the enlightened administrator he had in mind. Notwithstanding all these differences of opinion, all novel writers of the *Tanzimat* period agreed about the superiority of Islamic moral values.

All this meant that those who introduced the novel to the Ottoman lands served progress in two ways. The first was by introducing and spreading a narrative genre worthy of civilised people and developed by the Europeans, who had a more sophisticated literature, in other words by helping the process of Westernisation in literature. The second was by using the novel, just as in the case of newspapers, as a means of instruction and thus of progress (even though each had his own ideas about what progress meant).

Since this was what the novel writers of the *Tanzimat* period had in mind when writing their novels, they inevitably introduced in their novels the subject of how to use Western civilisation and in what measure. These Ottoman intellectuals saw themselves as civilised Muslims loyal to their own traditions and according to them it was possible to progress by taking inspiration from the example provided by the West and at the same time preserve one's own identity as religious Ottomans. Faltering between Eastern and Western values and becoming prey to a dilemma was not really possible according to this view. However, over time things changed. In 1876, Sultan Abdülhamit II introduced the constitutional monarchy requested by the Young Ottomans, but later abolished it and concentrated all power in his own hands. As a consequence the policy of Westernisation of the *Tanzimat* period, which did not rest upon a wide social basis, was abandoned and the Sultan began to follow a policy

based on the ideology of Islam. However the ideas introduced by the Young Ottomans and later pursued by the Young Turks were transmitted to future generations, minus their religious elements. The result of this current of thought was the introduction of the Second Constitutional Period by a group made up of progressive officers and civilians.

At this point, what is of interest for us is the “cultural duality” created as a consequence of the process of Westernisation.¹¹

As the state grew weaker and weaker, both financially and politically, it also became more dependent on the West and became obliged to adapt itself to the West. As a consequence, reforms, in contrast to the Ottoman system that was religion based, became inevitable in the administrative, public education and juridical systems. Increased commercial relations with the West obliged the state to introduce novelties to the juridical system. Secular *nizamiye* tribunals were introduced without abolishing the old *şer'i* (canonical) courts, the French Commercial Code of Laws was adapted to local requirements, institutions like public prosecutor and lawyer were introduced etc.¹² Reforms, which were to have important consequences, were also carried out in the field of public education, because there was the need for military schools to provide the necessary technical knowledge and new schools, in addition to the existing *medrese*, where a new kind of state employees were to be trained. While the *medrese* continued to educate the old type of scholars, the new *Mekteb-i Harbiye* (military school - 1837), *Darülmaarif* (state employee training school - 1849), *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* (political science school - 1859), *Mekteb-i Tıbbiye* (medical school - 1838), *Galatasaray Sultanisi* (Galatasaray high-school - 1868), *Darülmüallimat* (teacher training college - 1870), established by the state and based on secular principles, began to educate a new kind of intellectual. As in many other fields, the conflict between old and new made itself felt also in this field.¹³

Graduates of the medical school were more inclined to adopt a materialistic world-view. According to Hanioglu, there appeared, “a completely new type of intellectual, who under the influence of books imported from France, where positivism was all the rage among intellectuals, and of like-minded teachers, had adopted a biological materialistic outlook and

¹¹ See Taner Timur, *Türk Devrimi, Tarihi Anlamı ve Felsefi Temeli*, published by the Social Sciences Faculty of the Ankara University, 1968, Part 2.

¹² See İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, Hil Yayın, 1983, pages 129–131.

¹³ “After the introduction of the *Tanzimat* reforms, there appeared in addition to the group who had studied at the *medrese* that had kept the old organisation and mentality and that represented Arab culture, a completely different group who had studied at the new *Tanzimat* schools and who had a whole new set of ideas and ideals (...) whenever these two groups were in conflict, it was the *medrese* scholars, who were victorious until the introduction of the Second Constitution in 1908.” Sadrettin Celal Antel, “The Schools of the *Tanzimat*”, *Tanzimat*, pages 459–460.

as a consequence was in conflict with the system of values of a society, where religion was still in great part a determining factor.”¹⁴ Also Beşir Fuat, who introduced Emile Zola and his naturalism in his country and thus had great influence on Turkish literature, had studied at the medical school and was a materialist. Schools like the *tıbbiye* and the *mülkiye*, which during the *Tanzimat* period applied a secular education, became a third source, in addition to newspapers and literature, where ideology was formulated. Thanks to the new atmosphere of freedom following the introduction of the Second Constitution, the enlightened class educated in these schools was able to spread within certain spheres, currents like positivism, materialism, Darwinism and nationalism. At this point, analysing the views and attitudes of certain political groups would mean dabbling in excessive details as far as our subject is concerned. However we should point out that in the ideology of the Young Turks and of the *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee for Union and Progress), which followed the Young Ottomans, the proposed solutions for the rescue of the empire contained fewer elements of a religious nature.

Moving away from the ideology of Islam, which had been dominant for centuries, in what is nowadays known as Turkey, meant moving away from all the values, traditions and life styles that had taken root in society’s life. As we have already mentioned, the estrangement between the governing and the governed classes, present before the beginning of the process of Westernisation, was in great part compensated thanks to the ideology of Islam at the basis of everything and thanks to the everyday practice of Islam. We can state that the process of Westernisation widened this rift between the upper and the lower classes, by eliminating the common basic ideology and breaking up community life, which was the everyday application of this ideology.

This is only one aspect of the matter, since notwithstanding the spread of Westernisation, the upper classes were not completely Western and were not completely Ottoman. Whatever the political and philosophical views of the single intellectuals, there was always an inner conflict concerning the two civilisations. The co-existence of West and East had created a duality in the system of values, which was present not just in state institutions, but in all institutions. By then it had become possible to make distinctions between old and new ethics, old type and new type families, and old and new manners. In daily life, European customs, social relations, music, architecture and tastes were present in a very incongruous manner together with what was traditional. As a consequence, the rift between “high culture”

¹⁴ Dr. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981, page 8.

and “low culture” widened throughout the 19th century and while “high culture” found itself in a dead end, the resulting confusion of values became a main characteristic of Ottoman society. The intellectuals themselves had difficulty in achieving a balance within all these different values; they could not bring themselves to accept Western values in their entirety, but at the same time they were not content with traditional values. The First World War, the armistice following the war, the War of Independence and the subsequent reforms of Atatürk increased the confusion within Turkey’s attitudes towards Westernisation, with the result that this dilemma has maintained its central position.

Writers feel the need to confront this conflict of values by evaluating conflicting ideologies, questioning them and putting forward their own views, especially during periods of turbulence, when the pains of revolution are being felt and ideological struggles are raging. This is why until the 1950’s the problems related to the Turkish novel are to be seen as a function of the process of Westernisation. When we take a look at the most important writers of this period we see that almost all of them have included the question of Westernisation in their work. Westernisation is not just the main problem of the Turkish novel, it also determines in great part the function, establishment and types of the Turkish novel. I hope that as we analyse in this book the single novels, this phenomenon will become clearer. To claim that all Turkish novels have taken up this problem would be nonsensical. What we are trying to do is to underline the dominant nature of the Turkish novel. Clearly, this nature is present in the most famous works of our main writers. Are there not famous novels, in which this nature is not present? Of course there are. However, when we analyse this second type of novels, of which the most famous creator is Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, we will see that in a way even they include characteristics related to Westernisation.