

The Modernist Will to Totality: Dream Aesthetics and National Allegory

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate Program in Literature  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation argues that one of the distinguishing characteristics of modernist literature is its desire to represent the social totality and that some of the significant modernist narrative-formal experiments can be read as attempts to respond to the complex phenomenon of fragmentation witnessed in modernity. The crisis in the representation of totality is presented as a general framework within which different national situations and their literary works can communicate with each other, and the conventional definition of modernism can be broadened accordingly. This study focuses on the formal solutions offered to the mentioned problem in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, A.H. Tanpınar's *A Mind at Peace*, and Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*. The forms it analyzes extensively are Tanpınar's dream aesthetics and Hedayat's allegorical and non-oriented narrative resembling a Möbius band.

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## **Introduction: Modernism and Totality**

In an essay on Turkish modernist literature and the novelist, poet, essayist, and professor of aesthetics Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1960), the Nobel Laureate author Orhan Pamuk states that “In my view, we have never had a genuine modernism”<sup>1</sup> and explains how he defines the term:

By literary modernism, I understand not only the rejection of tradition but also moving away from the spirit of society and the mindset of community. Modernist literature has broken up the relationship of “representation” that was the strongest aspect of traditional literature. Literature no longer represented reality, writing was not a mirror of life. Writing became an activity against life, a distinct universe with its own structure, a new world. The texts produced by modernist writers were not sites where the existing world was reflected or its rules and secrets were explained. Modernist literary activity is not carried out to capture life as it is; modernist writing is an activity by itself and its meaning is revealed by its inwardness.<sup>2</sup>

Modernist writers, in order not to represent life, invented numerous “techniques, methods, and narrative procedures,” (stream of consciousness, collage, long sentences, dissolution of the narrative center or narrator, non-linear narration, etc.) all of which were genuine “inventions,” “examples of intellectual creativity,” and “novelty.”<sup>3</sup> Relying on “the richness and density of their inner structure,” modernist texts referred the reader not to the external world but to their own textual elements, and this procedure both distinguished them from other types of writing and displayed the fundamental attitude of

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<sup>1</sup> Orhan Pamuk, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar ve Türk Modernizmi." *Defter*, no. 23, 1995, pp.31-45; 32. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Turkish to English are mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

modernist writers: “Here, the deeper literary invention is the discovery of a new attitude. Our modernist novelist seems to be saying, ‘I love writing, the inner possibilities it offers for textual richness, and the creative horizons it opens before me so much that I just cannot stand the idea of making direct references to life.’”<sup>4</sup>

Pamuk maintains that by disrupting literary representation or rejecting to represent the world, modernist authors acted in line with a new ethos; “they assumed an attitude against life. They did something against their community and society.”<sup>5</sup> The reason why there has not been a literary modernism in Turkey was that the technical and stylistic novelties of “genuine modernism” could not be invented in Turkey mainly because the Turkish novelists did not assume the new modernist ethos of disconnecting themselves from society and not representing life: “Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar is a man of community; as a novelist, he feels completely responsible for the community in which he lives.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, we witness in his novels deficiencies such as authorial intervention (“not even Stendhal would do it that way”), lack of irony, seriousness, references to collectivity (“he automatically talks about an ‘us’”), didacticism, and so on. Tanpınar and other novelists like him (presumably modern Turkish writers in general) were people in the service of community. “This identity [man of service] does not fit modernism’s principal attitudes and behaviors; it is not in accordance with the ethos and the mood that produce modernist texts. We cannot imagine Tanpınar high on opium, out of his head, as a furious

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 34. One suspects that in this statement, instead of talking about modernism itself, Pamuk might be projecting onto modernist works his own postmodern novelistic agenda, which is sheer textual production and the pleasure derived from textual playfulness.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 39.

man who curses everyone. (...) We cannot imagine Tanpınar as a man who flirts with the idea of sin and collaborates with Satan.”<sup>7</sup> Arguably, if ridding oneself of tradition along with any kind of communitarian concern is a token of the modernist ethos, it becomes a bit difficult to position as modernist names like T.S. Eliot worrying about the deterioration of Western culture, W.B. Yeats engaging with the Gaelic revival, or Ezra Pound subscribing to corporatism.

This dissertation views Tanpınar as a modernist author and analyzes his magnum opus *A Mind at Peace* (1948)<sup>8</sup> from the perspective of international modernism. The other author that constitutes the main focus of my study is the Iranian novelist, essayist, and literary critic Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951). Pamuk does not consider Tanpınar as a modernist writer on the abovementioned stylistic and attitudinal grounds; nevertheless, these same criteria should doubtlessly make Hedayat the epitome of modernist style and ethos as he created one of the finest examples of literary surrealism and expressionism (for Pamuk, good non-mimetisms) with *The Blind Owl* (1936)<sup>9</sup>, which will be examined in the following pages. Moreover, Hedayat was an opium addict, an embittered social outcast, and a successful suicide attempter who wrote in one of his letters, “What an accursed, base and rotten country we’ve got, and what malevolent and infernal people it has! I feel that all my life I’ve been a plaything in the hands of whores and sons-of-whores.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, trans. Erdağ Göknaç, Archipelago Books, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello, Grove Press, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Homa Katouzian, "The Wondrous World of Sadeq Hedayat," in *Sadeq Hedayat and His Wondrous World*, ed. Homa Katouzian, Routledge, 2008, pp.1-14; 5.

One of the working assumptions of my dissertation is that it is not a narrow catalogue of literary techniques and non-communitarian attitudes that designate or disqualify Tanpınar and Hedayat as modernist novelists (and many other writers worldwide for that matter). The need for a fuller and more global definition of modernism has evidently gained more urgency with the interventions of postcolonial criticism, theory of alternative modernities, and the revived discipline of comparative literature that is far more receptive to non-Western literary realities. I wish to contribute to this effort with my dissertation which suggests that seeing modernism as an international phenomenon requires moving beyond the overexaggerated emphasis put on technique *qua* technique and form *qua* form—these should rather be viewed as various aesthetic strategies used not to withdraw from but to make sense of certain world-historical processes that condition them.

In what follows, I will concentrate on one such multifaceted process and the literary-aesthetic problem that it generates in modernity across different geographies. This phenomenon, to use an umbrella term, is fragmentation, and it concerns various sites including the psyche, experience of subjectivity and sociality, temporality, and culture. Put differently, my dissertation will argue that the thread that cuts across different spaces of modernity is the historical expansion of capital through imperialism and in this process various forms of fragmentation are experienced in all spaces of modernity. Yet, some of these forms gain more prominence for individual writers depending on the concrete ways in which their respective societies are situated in the globalizing network of capital and the interstate system created through imperialism. These different experiences of

fragmentation severely undermine the comprehensibility of totality—a term which, in my approach, signifies the social totality and the national culture and community conceived through a relatively intact epistemology and view of history. Below, I will try to think about international modernism in general, and Tanpınar and Hedayat’s modernisms in particular, with regard to the notion of fragmentation and the literary-aesthetic strategies they deploy to tackle this complex phenomenon. The crisis of representation specifically of totality, my dissertation suggests, is a fruitful trope that could enable us to put different modernist authors within a global context and in conversation with one another. But before I proceed to Tanpınar and Hedayat’s novels, I would like to overview in more detail the particular ideology of modernism that informs Pamuk’s position and then articulate the definition that will enframe my own discussion.

### **Modernism, Attitude, and Style**

There are two interrelated views that underlie the conventional accounts of aesthetic modernism and in an attempt to illustrate these views I will focus on two figures, Marshall Berman and Clement Greenberg, who seem to have presented most strongly the main arguments that have shaped the received understanding of modernist literature reproduced by Pamuk in relation to Tanpınar. Berman’s 1982 study *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*<sup>11</sup> rests on a tripartite working definition constructed around the concepts of modernization, modernity, and modernism. The modern world in Berman’s

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<sup>11</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Penguin, 1982.

narrative is a maelstrom in which, according to Marx and Engels' characterization in the *Communist Manifesto*, "All that is solid melts into air." As the bourgeoisie created a world in its own image and economic production came gradually under the sway of capital, all traditional forms of inhabiting the social world and nature changed drastically. Modernization is the name of this process by which the socio-economic and political structures of previous societies were irretrievably dissolved, and what made this possible was a train of unprecedented developments in science, communication, transportation, and technology, as well as massive urbanization, bureaucratization, and industrialization.

Modernism is the name of an ambiguous set of attitudes assumed in the midst of this maelstrom caused by modernization, and it designates an "amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own."<sup>12</sup> The ambiguity of these visions and ideas stemmed from the contradictions inherent to capitalist modernization which brought into existence an immense power of production; yet, it did so not only by doing away with the relatively stable ground of older institutions, identities, and experiences but also by recurrently destroying and remaking the ground of capitalist society itself. "This atmosphere—of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

the soul—is the atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born.”<sup>13</sup> As Perry Anderson observes, modernity in Berman’s definition is a type of historical experience that mediates to each other the essentially economic process called modernization and the set of cultural visions and ideas called modernism. Moreover, this mediatory concept, whose fundamental trait is the idea of development, has a dual meaning: “On the one hand, it refers to the gigantic objective transformations of society unleashed by the advent of the capitalist world market: that is, essentially but not exclusively, *economic* development. On the other hand, it refers to the momentous subjective transformations of individual life and personality which occur under their impact: everything that is contained within the notion of *self*-development, as a heightening of human powers and widening of human experience.”<sup>14</sup> Modernity, then, is an experiential ecosystem in which modernization and modernism intermingle through a certain developmental impulse constantly transforming society and the self.

The richest articulation of the experience of modernity able to account for its ambivalences and contradictions was produced in the nineteenth century. “Our nineteenth-century thinkers,” Berman writes, “were simultaneously enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions; their self-ironies and inner tensions were a primary source of their creative power. Their twentieth-century successors have lurched far more towards rigid polarities and flat

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution." *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 144, 1984, pp.96-113; 98. Original emphases.

totalizations.”<sup>15</sup> The arguably dialectical vision of the nineteenth-century literature had abounded in “open visions of life” until its successor, the twentieth-century modernism, put in their place “closed ones” either in full affirmation or in full negation of modernity depending on whether it was regarded as an oppressive machine and a spiritual wasteland or as a space charged with an uncontainable revolutionary energy. Interestingly enough, later in his book, repeating that very modernist gesture and almost with a leap of faith, Berman resolves the ambivalence expressed in the nineteenth-century literary and philosophical works by privileging what in fact has been all along just one of the terms of the contradiction, namely, unceasing development through creative destruction.

Berman’s endorsement of the idea of development with its various connotations such as constant innovation, successive transformations of the individual and the collective, and a Faustian creative force each time producing the radically new (and modern) reflects one of the views that determine the classic definition of aesthetic and literary modernism. According to this view, what allows certain works to be classified under the rubric of modernist literature is essentially that impetus shared by each one of them and expressed in Pound’s famous slogan: “Make it new!” A strong aversion to the traditional modes of representation and a restless search for new forms and techniques that would correspond to the experience of modernity thus appear to be what modernist literature was all about.

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<sup>15</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*; 24.

As for the second influential view, it can be found in its pure form in Clement Greenberg's 1980 essay "Modern and Postmodern,"<sup>16</sup> which asserts that modernism was in fact a response to the confusion of standards brought about by romanticism—a confusion that had reached the point of a real crisis of aesthetic value. Academicism, which for Greenberg stands not only for actual institutions and their artistic policies but all the programmatic approaches to art in various periods, did not take into account the intricacies and peculiarities of artistic medium itself. The academicist neglect of the medium coupled with the romantic disrespect to it resulted in a kind of blurring as "words become imprecise, colors get muffled, the physical sources of sound become too much dissembled."<sup>17</sup> The modernist reaction to academicism and romanticism, then, expressed itself both as a need for exploring new possibilities in artistic production and in the emphasis put particularly on the preciseness and concreteness of the medium in writing and painting alike. Clearly enough, commitment to innovation as opposed to the reified and blurred methods of artistic production is one of the major themes also in Greenberg's account of modernism.

Yet, there is another aspect to this commitment that was more profoundly related to the said crisis: "But above all Modernism declared itself by insisting on a renovation of standards, and it effected this by a more critical and less pious approach to the past in order to make it more genuinely relevant, more 'modern.'"<sup>18</sup> If romanticism's relation to

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<sup>16</sup> Clement Greenberg. "Modern and Postmodern." [sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html](http://sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html). Accessed 18 June 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the past was one of imitation, a kind of carrying over of the past into the present, modernism reaffirmed and dealt with it in totally new ways: “And it belonged to this reaffirming that the balance was tipped toward emulation as against imitation more radically than ever before—but only out of necessity, the necessity imposed by the reaffirmed and renovated standards.”<sup>19</sup> One of Greenberg’s most curious moves occurs at this very moment where he qualifies the modernist desire for innovation as an aesthetic virtue made out of necessity. He reiterates that “making it new” was an essential attribute of modernism; yet, he further argues, “all the great and lasting Modernist creators were reluctant innovators at bottom, innovators only because they had to be—for the sake of quality, and for the sake of self-expression.”<sup>20</sup> Innovation as such is crucial in order for any work’s artistic quality to rise above a certain level, but the innovations carried out by modernists were destined “to be, or look, more radical and abrupt than innovation used to be or look”<sup>21</sup> precisely because the fateful loss of aesthetic criteria and artistic levels necessitated it.

This reluctant yet continual innovation, both aggressive towards the older academicism and responsive to the crisis in standards, also had a defensive character. As Greenberg maintains, modernism should be understood as a “holding operation, a continuing endeavor to maintain aesthetic standards in the face of threats—not just as a reaction against romanticism.”<sup>22</sup> It is only with modernism that the awareness of aesthetic

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

value being in danger and the resultant anxiety to restore and preserve criteria became that strong. “Threats from the social and material ambience, from the temper of the times, all conveyed through the demands of a new and open cultural market, middlebrow demands,”<sup>23</sup> were among the causes that forced modernism to assume a more or less conscious group identity and take on the task of defending aesthetic value. Hence, the beginnings of modernism can be located somewhere in the mid-nineteenth century, in that period when the market finally came to dominate the scene of artistic production. After these remarks, Greenberg presents his broader definition of modernism: “It consists in the continuing endeavor to stem the decline of aesthetic standards threatened by the relative democratization of culture under industrialism; that the overriding and innermost logic of Modernism is to maintain the levels of the past in the face of an opposition that hadn't been present in the past.”<sup>24</sup>

While modernism endeavored to maintain artistic standards, it also promoted the notion that neither art nor aesthetic experience needed a justification extrinsic to itself—art was its own end and aesthetic value had an autonomous existence. “It could now be acknowledged that art doesn't have to teach, doesn't have to celebrate or glorify anybody or anything, doesn't have to advance causes; that it has become free to distance itself from religion, politics, and even morality. All it has to do is be good as art.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, Greenberg asserts, modernism did not have a program; it had nothing to do with ideas, theories, or ideologies. It has been “in the nature, rather, of an attitude and an orientation:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

an attitude and orientation to standards and levels: standards and levels of aesthetic quality in the first and also the last place.”<sup>26</sup> Pamuk adds to this the hostility towards the entire society that was deemed complicit in the marring of literary quality and freedom because of its communitarian spirit and demands.

In the narrative of modernism that I have tried to overview, modernist literature refers at once to a period and a set of similar attitudes, styles, and techniques. As a period concept, it signifies both the undermining of older aesthetic frameworks such as romanticism and realism, and a reaction to what Berman calls modernization and Greenberg despotism of the market and the blurring of standards. This reaction sometimes takes an affirmative form trying to make the most of the thrilling experiences and possibilities that modernity provides for social and subjective transformation alike. The works that are deemed modernist display a strong tendency for technical, formal, and stylistic innovation informed by that spirit. At other times, the reaction to modernity takes a rather negative form: The exertions not only of the cultural market but also of various social and ideological positions become so intense that artists, writers, poets find themselves in a situation where they face the danger of going extinct simply because art itself is under a heavy attack. A heroic defense of aesthetic standards against decadent standardization is what ensues, and the embodiment of this strategy is the essentially autotelic, fully autonomous painting, novel or poem that has nothing to do with “extra-artistic” elements. Obviously, whereas Berman’s modernism is closer to a kind of avant-garde espousal of the modern condition, where solid criteria for aesthetic value too melt

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

into air, Greenberg's modernism leans towards the integrity of the work of art and presumably universal, timeless value. However, what enables one in the last instance to keep these two poles together is a certain glorification of the new as such. After all, for Greenberg, even when it engaged in reaffirming the past (the tradition consisting of the best that has been produced in art and literature), modernism tried to emulate it largely by inventing new methods capable of maintaining aesthetic values.

### **Ideology of Modernism**

Fredric Jameson and David Harvey criticize this definition of modernism for being ideological—an ideology reflecting not so much the politics of modernism itself as that of its theorists, and Perry Anderson finds it uncaring in its historicization and not self-reflexive enough in its conceptualization. Jameson observes that in Greenberg's construction of the idea of aesthetic autonomy, there occurs a certain slippage from an antagonism between modernism and "its bourgeois context" to the one between art and the decadent middle-class culture, whereby modernism's anti-capitalist agenda is made invisible. Consequently, modernist art and literature become enclaves within bourgeois society, "no longer grounded in an analysis of the socio-economic system," and thus no longer displaying a genuine political engagement instead of voicing mere resentment or "social antipathies."<sup>27</sup> In Greenberg's formulation, Jameson argues, both leftist politics and the public sphere seen as invaded by middle-class tastelessness form an

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<sup>27</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, Verso, 2002; 170.

unproblematized unity that is identified very broadly as all that is extra-artistic. Moreover, in Greenberg's anti-Stalinist and anti-bourgeois position, both radical politics and a rather liberal notion of freedom congeal into the theme of a threatening struggle between different ideologies, a kind of crossfire amidst which art itself stands. Later Greenberg reduces this struggle to mere content, ideas or subject-matter, and these in turn "make it possible to identify as politics itself, of whatever ideological persuasion, what must be excised from the work of art in order for it to become something more purely aesthetic."<sup>28</sup>

It is here that the defensive strategy of modernism that Greenberg evokes becomes an "instinct of self-preservation"<sup>29</sup> and the artistic medium gets singled out as the only intrinsic subject-matter of art. This formulation, however, responds to the dilemmas and contradictions of a particular social and political context. As Jameson continues, Greenberg's success does not consist only in providing an aesthetic solution to the dilemma between mass culture/politically engaged art and autonomous art or in remaking a canon that presents his particular view of aesthetics as the endpoint of a process driven by tendencies inherent to modernism itself. It rather consists in grasping "the onset of the Cold War not as the end of hope and the paralysis of the productive energies of the preceding period, but rather as the signal opportunity to forge a brand-new ideology that co-opts and reawakens those energies and offers a whole new (aesthetic) blueprint for the future."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 172.

David Harvey offers a similar argument that further qualifies the period Jameson refers to as the “onset of the Cold War.” In Harvey’s account, this is a period in which the artistic, architectural, and literary figures of modernism that were once “judged as subversive, incomprehensible, or shocking” were appropriated and canonized by the academic establishment. Harvey describes the political and ideological motive of that appropriation as follows:

To begin with, the fight against fascism was depicted as a fight to defend Western culture and civilization from barbarism. Explicitly rejected by fascism, international modernism became, in the United States, “confounded with culture more broadly and abstractly defined.” The trouble was that international modernism had exhibited strong socialist, even propagandist, tendencies in the 1930s (...). The de-politicization of modernism [was embraced] by the political and cultural establishment as an ideological weapon in the cold war struggle.<sup>31</sup>

In both Jameson and Harvey, then, the rise of the kind of aesthetic ideology propagated by the likes of Greenberg coincides with the post-WWII moment whose retrospectively anti-fascist and more immediately anti-socialist tendencies ultimately strip modernism of its political character.

Curiously enough, Pamuk also agrees with Jameson and Harvey on the ideological nature of the established understanding of modernism:

After the 1950s, with the academic boom witnessed across the world and with the strengthening of academicism especially in the US, modernism became a founding stone of the twentieth-century literature and enjoyed approval. Modernism was now one of the fundamental rules of literature; it became an indispensable part of the literary museum. Unlike the romantics, modernist writers were not sniffed at. Today, they are the most legitimate and respected components of the twentieth-century literature. (...) In this regard, we can say that modernism

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<sup>31</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, 1992; 36-37.

is not only a part of the established ideology of literature; it is a part of the established ideological world as well.<sup>32</sup>

Pamuk thus acknowledges that the myth of modernism is predominantly an academic(ist) construct; however, throughout his essay, he speaks from within that aesthetic ideology. His dismissal of Tanpınar as a communitarian man who cannot be qualified as modernist reminds one of the criticism some commentators leveled against Tanpınar about one of his characters—Suad—in *A Mind at Peace*. Portrayed as the alter-ego of the novel's protagonist Mümtaz, Suad is a nihilistic young man who is in rebellion against all the social and ethical values and responsibilities borne by Mümtaz and his cousin İhsan—and eventually, he kills himself. One of the most influential Marxist literary critics in Turkey, Fethi Naci, in an essay he wrote in 1973, accused Tanpınar of creating an inauthentic character and argued that Suad, who resembled Dostoyevsky's Stavrogin from *Demons*, was in fact a distorted version of the latter: "An act that has a social meaning with Stavrogin turns into an act of personal evil with Suad. The reason is clear: Suad's suicide cannot pass beyond being merely a translated suicide."<sup>33</sup> When Tanpınar creates a "demonic" character in line with the ethos that Pamuk attributes to modernism, he is criticized for translating foreign characters and sentiments that do not fit into the realities of Turkish society; and when he displays extra-aesthetic concerns for culture or politics, his non-modernism is sealed for good. Incidentally, Hedayat was subjected to the same

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<sup>32</sup> Pamuk, "Tanpınar ve Türk Modernizmi"; 35.

<sup>33</sup> Fethi Naci, "Huzur," in *Bir Gül Bu Karanlıklarda": Tanpınar Üzerine Yazılar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, 3F Yayınevi, 2008, pp. 177-186; 181.

criticism especially by the Marxist Tudeh Party literary circles and was ostracized for being an inauthentic, pessimistic, petty-bourgeois nihilist.<sup>34</sup>

As for Anderson's objection to Berman, it raises two major points; one about Berman's characterization of modernization and the other about his conceptualization of modernism. For Anderson, whereas he rightfully retains Marx's argument about capitalism being a "universal dissolvent of the old social world," Berman proves to have overlooked the importance of another facet of Marx's theory of capitalism by choosing to focus extensively on the "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance, everlasting uncertainty and agitation." Anderson draws attention to the three adjectives above and argues that they "denote a *homogenous* historical time, in which each moment is perpetually different from each other by virtue of being next, but—by the same token—is also the same, as an interchangeable unit in a process of indefinite recurrence."<sup>35</sup> In its simplification of Marx's more nuanced analysis of the movement of capitalism, this view cannot detach itself from the conventional theory of modernization in which the central term stands for the incorporation of pre-capitalist societies or social sectors into the capitalist system.

The idea of modernization, Anderson suggests, rests on the notion of planar development. It is conceived as a continuous linear process that does not make room for internal conjunctural or epochal differentiations "save in terms of the mere chronological succession of old and new, earlier and later, categories themselves subject to unceasing

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<sup>34</sup> See Katouzian, "The Wondrous World of Sadeq Hedayat"; 1-14.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution"; 101. Original emphasis.

permutation of positions in one direction, as time goes by and the later becomes earlier, the newer older.”<sup>36</sup> This formulation, however, accounts precisely for the temporality of the capitalist market and commodities, whereas Marx’s analysis of the history of the capitalist mode of production has a “complex and *differential* temporality, in which episodes or eras [are] discontinuous from each other, and heterogeneous within themselves.”<sup>37</sup> The insertion of this differential temporality into the history of capitalism occurs primarily through Marx’s conception of capitalist society and the social-political conflicts within it, i.e. through classes and class struggles. “By and large,” Anderson adds, “it can be said that classes as such scarcely figure in Berman’s account at all,” and as a result in Berman’s work “[s]ociety as such is effectively missing.”<sup>38</sup> This omission of society reflects on a different level Greenberg’s relegation of it to a homogenous and abstract “extra-artistic” realm, whereby art and literature cannot be interpreted as both mediated by and mediating social processes.

The idea of planar modernization without any temporal differentiation finds its counterpart in Berman’s characterization of modernism as well. Anderson first questions Berman’s periodization of modernism and his reliance on figures that precede modernism proper such as Goethe, Baudelaire, Pushkin, and Dostoyevsky. Modernism “as a specific set of aesthetic forms, is generally dated precisely from the twentieth century—indeed is typically construed by way of contrast with realist and other classical forms of the 19<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Original emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

18<sup>th</sup> or earlier centuries.”<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, modernism needs to be theorized with a more variegated understanding of historical time, but this theory should also take into consideration the unevenness in the geographical distribution of modernism. Anderson notes that there are countries in the West that have not produced a significant modernist movement, and England is a striking example here vis-à-vis the modernisms that emerged in Germany, Italy, France, Russia, or the US. Thus, the space of modernism too has to be seen as a heterogeneous, discontinuous geography.

The third objection is to Berman’s treatment of modernism as a set of aesthetic principles that has no internal distinction. For Anderson, what is truly striking is the diversity of the reactions to modernity of different groups and movements called modernist. Referring to the fact that in the first decades of the twentieth century there was a spectrum of influential modernist currents ranging from symbolism to constructivism, expressionism to cubism, Anderson writes that the “antithetical nature of the doctrines and practices peculiar to these would suffice in itself, one would have thought, to preclude the possibility there could have been any one characteristic *Stimmung* defining the classical modernist bearing towards modernity.”<sup>40</sup> This seems to be the reason why “*Modernism* as a notion is the emptiest of all cultural categories (...) it designates no describable objects in its own right: it is completely lacking in positive content.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, one might still argue that the content of international modernism can be sought in the crisis of representation it tries to overcome by employing various literary forms

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 112.

understood not as outbursts of inventiveness but as serious engagements with the emergent experiential structures and contents that previous modes of representation could no longer contain.

### **Alternative Modernities/Modernisms?**

Anderson's call for rethinking modernism through the differential history of modernity and a corresponding type of spatialization makes possible the expansion of modernist studies into different geographies or national situations so as to investigate the literatures produced in those places as significant responses to that controversial process called modernization. The line of literary criticism that is inspired by the theory of alternative modernities seems to be rising to the occasion by emphasizing the creative agencies specifically of postcolonial writers and by asserting that their works should be regarded as a part of literary modernism, or rather, as examples of multiple modernisms. The idea of alternative modernities makes the argument that "modernity is best understood as an attitude of questioning the present," and that this questioning, which has now become global due to the fact that "the present announces itself as the modern at every national and cultural site today," yields the conclusion particularly in the West that modernity has come to end.<sup>42</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar asserts that this verdict is inaccurate:

[T]o announce the general end of modernity even as an epoch, much less as an attitude or an ethos, seems premature, if not patently ethnocentric, at a time when non-Western people everywhere begin to engage critically their own hybrid modernities. To be sure, there is a widespread feeling that we are at some sort of a

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<sup>42</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Duke University Press, 2001; pp 1-23; 13-14.

turning point in the trajectory of modernity. That sense of being at the crossroads might have less to do with the ending of an era than with the fact that modernity today is global and multiple and no longer has a governing center or master-narratives to accompany it.<sup>43</sup>

What is needed today, accordingly, is a “cultural” theory that subverts the dominant “acultural” conceptualization of modernity which is crippled by two errors:

First, it fails to see that Western modernity itself is a “culture” with a distinctive moral and scientific outlook consisting of a constellation of understandings of person, nature, society, reason, and the good that is different from both its predecessor cultures and non-Western cultures. Second, it imposes a false uniformity on the diverse and multiple encounters of non-Western cultures with the allegedly culture-neutral forms and processes (science and technology, industrialization, secularization, bureaucratization, and so on) characteristic of societal modernization. In short, an acultural theory is a theory of convergence: the inexorable march of modernity will end up making all cultures look alike.<sup>44</sup>

Gaonkar’s cultural theory of modernity emphasizes divergence as it detects the creative ways in which non-Western societies adapt to modernity: “Creative adaptation (...) is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practice to soften the impact of modernity; rather, it points to the manifold ways in which a people question the present. It is the site where a people ‘make’ themselves modern, as opposed to being ‘made’ modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny.”<sup>45</sup> The perspectival change afforded by the notion of creative adaptation gives one the opportunity to recognize that the latecomers to modernity enjoy the “license to play with form and refigure function according to the exigencies of the situation,” and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 18.

that they do this “not in the mode of ‘colonial mimicry’ but in a cosmopolitan mode of dialogue and engagement.”<sup>46</sup>

The point I would like stress here is that whatever way one chooses to narrate the global story of modernity, one very fundamental theme or fact remains the same, namely that non-Western societies cannot avoid being subsumed into modernity. One is tempted to espouse the affirmative gesture of celebrating the unique creativity of different peoples in adapting to modernity and making it of their own, but it seems problematic enough to subscribe to the ring of uncomplicated autonomy that the term creative adaptation implies. In the age of late capitalism or globalization, whose rise is generally dated to the post-WWII period that is also the period of decolonization and postcoloniality, “the cosmopolitan mode of dialogue and engagement” that Gaonkar mentions may have become much more probable, but it is doubtful if this was the case in the imperialist era too. As Meltem Ahiska remarks, the alternative modernities approach risks reducing “the power-stricken texture of history to a flat surface on which sameness and difference operate indefinitely.”<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, in Jameson’s view, when one thinks that “there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model,” one effectively overlooks “the other fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of a worldwide capitalism itself. The standardization [integral to the logic of capital all through the history of modernity] projected by capitalist globalization in this third or late stage of the system casts considerable doubt on

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>47</sup> Meltem Ahiska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 351-379; 361.

all these pious hopes for cultural variety in a future world colonized by a universal market order.”<sup>48</sup> And when the artistic or literary modes of expression of the peoples creatively adapting to modernity are concerned, one must bear in mind that “none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism—a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization.”<sup>49</sup>

Echoing Gaonkar’s rejection of the claim that modernity has evolved into a significantly different condition called postmodernity, Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that “Declaring the end of modernism by 1950 is like trying to hear one hand clapping. The modernisms of emergent modernities are that other hand that enables us to hear any clapping at all.”<sup>50</sup> Friedman’s direct target in this statement is Jameson’s periodization of different modes of cultural expression corresponding to different stages of the capitalist mode of production. According to this theorization that draws on the works of Marx, Lenin, and Ernest Mandel, the first stage of capitalism was marked by the establishment of the market and it signified the national moment of capitalism as it had emerged out of the industrial revolution. The next stage was imperialism or monopoly

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<sup>48</sup> Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*; 12-13.

<sup>49</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, no. 15, 1986, pp. 65-88; 68.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies." *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 425-443; 427.

capitalism in which the borders of national markets were increasingly liquefied and capital expanded much beyond its national base. Finally, the third stage is characterized by multinational capital becoming the dominant force in the post-WWII period. In this stage, capitalism has gained an even more global character than in imperialism, and it has left no residue across the world that has not been appropriated by capital (including the unconscious and the pre-capitalist forms of agricultural production). In that sense, postmodernism is the cultural logic of a period in which all production has become commodity production and capitalism has become truly universal.

This periodization underlies not only Jameson's theory of modernity and postmodernity, but also of realism, modernism, and postmodernism. The age of market capitalism provides the historical framework within which the realist mode of representation gains prominence. In this period, the concrete experiences of individuals and economic structures conditioning them are not entirely dissociated from each other; its limits allow the market to be experienced as a reality and the national space and community as a totality. In imperialism, however, a gap emerges between the economic structure and the subjective experience lived within the society based on that structure. The modernist aesthetics, in this regard, belongs to a period in which the separation of individual experience from the structure along with various forms of fragmentation resulting from that essential gap are registered and dealt with as a debilitating problem for artistic representation.

Although Jameson's periodization refers to the becoming dominant and/or residual of certain representational paradigms within the history of capitalism and argues

that modernist and postmodernist modes of writing, for instance, can coexist with varying degrees of effectivity, Friedman criticizes his characterization of modernism (which I will look at more closely) for a couple of reasons: First of all, this periodization, by declaring that modernism *definitely* ended in the 1950s, “cuts off the agencies of writers, artists, philosophers, and other cultural producers in the emergent postcolonial world just as their new modernities are being formed,” and to claim that the literatures of these societies are postmodern is to overlook the fact that “Multiple modernities create multiple modernisms.”<sup>51</sup> Secondly, whereas “For some, [and by implication for Jameson too] modernism is a purely Western aesthetic and as a category has no explanatory power for postcolonial writing,” Friedman regards modernism as “the *expressive dimension of modernity*, one that encompasses a range of styles among creative forms that share family resemblances based on an engagement with the historical conditions of modernity in a particular location.”<sup>52</sup> I am not sure how Friedman’s formulation can move modernist studies beyond a mere cataloguing or matching of styles and forms across the world in order to define what literary modernism is or was, while the more important task seems to be understanding what aesthetic-representational predicaments emerge on a global level and how those extremely diverse styles and forms are used to overcome them. In other words, the family resemblances must be found in the representational problems themselves and not among styles—even if they are different or even conflicting with one another, these styles may be responding to the same problem of figuration. Friedman

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 431-432. Original emphasis.

advances the slogan “Always spatialize” mainly because “the ‘periods’ of modernism are multiple and (...) modernism is alive and thriving wherever the historical convergence of radical rupture [between the old and the new] takes place.”<sup>53</sup> Once again, it is difficult to see how such an abstract and ahistorical (or transhistorical) category as “radical rupture” can account for the emergence of modernism which, one would expect, should also refer to a period. Adrienne Rich writes that “A place on the map is also a place in history,”<sup>54</sup> and in the spirit of this remark, it is possible to suggest that even for the difference of a place to be appreciated as a site of creative adaptation or a distinct modernism, there must be a minimally shared history that encompasses those spaces and makes them face more or less common contradictions. Only against such a background can individual formal solutions and inventions be seen as interrelated. For international modernist literature, I believe that this common framework is the phenomena of fragmentation and the crisis in the representation of totality effected by capitalist modernity.

### **Totality, Fragmentation, and the Crisis of Representation**

Modernism figures as a transitional mode of cultural expression in Jameson’s periodization and it corresponds to a milieu in which the agricultural and capitalist forms of production, the feudal-aristocratic and bourgeois cultures, the rural and urban types of life, still coexist. In this sense, artistic or aesthetic modernism is peculiar to a situation of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Ahiska, "Occidentalism"; 351.

incomplete modernization, one of the most important consequences of which is revealed in the writers' experience of time:

This makes for a world that is still organized around two distinct temporalities: that of the new industrial big city and that of the peasant countryside. (...) [O]ne of the great themes which has conventionally been identified as a dominant in literary modernism—namely, temporality itself, and that “deep time” that Bergson thought he could conceptualize and into which so many modern writers have attempted to peer as into a fundamental mystery—is very precisely a mode in which this transitional economic structure of incomplete capitalism can be registered and identified as such. In this transitional era, people (...) still live in two distinct worlds simultaneously.<sup>55</sup>

As I will try to discuss specifically in relation to Tanpınar's utilization of Bergson, the insertion of industrial technology together with its own organization of time and types of activity into a relatively feudal social milieu creates not only an aesthetic but also a full-blown culture shock for some writers in different parts of the world. The superposition of the rationalized, empty and measurable time of modernity on traditional societies (Ottoman Turkey, for example) also results in a traumatic break in the perception of historical continuity. International modernist literature dedicates a large part of its energy to registering, and at best to absorbing, this shock. However, if the breaking up of an older, much more familiar experience of temporality is an important form of fragmentation in modernity, its roots still need to be located in the production process itself. In Jameson's account of capitalist modernity, the worker is first “‘freed’ from his means of production, separated from land and tools and thrown upon the free market as a commodity.”<sup>56</sup> With “the reorganization of the labor process along rational lines”

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<sup>55</sup> Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*; 142.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

propagated by Taylorism, productive activity is broken up into its component parts and production can no longer be comprehended “as a meaningful whole, or, as Lukács puts it, as a ‘totality.’”<sup>57</sup> For Jameson, this fragmentation inside the labor process can also be regarded “as allegorical for the break-up of old or traditional organic communities and their ‘instrumental’ reorganization into the more purely quantitative groupings of the great industrial city.”<sup>58</sup> The inhabitants of the urban space not only lack the ability to have a grasp of the totality of their site-based experience of production, they cannot cognitively turn the capitalist system into a meaningful whole, either.

As a related phenomenon, the separation of the machine from the tools of manufacture gives way to the autonomy of the technological from productive activity, and this process is paralleled in language and artistic production in general. The “non-Euclidean” linguistic experiments in literature, the valorization of technique as opposed to the conventional rhetorical models, and the shift to non-figurative painting, for instance, are cases in point. What underlies this autonomization of language is a crisis caused by the inadequacy of older representational models to convey new feelings and affects attached to the technologization and rationalization of social life. This is a condition in which “some earlier and traditional contextual unity between words, places, bodies and gestures, a situational unity in which language does not yet entertain an independent, let alone an autonomous, existence, is (...) in slow disaggregation under the forces of differentiation and separation.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the ever-inventive forms of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 155.

expression and the autonomization of language witnessed in modernism cannot be explained with the logic of fashion or the dogma of making it new; these phenomena should rather be understood in connection to the particular crisis of representation described above.

I would like to turn here to another form of fragmentation that is just as important for the purposes of my study. Jameson argues that “it is the break of imperialism that (...) explains the crucial characteristic of modernism that is the first crisis in the possibility of representing a social totality. (...) [A]ll the great modernist achievements, it seems (...) revolve around this desperate attempt to skip over the impossibility of representation, and to represent everything in a way that would end in outright representation.”<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, this crisis does not only concern the national communities or the spaces of Western metropolitan centers; it has to do with being able to comprehend and represent the global space of imperialism as well:

At this point the phenomenological experience of the individual subject—traditionally, the supreme raw material of the work of art—becomes limited to a tiny corner of the social world, a fixed-camera view of a certain section of London or the countryside or whatever. But the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson*, ed. Ian Buchanan, Duke University Press, 2007; 141-142.

<sup>61</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, 1991; 411.

Although it creates complex forms of representation to register the effects on the psyche of the gap between lived experience and the economic-social form that governs it, the metropolitan consciousness, in its inability to recognize the fragmentation between the center and the colony, ultimately produces an epistemologically incomplete mode of expression. As Jameson continues, “the center does not have to know about the periphery, and therefore the center thinks it can tell those stories without reference to the structure of imperialism as a whole, that is, it tends to omit the parts of the story that result from the way in which the first world derives its wealth and its privileges from the third world.”<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, it is not possible for the periphery or the colony to not know about the metropolitan center; it is always aware of the dynamics of imperialism and its own subjugated position. I would venture to say that if in the metropolis the economic-structural truth of its phenomenological experience is invisible to the subject, in the colony, the political truth is displaced, but this reality can be registered by the colonial subject due to its unique place within the colonial structure of global power.

In arguably his most controversial essay on the national-allegorical character of third-world literature, Jameson explains the epistemologically advantageous position of the colonial subject (or society) with reference to the Hegelian master-slave relationship and the situational consciousness each term arrives at after a violent struggle for recognition and power. Having overviewed the dynamics of this clash, Jameson notes that “in the end, only the slave knows what reality and the resistance of matter really are; only the slave can attain some true materialistic consciousness of his situation, since it is

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<sup>62</sup> Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson*; 160.

precisely to that that he is condemned. The Master, however, is condemned to idealism—to the luxury of a placeless freedom in which any consciousness of his own concrete situation flees like a dream, like a word unremembered on the tip of the tongue, a nagging doubt which the puzzled mind is unable to formulate.”<sup>63</sup> The metropolitan subject suffers, generally without even knowing it, from the separation of its consciousness (or psyche) from the capitalist structure of production and social organization, thereby being crippled by a fragmentation between the private and the public; such a condition of “fragmented subjectivities” lacking the “possibility of grasping the social totality”<sup>64</sup> does not determine the colonial subject. What “condemns [the metropolitan] culture to psychologism and the ‘projections’ of private subjectivity” is denied to the colonial culture, “which must be situational and materialist despite itself.”<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, even though the peripheral subject is conscious of the loss of its political truth to London, Paris, or Brussels, and can have access to the social totality, when the imperialist system as a whole is concerned, it too is marked by an inability to totalize the global space of imperialism. In his essay where he sets out to comparatively test the validity of his argument that the non-totalizability of the imperial system generated a significant part of the representational crisis in the metropolis that conditioned different modernist formal and stylistic experiments, Jameson suggests that the term of comparison here—environmental conditions that are radically different from those in the metropolis—cannot be found in the colonial space:

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<sup>63</sup> Jameson, "Third-World Literature"; 85.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

(...) there the face of imperialism is brute force, naked power, open exploitation; but there also the mapping of the imperialist system remains structurally incomplete, for the colonial subject will be unable to register the peculiar transformations of First World or metropolitan life which accompany the imperial relationship. Nor will it, from the point of view of the colonized, be of any interest to register those new realities, which are the private concern of the masters, and which a colonized culture must simply refuse and repudiate. What we seek, therefore, is a kind of exceptional situation, one of overlap and coexistence between these two incommensurable realities which are those of the lord and of the bondsman altogether, those of the metropolis and of the colony simultaneously. Our experimental variation, then, would presuppose, were it possible in the first place, a national situation which reproduces the appearance of First World social reality and social relationships (...) but whose underlying structure is in fact much closer to that of the Third World or of colonized daily life.<sup>66</sup>

Jameson finds that unique national situation in Ireland and the work that comes out of this condition is *Ulysses* (to which I will turn later). At this point, one cannot help but conjecture about the existence of literary modernism in colonial societies. If one of the epistemological conditions of possibility of modernism in the metropolis is the loss of totality of the national and the imperial space along with the absence of colonial realities in the life of the metropolis, and more important, if this lack or absence is also mirrored in the colony, then, from this perspective alone, we seem to be impelled to posit that modernist works must have been produced in the periphery as well, even before decolonization or postcoloniality. However, I would suggest that in this context the most important criterion would be, once again, the presence of a crisis of representation that arises from the inadequacy of existing or older forms to contain the social totality. This inadequacy, even if not fully and consciously grasped or theorized, must be felt to a

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<sup>66</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, Verso, 2007; 164.

certain degree by writers or artists and translated into a need for new modes of expression. So long as the established, traditional forms can meaningfully represent the life and feelings of a collective (a village, a tribe, a small or even a much larger religious community, etc.) that is permanently consolidated also by the colonial presence of a foreign power, and to the extent that the commodity form and production have not yet dissolved the existing totalities in social and subjective life, a representational crisis may not be experienced at all.

The passage quoted above refers us to another unique space that bears resemblances to the Irish situation—Turkey and Iran—, and their experience which is variously named as belated modernity or semi-coloniality. Here, I will not discuss in detail these two countries' remarkably similar experience with modernity or modernization as some of its key elements will be covered in the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation. I rather want to emphasize that the discourse of alternative modernities/modernisms does not seem to pay any attention to these countries; for instance, when she objects to the periodization that locates the end of modernity and literary modernism in the 1950s, Friedman writes that

India's independence from Britain and the wrenching murder and displacement of millions in Partition that gave birth to two postcolonial nation-states happen in 1947-1948. One after another of the colonies in the Caribbean and in Africa acquire liberation from official colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1950s are the period of Frantz Fanon's brilliant indigenizations of European psychoanalysis to dissect the psychopathologies of colonial racism for both whites and blacks. *Black Skins, White Masks* is yet another manifestation of the phenomenology of the new and the now that defines a modern sensibility.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism"; 427.

Turkey and Iran cannot fit into this narrative for a number of reasons: First, although they were in serious decline and reduced to semi-colonial status in the nineteenth century, they themselves were long-established imperial powers in their region. Second, both countries began to engage with modernity much earlier than the decolonization struggles or the postcolonial era of the twentieth century. And third, the taking root of modernity in these countries was effected by both the exertions of imperialist powers and expansion of capitalism, and the state-led processes of modernization and Westernization. Roughly speaking, the Ottoman Empire's modernizing efforts began with the 1839 Tanzimat reforms which were followed by two constitutional revolutions in 1876 and 1908, and this process significantly accelerated with the founding of the Republic in 1923. The Qajar-ruled Iran made limited yet important juridical, economic, and educational reforms in the nineteenth century, had two constitutional revolutions in 1906 and 1909, and after the coup d'état of Reza Khan in 1921 (later, Reza Shah), Iran's modernization took a much more radical path. Needless to say, the modernization of each country displayed an internal unevenness and conflicts, whereby, among other things, the role of the state, discourses used to legitimize Westernization, and the political programs put to practice varied in important ways. But one thread seems to have remained relatively unbroken: Despite brief periods of imperialist occupation and invasion, the top-down modernizing reforms were carried out not to regain home rule but to preserve it, and the cultural politics employed was not a categorical rejection of the colonizers' culture but one of transferring or emulating the political, technological, economic, and cultural outlook of Europe. The goal was to find a new and securer place in the capitalist interstate system,

and conversion to the ambivalently envied and feared Western culture was the best way to align with Europe.

The gradual integration of the Ottoman Empire into the network of international trade and state system created a milieu in which “the invasion of Western sciences, know-how, and artifacts, which contested Islamic and traditional ways of life and invoked the existence of ‘lack,’ was accompanied by actual enterprises that established and monopolized certain trades and industries.”<sup>68</sup> The same process was also experienced in Iran<sup>69</sup> and especially in both imperial capitals, with the introduction of new sectors and ways of production, a Western-type bureaucracy and military, commodities, fashions, styles, schools, newspapers, coffee houses, and more importantly for my study, a new intelligentsia and new literary forms, notably the novel, there emerged at least the appearance of a European or modern form of society. Istanbul’s physical proximity to Europe, the presence of foreign embassies, companies, and non-Muslim communities engaged in international trade, and the growing aspiration to Westernize made the Ottoman cultural elites closely follow the social relations in European metropolises—a similar interest was prevalent in Tehran, too. One important point about the desired Europeanization in all areas of social life is underlined in Gregory Jusdanis’ study on the nation-building process in Greece, where he comments on the perceived lack of modernity in belatedly modernized countries and the anxiety that this lack generates:

Belated modernization, especially in nonwestern societies, necessarily remains “incomplete” not because it deviates from the supposedly correct path but because it cannot culminate in a faithful duplication of western prototypes. The imported

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<sup>68</sup> Ahiska, "Occidentalism"; 360.

<sup>69</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge University Press, 2008; 63-96.

models do not function like their modern counterparts. (...) Peripheral societies (...) internalize the incongruity between western original and local realities as a structural deficiency. The lack of modernity is seen as a flaw. Hence, “incomplete” attempts to catch up with the West are followed by calls for a new phase of modernization. Ironically, however, the flaw lies not in modernity’s absence, but in its purposeful introduction, ignoring autochthonous exigencies.<sup>70</sup>

What I find striking in this excerpt is the emphasis on the structural incompleteness of modernity/modernization to which countries like Greece, Turkey or Iran were doomed and the unending effort to catch up with the European model. If we accept that modernity is not a condition but a critical attitude towards (or a mode of questioning) the present, then, as Ahiska suggests, we need to first understand what that present consists of. Under the circumstances in which the perceived lack of modernity results in a permanent failure to attain it, “the meaning of the present is displaced”<sup>71</sup> onto the time of the model that is to be adopted. Thus, one never manages to catch up, and this predicament is summed up in the seemingly celebratory commonplace metaphor of the bridge specifically used for Turkey—a bridge between East and West, backwardness and modernity, which is a non-place between two substantial experiences of subalternity and hegemony. In this regard, it is possible to argue that the present of the colony is filled with a much more tangible structuring and mobilizing experience, whereas, despite all the tumult of modernization and cultural revolution in the republican Turkey and the Pahlavi Iran, the meaning of the present is constantly deferred to a moment that is yet to come.

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<sup>70</sup> Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture. Inventing National Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991; xiii.

<sup>71</sup> Ahiska, "Occidentalism"; 362.

Needless to say, this creates a representational problem for writers unless they are staunchly committed to traditional forms of expression or embedded in the modernizing project. When the present ceases to be in continuum with the past and is emptied of all positivity (a theme Tanpınar repeatedly treats in his works), or when it becomes the stage of an extremely fast-paced and radical restructuring of society that seems to lead nowhere (Hedayat writes in such an environment), finding a totalizing narrative form to map the time and space of the nation becomes all the more necessary. As a matter of fact, even in its beginnings in the Tanzimat era, the Turkish novel grappled with an essentially epistemological version of this representational problem that had to do with depicting the present within a comprehensible totality by using an unalienated (and unalienating) language that retained its mimetic power. In Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem's 1886 novel *Araba Sevdası* (The Carriage Affair), we are presented with a slightly delusional protagonist, Bihruz Bey, who is an admirer of everything Western—he dresses up and acts like a true European, mixes Ottoman Turkish and French when he speaks, and so on. One day he falls in love with a European-looking young woman named Periveş and her stylish carriage, and what follows is a train of comical events, misunderstandings, and the protagonist's foolish pursuit of his beloved. As Jale Parla notes, "The novel is composed as a parody of futile writing and reading activities, as futile as the rounds made by the fancy carriages of Westernized beaus in the fashionable Çamlıca [where Bihruz first sees Periveş]." <sup>72</sup> At one point, Bihruz Bey decides to express his love to the young woman by

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<sup>72</sup> Jale Parla, "Car Narratives: A Subgenre in Turkish Novel Writing." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 535-550; 536.

translating a French poem into Turkish, which reads: “I name a rose / That woman who confuses my mind / If the word must represent the thing / That woman deserves that name of beauty / Like a rose.” In one of the lines of this poetic fragment, Parla detects the crisis that underlies the Tanzimat novel:

In this poem, the one line that makes absolutely no sense to Bihruz Bey is “If the word must represent the thing.” Bihruz’s total helplessness to conceive the relationship between the word and the thing provides the major irony of the book: the fruitlessness of Tanzimat writers’ labors to represent and communicate. Bihruz Bey’s poorly composed, incomplete, and unread epistle, therefore, signifies the mimetic crisis that Ekrem perceived was engendered by the cultural and linguistic chaos of his times. Among other factors that contributed to this chaos, one was especially relevant to writing and representation: the clash between the empirical, realistic epistemology of the Western novel and the aprioristic and idealistic epistemology that the first Turkish novelists were reluctant to give up.<sup>73</sup>

That aprioristic and idealistic epistemology which derives from Islamic philosophy and theology deteriorates with each step towards modernization, and even when the Western epistemology has become dominant, the crisis of representation remains, this time facing the much broader historical and cultural impacts of Westernization and capitalization experienced in the social structure and consciousness.

In what follows, however, I will discuss how Tanpınar and Hedayat respond to the crisis of representation that is at once the condition of possibility of modernism and a problem that the latter tries to overcome by generating a diverse set of narrative forms. My focus will not be representation in general but the representation of social totality with its historical and structural dimensions. The fragmentations in the experience of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 538.

temporality (problem of a radical break in history) and of social structure (problem of constellating classes or groups) will constitute the major theme with regard to which I will try to analyze Tanpınar's "dream aesthetics" and Hedayat's non-oriented narrative form resembling a Möbius band along with his use of national allegory as two remarkable contributions to international modernist aesthetics. But, before I get to these writers, I wish to briefly look at that unique Irish situation that has commonalities with Turkey and Iran, and discuss where *Ulysses* stands as a "canonical" example vis-à-vis the question of the representation of totality.

## Chapter One: *Ulysses*, Closure, and Structure

In a letter he sent from Paris in 1960 to the artist Adalet Cimcoz in Istanbul, Tanpınar inquires about a novel he had lent to one of their mutual friends: “Please ask Teo if he will return *Ulysses*. I cannot do without this book. If he won’t, I’ll happily buy a new copy.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in an article about Tanpınar and the circle of Turkish artists and writers he met in Paris in 1960, Ferit Edgü recounts how his copy of *Ulysses* ended up in Tanpınar’s hands and how the latter responded when asked to return the book: “He said ‘Please don’t take it away from me. Because I can’t sleep without reading a page from it every night.’”<sup>2</sup> Edgü notes that he was quite surprised by Tanpınar’s response; “To be honest,” he says, “I couldn’t see a relationship between James Joyce and Tanpınar’s novelistic universe. I’m unable to see a connection even today.”<sup>3</sup> Apart from a talismanic quality that Tanpınar might have attributed to *Ulysses*, the reason why he could fall asleep only after having read a page from Joyce’s novel may be that it functioned as a book of lullabies rather than a prayer book. Jameson refers to this quality as “autistic textualization” whereby the narrative, especially in the novel’s last episodes, is radically depersonalized, the sentences are produced in a void, and “the book begins to elaborate its own text, under its own momentum, with no further need of characters, point of view,

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar'ın Mektupları*, ed. Zeynep Kerman, Dergâh Yayınları, 1992; 154. Tanpınar read *Ulysses* in French. All translations from Turkish to English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Ferit Edgü, "Tanpınar ve *Ulysses*," in "*Bir Gül Bu Karanlıklarda*": *Tanpınar Üzerine Yazılar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, 3F Yayınevi, 2008, pp. 569-570; 570.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

author or perhaps even reader.”<sup>4</sup> Although it is a veritably reified form of addressing the divine, the prayer still requires a minimum degree of contemplation or engagement with meaning; a lullaby, on the other hand, is numbing enough with its rather meaningless repetitions, rhymes, onomatopes, and so on.

Tanpınar may have found such a liberating (from signification) aspect in *Ulysses* but we do not have evidence to substantiate this assumption. However, we know for sure that he admired *Ulysses* for its form and the solution it provided to an important problem that Tanpınar himself faced while writing *A Mind at Peace*; namely, creating a totalizing narrative despite an immense variety of material that does not necessarily produce an internal logic of narrative closure. In a diary entry from 1958, Tanpınar compares Virginia Woolf and Joyce: “I’ve recently read *Mrs. Dalloway*. It’s very beautiful but formless. (...) It isn’t like *Ulysses*. Is it formless or does it lack resilience/resistance [*mukavemetsiz*]? But aren’t they the same thing?”<sup>5</sup> Ever since its publication in 1922, literary critics and scholars have extensively discussed *Ulysses*’ structure and form, and sometimes, its formlessness. In his well-known article titled “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth,” T.S. Eliot argued that Joyce presented his contemporaries with a method that, after the exhaustion of the representational capacities of the novel, could enable them to make modern life a subject-matter of literature. This method was unique as its principle was to be found in the myth—“using the myth [and] manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity is a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and

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<sup>4</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, Verso, 2007; 148.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Günlüklerin Işığında Tanpınar’la Başbaşa*, eds. İnci Enginün and Zeynep Kerman, Dergâh Yayınları, 2010; 140.

a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”<sup>6</sup> Modern condition was one of constant decay and chaos, and the task of the new literature was to make it into a sensible whole—and this was what Eliot argued he wanted to do in his 1922 work *The Waste Land*.

Contrary to Eliot, in “The Ideology of Modernism” Georg Lukács accused modernist literature of not producing a total representation of social life, or rather, of not representing it as totalizable, as something which one can grasp by recognizing its fundamental structure. Modernism was a continuation of naturalism that was itself only a schematized version of realism proper. Anti-realism, in this sense, constituted the ideological basis of all modernist trends and Lukács’ discussion of the function of *monologue intérieur* or stream-of-consciousness in Joyce and Thomas Mann can be taken as an instance explicating this point. With Joyce, Lukács wrote, “the stream-of-consciousness technique is no mere stylistic device.” Technique was the very aesthetic ambition that *Ulysses* relied upon; it was the absolute form-giving principle that determined not only the narrative pattern but also the depiction of characters.<sup>7</sup> With Thomas Mann’s *Lotte in Weimar*, however, “the *monologue intérieur* is simply a technical device, allowing the author to explore aspects of Goethe’s world which would not have been otherwise available.”<sup>8</sup> The opposition between Joyce and Mann was one of intention deriving from their respective ideologies. Joyce, precisely with his extensive

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<sup>6</sup> T.S. Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth,” in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, New York, Blackwell Publishers, 2005; pp. 165-167; 167.

<sup>7</sup> Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander, Harper & Row, 1971; 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

use of “sense- and memory-data, their powerfully charged—but aimless and directionless—fields of force, give[s] rise to an epic structure which is *static*, reflecting a belief in the basically static character of events.”<sup>9</sup> Mann, on the other hand, followed the tradition that narrated events and characters in a dynamic and developmental way, and this enabled him to preserve the idea of history and the changeability of society. As opposed to the formalists who glorified the technical and stylistic mastery of modernist writers, Lukács asserted that what one had to pay attention to in a modernist work was not its form (which was indeed a non-form) but “the view of the world, the ideology or *weltanschauung*”<sup>10</sup> it propagated.

“Man is *zoon politikon*, a social animal,” Lukács wrote, and this “Aristotelian dictum is applicable to all great realistic literature.”<sup>11</sup> This vision was conspicuously absent from modernism; nevertheless, at this point one might recall that what was also applicable to all realistic literature was the Aristotelian notions of the unity of plot, causal comprehensibility and temporal sequentiality of events, and character development. This was the very formal paradigm that got universally dissolved in capitalism. Commodity form, for example, is not Aristotelian; it is a phantasmal entity that is separated from the agents and processes of its own production, thereby appearing not in unity with its reality, causality, and history. Although he had claimed in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) that in capitalism the commodity form determined all processes of social life, in the present essay, Lukács clearly overlooked the importance of literary form as a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Original emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

symptom of the contradictions at play in its social and historical milieu. Thus, he eventually argued that the failure of modernism to represent the social totality and the historicity of man was rather rooted in authors' personal choices and fixation upon a specific content. If modernist literature frequently talked about the fragmentation of the subject as an ontological premise and established angst, despair, hopelessness, and alienation as an eternal *condition humaine*, this only showed its ideological decision to reject history and the reality of modern society. The subject, be it the protagonist or the narrative point of view, was deliberately disintegrated in modernist works to such an extent that the external reality was no longer penetrable, and in this world depicted in complete disarray, the only option available to the subject was to take refuge in nothingness. This gesture foreclosing the possibility of perceiving any kind of wholeness such as sociality or individual and collective history was reflected in the formless, non-structured, and non-plotted character of modernist literature.

### **Reading Form into *Ulysses***

Where Lukács sees formlessness, Tanpinar finds the resilience of form and its resistance to the narrative material, and in this regard, it is possible to suggest that for him, Joyce succeeds in keeping *Ulysses* together despite his encyclopedic ambition to include as many elements and characters from the life and history of Dublin—an ambition that informs *A Mind at Peace*, as well. T.S. Eliot's reading of *Ulysses* gives way to one of its most canonical readings that concerns not only its structure but also its content and significance. To be sure, that reading which serves as an interpretive guide

for each episode by drawing on the Homeric parallel is motivated by the novel's title and Joyce's own interventions. While *Ulysses* was serialized in *The Little Review* between 1918 and 1920, Joyce used episode titles from the *Odyssey*, and when the novel was published, these Homeric references had been replaced by numbers.<sup>12</sup> Besides, in 1920, in an attempt to explain the underlying structure of *Ulysses*, Joyce gave Carlo Linati a schema containing the same titles and even the names of figures from the *Odyssey* that corresponded to certain characters in each episode. He produced a similar document in 1921 for Stuart Gilbert. Joyce was apparently aware of the difficulty the public might have trying to make sense of *Ulysses* and thus wanted to provide his readers with various tools to approach the text. In doing so, he also initiated several reading procedures that have over the years been conventionalized in literary scholarship. Jennifer Levine refers to one of these procedures as the poetic model which regards *Ulysses* as "a vast symbolic project whose logic is metaphorical and allusive rather than narrative."<sup>13</sup> Jameson identifies three types of reading that have determined our interpretation of the novel, and he calls them "the mythical, the psychoanalytical, and the ethical readings respectively. These are (...) the readings of *Ulysses*, first in terms of the *Odyssey* parallel; second, in terms of the father-son relationship; and third, in terms of some possible happy end according to which this day, Bloomsday, will have changed everything, and will in particular have modified Mr. Bloom's position in the home and his relationship with his

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<sup>12</sup> See Jennifer Levine, "Ulysses," in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 122-137; 123.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

wife.”<sup>14</sup> None of these readings is satisfactory for Jameson since, in one way or another, they subject *Ulysses* to a moralizing reading. One may even suggest that the psychoanalytical and ethical readings too are motivated by the *Odyssey* parallel as they feel compelled (alongside numerous other literary references such as *Hamlet* or *La Vita Nuova*) to allude to the temporarily broken Telemachus-Odysseus relationship, the nostos of the latter, the ancient virtues of heroism, resourcefulness, cunning, patriarchal authority, and so forth, that shaped the ideology of Homer’s world. All in all, each of these interpretations seems to be trying to read a form or structure into *Ulysses* by following certain themes and motifs adopted from the *Odyssey*. Here, I would like to look at a different kind of reading which would be expected to avoid the shortcomings of the abovementioned procedures precisely because it takes as a model the only non-referential form of art, but which ultimately merges those readings into another theme-based structural analysis. This method reads *Ulysses* as a musical composition, and specifically, as a sonata.

Don Noel Smith presents one of the most emblematic musical analyses of Joyce’s novel and argues that if we were to find a musical analogue of the structure of *Ulysses*, it would have to be the sonata. Taking the *Oxford Companion to Music* which defines the sonata form under the title “Development” as his departure point, Smith sets out to explain how the three common processes of musical composition might enable us to better understand the working of *Ulysses*. These are “a) the statement of musical themes or subject, b) the treatment of them by breaking them up into their constituent members,

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<sup>14</sup> Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*; 137.

and making new passages out of these (often very modulatory), and c) the repetition of them.”<sup>15</sup> While examining how these developmental movements occur in the novel, Smith focuses on three themes: “1) the search for the father, or for protection, guidance, authority, and most of all identity; 2) wandering and return; 3) usurpation, perceived as disorder or an unrightful order by those who feel displaced.”<sup>16</sup> Smith notes that although it is possible to see Stephen and Bloom as two different themes that can be named as the first and the second according to the sequence with which they are introduced, he prefers to take them as “subjects, in relation to whom various themes accrue, notably the three above.”<sup>17</sup> Smith then divides the novel into three sections reflecting the three stages in the sonata form and considers the last episode, “Penelope,” as the coda as “In addition to statement, development, and recapitulation, the sonata form usually includes a coda, in which the themes are resolved.”<sup>18</sup>

In Smith’s analysis, episodes 1 through 6 (“Telemachus” and “Hades”) constitute the exposition or statement of themes. Accordingly, the first three episodes initiate the main themes stated above in relation to Stephen, who is tormented by the lack of meaning and value in a world where fluidity and uncertainty prevail in the absence of a protective father and a nurturing mother. “His life in the tower with Mulligan has been disrupted with the intrusion of the Englishman Haines. He begins his wanderings of the day, in effect, burning bridges behind him. His mother’s death and the fiasco of his attempted

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<sup>15</sup> Don Noel Smith, "Musical Form and Principles in the Scheme of *Ulysses*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1972, pp. 79-92; 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

flight have left him without a center: his wandering is dominated by search, for he has yet no established point of return.”<sup>19</sup> As the Telemachus section ends, we encounter the second protagonist of the novel, and this time the same themes are reiterated in relation to Bloom, “except that the search for the father is inverted, appearing in its obverse form, the search for the son—someone to care for, rely upon, share with, in an exclusively masculine sense.”<sup>20</sup> Bloom is also a wandering figure; however, Smith notes, “he has a home, a point from which he starts and to which he returns.”<sup>21</sup> While the theme of usurpation is linked to the presence of Haines in the case of Stephen, in Bloom’s case, it emerges with Blazes Boylan preparing to have an affair with Molly. Smith argues that the themes of search for the father/son, wandering and return, and usurpation are resolved at the end of Bloom’s movement; as for Stephen, they are resolved “in a projected sense.”<sup>22</sup>

Episodes 7 through 15 (“Aeolus” and “Circe”) display the novel’s development and the main operation in these episodes is the modulation of the (musical) subjects and themes. “With Chapter 7 the focus shifts as abruptly from Bloom as it has from Stephen with Chapter 4, and although Bloom is without doubt the major figure throughout them, he is by no means the sole center of attention. His day is interwoven with that of Stephen: paralleling, counterpointing, intersecting, and finally merging with it.”<sup>23</sup> The themes and the two subjects start to recapitulate with “Eumeus” and this movement is reinforced in “Ithaca,” episodes 16 and 17 respectively. Smith regards “Eumeus” as a kind of bridge

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 83.

between development and recapitulation in that Stephen and Bloom are “here brought into intimate conversation for the first time; and by the end of the episode they have actually begun to communicate, to interpenetrate in thought, though they retain their distinct, characteristic concerns.”<sup>24</sup> “Ithaca” functions as an abstract recapitulation of the previous experiences and explorations of the two subjects, and this aspect is observed “in Stephen and Bloom’s deliberating upon considerations and incidents of the past day (...) in their noting the circumstances of their previous acquaintance (...) in their exchanging their respective vital statistics.”<sup>25</sup> The last episode, as stated before, is the coda whose purpose is “to resolve the themes and give a greater sense of finality to the piece.”<sup>26</sup> In “Penelope,” Molly, with the secureness coming from her identity, does not feel the need to wander and search for another person who will confirm her spiritual or physical being. “She does not remove from home all day, remaining at center, in key;”<sup>27</sup> hence, at the end of the episode, the two subjects, with their common themes (father and son, returning wanderer, usurped usurper) unite and resolve in relation to Molly, in this final chord.<sup>28</sup>

This analysis seems to be purely formalistic with its allusions to strictly technical/compositional terms of music, but it works only if one makes the preliminary verdict that *Ulysses* unquestioningly espouses the Homeric themes together with all the moral-social values that they project. Yet, the restoration of patriarchal order, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>28</sup> For another detailed analysis of *Ulysses*’ structure with reference to the theory of tonal music, see Mack Smith, “The Structural Rhythm in *Ulysses*: Dominant to Love to Return.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1984, pp. 404-419.

reestablishment of the father-son relationship, the rebirth of kinship or organic community, and the reconstitution of the sovereign subject are themes or conditions that in *Ulysses*' world appear to be either in severe crisis or completely undermined. Smith's musical analysis shares the Homeric bias of the four reading procedures mentioned above and it promotes as perfectly realizable what is no longer possible in modernity. Furthermore, the most significant features imposed on *Ulysses* through the sonata analogy are tonality, development, and resolution (of themes) within a tonally hierarchical movement, and a thoroughly controlled structure that conforms to established patterns. These qualities certainly have broader philosophical and socio-political connotations. For instance, as Paul Lansky asserts, "one of the remarkable aspects of tonality is the high degree of interdependence between the various dimensions of a composition, such as pitch, rhythm, dynamics, timbre and form,"<sup>29</sup> and unlike atonality, in tonal music, functional relations between these dimensions are clearly defined. Tonality is achieved with compositional practices that both utilize and foster a sense of unity based on interdependent elements whose functions are definite and organized around normative procedures. This definition, one is tempted to argue, is analogous to the conceptualization of modern sovereignty and national community by the bourgeoisie in its heroic age: Organicism of social classes instituted through certain norms and procedures that are imagined to reflect the common will and interest of people

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Lansky, et al. "Atonality."  
[www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/47354-2001-01-20](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/47354-2001-01-20).  
Accessed 17 Aug. 2017.

is the principal element of representational or contractual sovereignty. In this analogy, the sovereign figure or the notion of sovereignty itself becomes the home key or the tonic in relation to which all dissonances are turned into consonances, and in the final moment, resolved and unified.

What is more, the idea of a musical process finding its departure point and justification in the home key and developing along a hierarchically organized movement of tones and themes brings to mind the notion of organic autonomy Daniel Chua presents in *Absolute Music*. As he states, in the nineteenth century, “Instrumental music was declared autonomous. It had soul. This was not a mechanical autonomy, but an organic one: machines are made, organisms generate themselves. (...) The energy [of musical material], however diverse, emanates from the unity of the rational soul.”<sup>30</sup> Taking the referential function of the law-giving home key/the tonic into consideration, one may add that this self-generating and self-justifying soul is the very logic that ordains tonal music in general. Yet, as Chua continues, “the self-creating structure of the instrumental music is (...) the delusion of the male ego kicking against nature, believing that deep within its being is an organic force that could create a fallen world into his perfect image.”<sup>31</sup> Once again, this characterization echoes the vision of the autonomous self of modernity as well as the self-made revolutionary bourgeoisie, and the movement that is evoked in the sonata analogy similarly reflects that self-becoming ego which explores the world by

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, 1999; 146.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-148.

essaying its dissonant chords yet ultimately reaches a point of reconciliation, mastery, and re-stabilization thanks to its own rational center.

### **Resilience of Form**

Does the formal-structural character of *Ulysses* reinforce such notions as organicism, progress/development, unity of the self, and its integration into or reconciliation with the external world? I would like to argue that these values are inherent in the aesthetics and ideology of the national moment of capital itself; in other words, such notions were conceivable or retained a social-cultural value only in the period in which the social and experiential fragmentation was not experienced as an all-pervasive phenomenon, and thus realism could rise as the dominant mode of representation. Reading *Ulysses* along the lines of Homeric themes or in accordance with the implications of the sonata form and tonal music is subjecting it to interpretive procedures that rather fit the older novelistic forms.

Admittedly, though, in the first six episodes of the novel (“Telemachus” through “Hades”), Joyce uses a somewhat realistic narrative style recalling the novel’s generic role in the delineation and representation of the nation, the city, or the village. The two protagonists do not meet until the seventh episode, “Aeolus,” nevertheless, we do not think that under the title *Ulysses* there are two distinct narratives set in different societies, telling the stories of two characters inhabiting different temporal or spatial coordinates. (This pattern might also be seen as an example of the movements of the subjects/themes in the dominant and subordinate keys during the expository part of the sonata.) Enda

Duffy notes that the greatest merit of the nineteenth-century novels that the opening episodes of *Ulysses* draw on is “to show many members of a diverse community simultaneously going about their business, unaware of each other, in a single place.”<sup>32</sup> In the case of *Ulysses*, he adds, “Once the novel moves suddenly from Sandymount to Eccles Street and the whole other world of Bloom household is introduced in ‘Calypso,’ this strategy of imagining different subjects existing simultaneously is shown as key to notating a potential national community.”<sup>33</sup> Stuart Gilbert raises the same point with respect to the technique Joyce employs particularly in “Wandering Rocks” in order to create a sense of community: “The structure of this episode is curious, and unique in *Ulysses*. It consists of eighteen short scenes followed by a *coda* describing a viceregal passage through Dublin. All these scenes take place in the streets of Dublin between the hours of 3 and 4 p.m., and their synchronism is indicated by the insertion in each fragment of one or more excerpts from other fragments, which serve to fix the correspondence in time.”<sup>34</sup> Eighteen short scenes taking place in one city within a single hour, eighteen episodes taking place during an ordinary day in Dublin, and fragments inserted in each scene and episode to create synchronism—the parallelism seems so obvious that Gilbert defines “Wandering Rocks” as the small-scale model of *Ulysses* as a whole.

However, in sketching such a synchronicity, Joyce does not try to instill a sense of collectivity and unity in the same way as the nineteenth-century novelists did; he rather

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<sup>32</sup> Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern Ulysses*, University of Minnesota Press, 1994; 52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's "Ulysses,"* Vintage Books, 1952; 227.

attempts to illustrate upon what kind of a perceptual basis that organism called the nation can be imagined and represented in the first place. That particular novelistic strategy—the classical narrative form—becomes just one among many other styles and techniques utilized throughout *Ulysses*. Apparently, Joyce supersedes the structural parallelism that Gilbert points out and turns it into a mere effect. As it unfolds, the novel also reveals what is absorbed into the social organism and it increasingly focuses on the diverse temporalities of the mind which are not sequential or clocked but move with the chaotic spontaneity of remembrances, nervous stimulations, and expressions of the unconscious.

As Franco Moretti argues,

in Bloom's [and arguably in Stephen's] stream of consciousness pieces of undigested language are constantly surfacing: fragments of other people's speech. They are mixed up with innumerable other things—noises, commonplaces, memories, onomatopoeias—and at the first sight they are barely even distinguishable. In the long run, however, they will have a quite different significance, because it is precisely from this undigested language that the polyphony of *Ulysses* develops.<sup>35</sup>

With the help of stream-of-consciousness, then, Joyce disrupts the alleged identity and continuity of the themes or subjects mentioned in the sonata analogy, and unweaves their unity through a kind of linguistic machinery that works almost independently of the characters and displays no substantial logic of coherence.

Curiously enough, Joyce also dissects the novel's "body" into different organs and the social fabric of Dublin into multiple institutional spaces such as the school, the graveyard, the newspaper, or the hospital. Michael Tratner comments on the structure and

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<sup>35</sup> Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*, trans. Quintin Hoare, Verso, 1996; 187-188.

the organ of “Wandering Rocks,” and by implication, describes how Joyce transfigures the older novelistic form and its agenda in *Ulysses*:

Joyce dubbed the “organ” of this chapter the “blood,” which, combined with his use of “citizens” as its symbol, suggests he is taking up a conservative metaphor and one invoked by nationalist movements everywhere. But this chapter makes us think of the circulation of the blood in its numerous different veins, not of the unity produced by people of “one blood” joining together. Indeed, throughout the novel, Joyce twists biological metaphors to subvert the oppressive and essentially conservative results of nationalist essentialism. He assigns an organ to each chapter, which roughly translates into assigning each institution in the novel an organ, suggesting that this novel presents a view of society as an organic whole. But his presentation of organs emphasizes that each organ is radically different from the others. Joyce thus subverts the most common political uses of the metaphor of an organic nation as distortions. (...) The breakage and discontinuity in this novel are efforts to show the relationship of that personal multiplicity to the institutional multiplicity of any social order.<sup>36</sup>

In line with Tratner, one may assert that by radically compartmentalizing the social life and the novelistic structure, Joyce also releases the social heteroglossia with all the different styles, languages, and institutional discourses it contains, and he does this with no anticipation of reunion or resolution in a single linguistic key. After “Aeolus,” the episode with which the stylistic and formal experiments of the novel become even more explicit, the place or the institution that an episode is set in begins to determine both the idiom and the subject-matter of conversations among the Dubliners. For instance, “Aeolus” itself is written in the journalistic discourse and its organization reflects the pattern of a newspaper—it is composed of sixty-three sections titled in the way stories are headlined in a newspaper. In the “Oxen of the Sun,” Joyce parodies the different styles

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Tratner, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*, Stanford University Press, 1995; 187.

observed in English literature from the eleventh to the early twentieth century, thereby including in his novel not only one of the elements of heteroglossia (i.e. literary discourse), but also its epochal and generic variations. This abundance of linguistic idioms in *Ulysses* is accompanied by a diversity in narrators and narrative points of view as well. In other words, the omniscient third-person narrator of the opening episodes using a rather standard language and keeping a relatively neutral stance towards event and characters later transforms into various narrative voices having different degrees of command over the narrative material, coming from different social groups, and so on.

For Tratner, by showing the effects of institutional roles and languages on the characters, Joyce suggests that the self “is no longer located inside the individual but becomes something maintained by outside forces.”<sup>37</sup> This underlines one of the ways in which the claims of the bourgeois subject about self-generation and self-containment are refuted in *Ulysses*. Moreover, unlike the nineteenth-century novels that ultimately have a controlling style and structure, the diverse languages and discourses that inform (or even dissolve) the individual and collective selves are not made subservient to a single narrative center or a privileged style. Tratner comments on the last section of “Wandering Rocks” where the viceregal cavalcade, having traversed all the fragments of the episode, emerges in full view like a knot that endows the episode with a peculiar sense of unity and continuity: “We see a sequence of ‘salutes’ to the royal procession, but these salutes are neither reverential recognitions of the majesty of government nor direct acts of rebellion (...) The sovereign, which is supposed to represent everyone, is reduced to a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 191.

passing perception, something seen by all, but only among many sights, and a sight that produces quite disparate responses: it is not the basis of unity of the whole nation, but merely one institution that intersects other institutions in many ways.”<sup>38</sup> If we drew a parallel between the increasingly autonomous linguistic and stylistic elements in *Ulysses* and the multitude of citizens walking in the streets of Dublin, the foregrounding of the failure of the political authority to represent and unify the nation might appear as a sign of the author’s self-conscious rejection of creating a totalizing representation of Dublin’s social life.<sup>39</sup> In this case, Joyce would be implying that just as political sovereignty is realized through the negation or suppression of actual differences within society, the authorial sovereignty is realized via the subsumption of the mentioned stylistic and linguistic plurality into a centered, strictly organized text. And, in this sense, Joyce would be undermining the role not only of the author but also of the novel as the authoritative narrative form of modernity.

To be sure, these remarks are not entirely incorrect; however, I maintain that one should avoid celebrating *Ulysses* from the perspective of the literary-aesthetic program of late capitalism, whereby Joyce becomes a dedicated champion of postmodern pastiche, intertextuality, decentered subject, sheer difference, and the floating signifier. It rather seems to be the case that when certain aspects of capitalist modernity begin to take root amidst an older mode of sociality, the processes of fragmentation discussed in the

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 186

<sup>39</sup> In this context, Jameson argues that the “palpable discontinuities [of the “Wandering Rocks” episode] are already mere appearance: we know already in fact that these disjointed characters are already connected, by acquaintance and history...” See *The Modernist Papers*; 167.

introduction are felt much more intensely. In this regard, Joyce, instead of advocating the emancipatory role of fragmentation, may be struggling to create a narrative apparatus that can register its effects on the relatively organic community of colonial Dublin, the psyche, the experience of temporality, language, and narration (recall the depersonalized “autistic textualization” in *Ulysses*, for instance).

As suggested before, Tanpinar’s remark about the resilience of *Ulysses* concerns the form and structure that Joyce used to manage an immensely diversified, potentially infinite linguistic and narrative material. This very endeavor illustrates two things at once: In the historical milieu that gave rise to modernism, social totality and all that it contains—characters, classes, languages, experiences, etc.—become increasingly imperceptible or unavailable for representation; nonetheless, the modernist novelist tries to contain that totality as successfully as realism did. I would like to return to the working assumption of this dissertation and recall the relationship Jameson establishes between modernism and the crisis of representation witnessed in the imperialist period of capitalism:

The concept of such a crisis is (...) a useful interpreting tool for the modernist period because although the great modernists didn’t understand that it couldn’t be resolved, they tried to do so, resulting in projects like Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The premise of all modernism is that language cannot express these things—that finally human psyche is too complicated, you can’t trace the map of society, you can’t position yourself outside of an individual life and look down at totality from above—and yet this is exactly what Joyce tries to do. This is, then, a necessary failure, but it is a failure whose authenticity is guaranteed by the urgency of the impossible attempt to represent this totality (...) this crisis is a desperate matter for the modernist artist, in which he invests all of his existence and passion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson*; 142.

One may then argue that, alongside the phenomena of separation and (semi)autonomization experienced in social life, it is also Joyce's restless desire to create a totalizing narrative which results in the unceasing proliferation of linguistic and narrative materials in *Ulysses*. In other words, the more strongly Joyce wills totality, the more expansive his text becomes.

However, this proliferation itself creates another structural problem that has to do with narrative closure. In his article discussing Jameson's reading of *Ulysses* in tandem with his notion of national allegory, Ian Buchanan mentions two fundamental problems that every writer faces; namely, how to generate sentences and how to impose closure on them. As he suggests,

These problems have become especially acute since the breakdown of the realist model because the once rigid rules governing the construction of narratives have all been overturned, leaving writers to create their own parameters practically from scratch. (...) As Jameson reads it, Joyce resorts to an allegorical structure in *Ulysses* for the very reason that his way of generating sentences (namely, the detailed recording of what might be called the interiority of daily life in all its mundane glory) implies no specific or logical form of closure. Without the conceit of the epic allegory, any form of closure Joyce imposed would be intolerably arbitrary.<sup>41</sup>

The Homeric "original" draws the limits of *Ulysses* as a whole and also structures the narrative internally by providing the outlines of its smaller units that are the eighteen episodes. "The *Odyssey* parallel," Jameson writes, can "be seen as one of the organizational frameworks of the narrative text: but it is not itself the interpretation of

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Buchanan, "National Allegory Today: A Return to Jameson," in *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalization*, eds. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan, State University of New York Press, 2006, pp. 173-188; 180-181.

that narrative, as the ideologues of myth have thought. Rather it is itself—qua organizational framework—what remains to be interpreted.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, if the Homeric text functions as a schema of closure for Joyce’s ever-expanding totalizing narrative, we should add that there is another, more literal “map” fulfilling the same role, and that is Dublin itself: “[I]n *Ulysses* space does not have to be made symbolic in order achieve closure and meaning: its closure is objective, endowed by the colonial situation itself—whence the non-poetic, non-stylistic nature of Joyce’s language.”<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps it was Joyce’s idea of manipulating the *Odyssey*’s structure and the spatial grid of Dublin that Tanpınar regarded as a remarkable contribution to the formal possibilities and strengths of the modernist novel. In the next chapter, I shall discuss how Tanpınar himself exploits such structural frameworks as Istanbul, its historical geography, and the patterns of mystical love depicted in Sufism—all elements of his dream aesthetics. *A Mind at Peace* is just as ambitious in its endeavor to create a totalizing narrative that can register and respond to certain forms of fragmentation experienced (and suffered) in the Turkish national situation, and now I will look at how it sets out to achieve this goal.

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<sup>42</sup> Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*; 139.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

## **Chapter Two: *A Mind at Peace* Revisionary History and Dream Aesthetics as Totalizing Forms**

The encounter between the West and non-Western societies; or rather, the latter's encounter with colonialism and modernity, has been studied from multiple perspectives by various critical disciplines across the world. These encounters and the untold or misrepresented histories of the silenced non-Westerners have been the subject primarily of postcolonial theory whose inaugural work is usually considered to be Edward Said's 1978 study *Orientalism*<sup>1</sup>. Postcolonial theory, including Said's book, however, is also known for its silence about the history of Turkey or its Ottoman predecessor, arguably because they have never had colonial experiences proper. Although struggles took place in different parts of the Ottoman Empire against the imperialist states before, during, and after World War I, neither the empire's nor the republic's political sovereignty was completely lost to another power.

One of the long-favored views in Turkey essentially aiming to justify the abolition of the Ottoman state discusses its status with reference to colonialism and asserts that in its decline, due to the treachery of the Sultan, the empire became a colony of major European powers. Sungur Savran refutes this claim on the grounds that the Ottoman Empire cannot be characterized as a colony if the precise meaning of the term is taken into consideration. "The term colony is directly linked to the political realm. It is not necessarily related to economy and exploitation unlike what the Turkish counterpart of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 1978.

the word [*sömürge*] implies. (...) Under the term colony lies the sense of a place of settlement.”<sup>2</sup> Colony is a region or a country which is politically ruled by a metropolitan state; the fundamental criterion that determines the status of a colony is lack of political independence. The nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, accordingly, should be defined as a semi-colony: “Semi-colony does not only refer to a country whose economy is under imperialist hegemony. Whereas it has political independence, the semi-colony transfers [to another power] its authority over some important functions of the modern state.”<sup>3</sup> This point is worth emphasizing in that not losing political sovereignty altogether to Europe determined the Ottoman intellectuals’ mixed attitude—concurrent attraction and repulsion—towards the West. As a consequence of the capitulations given to the French and the trade agreement signed with the British in 1838, the Ottoman state lost its right to control imperial customs. With the first foreign loans taken to finance the Crimean War in 1854 and with the foundation of the Ottoman Bank in 1856 (which would become the Imperial Central Bank in 1862) to monitor the payment of Ottoman debts to European states, national economy and finance began to be regulated largely by Britain and to a lesser extent, France.

This era in which some of the crucial roles of the Ottoman state were overtaken by foreigners is known as the Tanzimat (reorganization) period, named after the state-

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<sup>2</sup> Sungur Savran, *Türkiye’de Sınıf Mücadeleleri*, Kardelen Yayınları, 1992; 30. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Turkish to English are mine.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

sponsored modernizing reforms declared in 1839.<sup>4</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, one of the most prolific and controversial figures of Turkish modernist literature, views this period as a breaking point in the historical consciousness and cultural continuity of the Ottoman/Turkish society. This break, he argues, has brought about a dramatic fragmentation in social life, culture, collective and individual experiences of post-Tanzimat generations; in other words, it has resulted in the universal loss of a previously perceived wholeness in collectivity and subjectivity alike. In his writings, but most notably in his 1948 novel *A Mind at Peace*,<sup>5</sup> Tanpınar the modernist attempts to create a totalizing aesthetics and form that would enable him to supersede the fragmentation Turkish society began to suffer with modernization. “Dream aesthetics” is the name of the formal-literary solution with which Tanpınar tackles the problem of loss of totality associated with the global experience of modernity and with its particular effects in Turkey. In this chapter, I will try to illustrate how Tanpınar formulates and puts to practice his dream aesthetics, what motifs and tropes he utilizes to make this aesthetics

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<sup>4</sup> Meltem Ahiska maintains that the political and cultural transformation of the late-Ottoman Empire can be analyzed within the framework of colonization, provided that the term is used in a rather broad sense including social life and practices. As she states, “the low tariff rates in trade during the Tanzimat era led to a flood of imported European goods, which dealt a blow to small craft industries.” Because of the economic capitulations and trade agreements giving Western merchants great privileges, the Ottoman state ended up being merely the “gendarmes of foreign capital.” And, “In addition to economic colonization, the social life was also colonized due to factors such as the constitution of Western schools and organizations, the invasion of Western technologies and ideals, and the political power enjoyed by Western embassies.” See, “Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2/3 (2003): 351-79; 360.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, trans. Erdağ Gökna, Archipelago Books, 2011.

fulfill the task he assigns it, and what the limitations and paradoxes of this aesthetic solution are.

### **(Post-)Imperial Trauma and Psychosis**

In an article he published in 1951 (*Changing of Civilization and Inner Man*), Tanpınar writes: “If I were so daring, I would have said that since the Tanzimat, we have been living in an Oedipus complex; that is, in the complex of a man who has unknowingly murdered his father.”<sup>6</sup> Strikingly enough, the Tanzimat, which Tanpınar presents as the cause of the Oedipal disorder in Turkish society, far from having a patricidal intent, was in fact driven by the objective to restore the full political independence of the Ottoman Empire. The most common theme of the newspaper articles, pamphlets, intellectual and political debates of the period that forced the ruling elite to implement westernizing reforms was to prevent the dissolution of the empire and to strengthen the state against the political and military exertions of European powers. One group in the imperial bureaucracy held the view that these goals could be achieved by modernizing the army and restructuring the state; yet, there was another group wishing to extend the reforms to the very foundations of society. Hence, due to the persistent pressure of the domestic and foreign mercantile bourgeoisie and manufacturers who had gained considerable power especially in Istanbul and the Balkans, the Tanzimat promoted a legal system that further secured private property, accumulation of wealth, land ownership, and rights of inheritance, and this also necessitated a new taxation system

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*, ed. Birol Emil, Dergâh Yayınları, 2005; 38.

favoring those rising classes.<sup>7</sup> Considering these positions, it can be suggested that the reforms of 1839 displayed a clash between two contending interests within the mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman society as on the one hand they tried to consolidate the imperial power, and on the other, they challenged the juridical, social, and political authority of the Sultan. Nevertheless, it seems more appropriate to say that the Tanzimat was at once an expression of clash and compromise.

The mentioned views prescribing military, administrative, juridical, and/or economic remedies to the empire's crisis were responding to the same phenomenon which can be defined roughly as the globalization of modernity through the expansion of capital and its taking root in the Ottoman society. It should be noted that although the Tanzimat and the successive constitutional governments of 1876 and 1908 diminished the court's power in almost every domain of social life, until the republic was founded in 1923, the presence of the imperial state had not been openly challenged. For instance, the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki*), the organization which most actively contributed to the preparation of the second constitution and held the majority in the second cabinet, refused to take hold of power completely although its radical program gained support from many senior army officers and Ottoman intellectuals living inside and outside the empire. Having to weaken the absolute rule of the Sultan in favor of modernization but being unable to abolish the old state was the deadlock that the Union and Progress faced. Moreover, even the reforms that were made to strengthen the state

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Savran, *Türkiye'de Sınıf Mücadeleleri* and Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, 1993; 1-31.

could not help but undermine some of the long-established institutions and traditions of the empire, thereby proving that prolonging its life depended on burying it piecemeal.<sup>8</sup> The irony here consisted in the fact that since the state needed the technology and financial support of the West, it could not afford antagonizing the advocates of modernization; and the latter had to resort to the state to exploit its power to realize and consolidate the reforms.

In his work, Savran discusses the general characteristics of earlier modern revolutions in history and argues that in “classical” cases such as the English, American, or French Revolution, the bourgeoisie mobilize peasants, urban artisans, craftsmen, and the newborn proletariat, and rely on popular uprisings to try and destroy the existing regime. However, in other examples that come historically later, the modernizing tasks of revolution are carried out by imperial bureaucracies and the bourgeoisie have to compromise with the state because of their relative weakness and inability to create an independent leadership. This latter type of modernization observed in countries such as Germany, Italy, and Turkey, Savran notes, may be called “revolutions from above.”<sup>9</sup> Not only the two constitutional governments but also the Turkish republican movement as their inheritor bear the quality of relying on the cadres of imperial army and bureaucracy rather than politicized masses in conducting the struggle for independence and in delivering the modernizing reforms in a top-down fashion. Yet, what distinguishes the

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<sup>8</sup> A more comprehensive analysis of the policies carried out by the Union and Progress can be found in Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914*, Clarendon Press, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Savran, *Türkiye'de Sınıf Mücadeleleri*; 36.

republic from the preceding Westernization attempts was its strong commitment to the building of a nation-state.

Tanpınar describes Turkish modernization which had started in the Ottoman Empire and reached its apex with the republic as a change of civilization, and argues that ever since the Tanzimat “we have been able neither to resist what will change us, nor to surrender to it completely. We live as if we have lost our historical and existential essence; we are in a crisis of values. We accept everything without making it an attribute of ourselves in the broadest sense; and we keep what we have accepted hidden under lock and key within a corner of our mind.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, Tanpınar continues, a civilization must be a whole and develop together with its institutions and value judgments. “It does not find these elements useless, nor does it doubt them. We live with our institutions and values just as we live without thinking that we have hands, feet or ears. And, this is the true organicity.”<sup>11</sup> Societies should attune themselves to their historical eras but those transformations should arise from the actual needs of life and be realized without violating the sense of continuity and wholeness in collective consciousness: “In the West, men of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, of the industrial age, and of today, are all material and historical phenomena which have emerged with their own civilization and institutions.”<sup>12</sup> These figures, who differ from each other in terms of their respective historical and material conditions, are in effect interlinked by an invisible continuity that

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<sup>10</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

makes Western civilization a coherent whole. Although these types are stated to emerge with their own institutions and social organizations, these are merely moments within an integrated sphere. This civilizational consistency is conceivable due to a certain consciousness of temporality that is inviolable by periodical changes such as those mentioned above. Tanpınar suggests that before the Tanzimat, Ottoman/Turkish people used to enjoy the same wholeness because in their old civilization, which for them was at least as coherent and meaningful as Western civilization is for a European, they used to doubt neither themselves nor their predecessors from whom they had inherited their life. Dissimilarities between generations were not unsettling because time was unfragmented both as history and as a much deeper continuum providing people with intuitions to combat such “existential” doubts; on the contrary, the present and the past used to be connected in people’s minds and they thought of the future as an extension of their lives.

Tanpınar did not have an imperial nostalgia for a “morally superior or utopian past,” Azade Seyhan remarks, he rather searched for a unifying structure “that would lend a sense of renewed selfhood and autonomy to Turkish culture.”<sup>13</sup> What he problematizes about Turkish modernization is not technological, educational, juridical, or political reforms. For Turkey, these had to be implemented in order to survive and assume a place of its own among other nations. The question that Tanpınar draws attention to is specifically the “spiritual trauma” that was caused by the Tanzimat and aggravated as

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<sup>13</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context*, The Modern Language Association of America, 2008; 138.

society moved further towards Westernization. As he calls it, the abrupt and wholesale adoption of Western culture by the Ottoman community ended in a “social psychosis” which eventually turned into a real duality or split of self: “There is no doubt that the old stands so close to us; sometimes it appears like a victim, at other times like a lost paradise or a treasure keeping our spiritual wholeness. Even the smallest tremor opens it up in front of us with the glimmers of a fata morgana; it constantly calls us to itself, and when it does not, it makes us suspect our life. Fluctuations and a kind of remorse of conscience [are what we suffer].”<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that the most important and grieving result of the indiscriminating espousal of the new for Tanpınar was a crisis in collective identity. Justifiably yearning for the modern, the advocates of Westernization quite dangerously ignored the sources from which the value system of Ottoman/Turkish people had flourished. As a result, people were uprooted, they lost the idea of being part of a continuous temporal movement and were finally purged from the culture in which they used to be themselves. In that respect, suspicion that the old gives way in the new society has to do with its authenticity; with the question whether or not the values that pervade its life originate in itself. One can argue that the desire to have a temporal-historical experience of unity and wholeness, and to gain a revitalized sense of collectivity appears to be a utopian impulse that is not projected onto a hollow image of the glorious Ottoman past but situated within Tanpınar’s own present moment, taking its impetus from the

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<sup>14</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 38.

malfunctioning cultural dynamics of republican Turkish society as they are diagnosed by Tanpınar himself.

### **“Setting a Zero Point in Time”**

In *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture*, Gregory Jusdanis presents a historical and conceptual narrative which also speaks to the Turkish case that for Tanpınar has culminated in a social psychosis:

By the modernization of Greek society, I mean the enterprise launched by the intellectual and mercantile elites in the late eighteenth century to designate the Greek-speaking Orthodox a national community, free the Greek territories from the Ottoman control, and define the Greeks as western. (...) A national culture, replacing the ethnoreligious identities in the Ottoman Empire, acted as a source of legitimation for the new state by harmonizing local loyalties and linguistic variations in an imaginary realm. This domain of symbols and meanings was conceived (...) prior to actual independence. In short, national unity was experienced discursively before it was attained politically.<sup>15</sup>

Before the War of Independence was over (1923), the modernizing movement in Turkey too had started to produce its own imaginary symbols, meanings, and definitions with the aim of creating a national community and culture that would legitimate the founding of the new Turkish state. During the second constitutional period, the natural borders of the country had been determined by the parliament and the motherland had been geographically defined (these borders were later accepted by the republican movement with some modifications). In 1920, the National Assembly was opened in Ankara and

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<sup>15</sup> Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture. Inventing National Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991; xiii.

declared as the nation's only political authority while the imperial state was still alive. Besides, the Independence Tribunals were instituted as the nation's only legitimate judicial organs while the empire's own courts were still functioning. These practices were being backed up by the republican leadership's discourse promoting the nation as preexisting the desired independence. The National Assembly implied that there had already been a nation to be assembled; likewise, the assembly and its tribunals had started to outline the rights and duties of citizens before the Ottoman people became citizens proper. This process of delimitation and specification required a laborious restructuring of history and geography, and with the nation-building project, what had come to be imagined and perceived as the imperial space, time, and culture, was morphed into the motherland, national history, and the national myth of creation.

Just as it was attempted in Greece, the foremost aim of the republican movement was to designate a national community by centralizing politically and culturally the localized remnants of the Empire. Added to that, and arguably this is where the social psychosis that Tanpınar refers to stems from, it too tried to designate that community as western, and it did so by freeing the Turkish nation from the Ottoman control. One of the fundamental principles of the republic which was expressed in the 1921 Constitution, "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation," is doubtless integral to the modern state's claim to represent all classes and social groups homogenized within the nation. However, given the period in which this principle was first foregrounded (a situation of "dual power" in Lenin's terms), it seems justified to claim that its actual referent was imperial sovereignty which was to be undermined in order to reinforce the legitimacy of

the new state. The republic's approach also to the Ottoman history and culture was extremely hostile, and except for its specific elements that were pragmatically used in the fortification of Turkish identity, the Ottoman world was fundamentally othered and belittled as a semi-barbarian primitive culture suppressing the genuine characteristics of Turkish people such as intelligence, love of hard-work, aptitude in sciences, belief in gender equality, capability of self-governing, and so forth.

Hülya Adak illustrates the hostility of the new state towards the Ottoman past in relation to Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* (The Speech), the messianic "sacred text" of the republic equating Mustafa Kemal's life with the nation's fate and presenting the date he arrived in Samsun to launch the War of Independence as the birth-date of the Turkish nation. The secular prophetic quality of Mustafa Kemal, first asserted in *Nutuk*, was later reinforced by the last name given to him by the Assembly: "Atatürk" has the meaning of the "Father/Ancestor of the Turks," thus making Mustafa Kemal's coming on historical stage (1919) the nascence of Turkish community. Adak writes that "The speech foregrounded the role of its narrator in Turkish history at the expense of defaming or ignoring the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph,"<sup>16</sup> which defamation is the core of the republic's nationalist discourse. As she continues:

In *Nutuk*, this myth of rebirth is linked with the narrative of discontinuity, a narrative of distinct separation from the Ottoman Empire. This narrative of discontinuity distanced the Turkish Republic from the Ottoman Empire on several different levels. First and foremost, the Sultanate and the Caliphate are presented as useless and backward institutions that cannot be reconciled with modernization. The argument for the abolition of both the Sultanate and the Caliphate (in 1922

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<sup>16</sup> Hülya Adak, "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* and Halide Edip's *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 509-529; 509.

and 1924, respectively) was made through the individual acts of treachery of Sultan Vahdeddin, who vouched for the British mandate and, during the Independence Struggle, actively struggled against the nationalist forces in Anatolia. In *Nutuk*, not only the *last* Ottoman Sultan Vahdeddin but all Ottoman Sultans are degraded as “a bunch of madmen,” “moronic and ignorant” “animals.”<sup>17</sup>

Distinct separation from the Ottoman past and complete dismissal of traditional cultural elements (music, rituals, poetry, philosophy, religious architecture, etc.) condensed into the debased images of the Sultanate, the Caliphate, and any other figure or institution that functions as an element of negative foundation for the nation-state and national identity—this operation combined with an uncompromising rationalism and positivism constitutes the backbone of the republican cultural revolution and the last episode of what Tanpınar calls civilizational change.

One traditional cultural element that the modern secular state had to suppress was religion, and the exclusion of religion from the nation’s political and social life was carried out with a carefully crafted discourse. The denominator of the republic and the unifying identity of the Turkish nation could not be Islam but common language, common history, and common land. In the first civics textbook of the republic which was written by Mustafa Kemal himself, it was explained why Islam could not hold the nation together:

It is claimed that religious unity is also a factor in the formation of nations. Whereas, we see the contrary in the Turkish nation. The Turks were a great nation even before they adopted Islam. This religion did not help the Arabs, Iranians, Egyptians and others to unite with the Turks to form a nation. Conversely, it weakened the Turks’ national relations; it numbed Turkish national feelings and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 516. Original emphasis.

enthusiasm. This was natural, because Mohammedanism was based on Arab nationalism above all nationalities.<sup>18</sup>

Since “Mohammedanism” was a means of subordinating all other Muslim nations to the Arabs, it was more than necessary to destroy the age-old bondage of Islam to achieve an independent and sovereign state, and to tear apart the shackles that hindered the Turkish nation’s progress for centuries. In March 1923, seven months before the declaration of the republic, Mustafa Kemal delivered a speech in the National Assembly and announced what was wrong with Islam and the Islamic world:

You know there is an unforgiving enmity between the societies of the Muslim world and the masses of the Christian world. Muslims became eternal enemies of Christians, and Christians those of Muslims. They viewed each other as non-believers, fanatics. The two worlds co-existed with this fanaticism and enmity. As a result of this enmity, the Muslim world was distanced from the western progress that took a new form and color every century. Because, Muslims viewed progress with disdain and disgust. At the same time, the Muslim world had to hold on to its arms as a result of this enmity that lasted for centuries between the two groups. This continuous occupation with arms, enmity, and disdain for western progress constitute another important cause of our regression.<sup>19</sup>

In this discourse of progressivism and secularism, it is precisely the Ottoman milieu that is meant by the Muslim world; for five centuries, the Ottoman Sultan was the Caliph of all Muslims and three quarters of the Islamic ummah lived under the Ottoman rule until the beginning of the twentieth century. This rhetoric of modernization and progress was based on the proclaimed antiquatedness of the Ottoman and Islamic culture, and the Turkish history was rewritten by the new state as having always been oriented towards

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<sup>18</sup> The Atatürk Society of America.

[aturksociety.org/about-ataturk/in-ataturks-own-words/](http://aturksociety.org/about-ataturk/in-ataturks-own-words/). Accessed 27 June 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

modern Western principles and values such as reason, development, and scientific thinking. Meltem Gürle refers to this process as a Janus-faced modernization and suggests that this project was driven by the “twofold assumption that the country could become Western and national at the same time.”<sup>20</sup> The effort to create citizens from a vast group of imperial subjects “required reshaping the country’s memory and imagination” as well as dispensing with the Ottoman ethos, which “meant erasing many significant cognitive, social and cultural points of reference from the collective memory.”<sup>21</sup>

Erdağ Gökner argues that in its endeavor to shift away from the Ottoman tradition and historiography, and to create a new, secular national identity, the republican leadership formed a metanarrative that made it possible to formulate the movement from empire to republic. Gökner calls this “the Turkish national core narrative [with] four major plot points: (1) colonial encounter (foreign military occupation)<sup>22</sup>; (2) the Anatolian turn (a movement toward the people); (3) national consciousness (nation over self); and cultural revolution (a new history and identity).”<sup>23</sup> In this narrative, the moment of break with the Ottoman world is placed within the “colonial encounter” with the Allied forces. For Gökner, there is also a Janus-like quality in Tanpınar’s worldview that stands in contrast to the Janus-faced project of republican Westernization deriving its

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<sup>20</sup> Meltem Gürle, “‘Wandering on the Peripheries’: The Turkish Novelistic Hero as ‘Beautiful Soul’.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2013, pp. 96-112; 97.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> This period starts with the occupation of Istanbul in November 1918 and ends with its liberation in October 1923.

<sup>23</sup> Erdağ Gökner, “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future: Ambivalence in A.H. Tanpınar’s *Those Outside the Scene*.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 647-661; 648-49.

legitimacy, among other discursive constructs, from the mentioned core narrative: “Faced with a decision between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ modernity and tradition, and Ottoman past and Turkish national future, Tanpınar’s characters cannot, or perhaps refuse to, decide.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Tanpınar asserts that the choice to be made between these binaries is a false one, and rather than taking West and East, or traditional and modern as real alternatives, “he sees them as synchronic, two cultural springs feeding his identity and his art. His cultural ideal thereby involves a lived synthesis of apparently contradictory identities (...) manifested by the people of Turkey.”<sup>25</sup> This lived synthesis is the way to overcome the multiple forms of fragmentation in collective consciousness and memory; by showing the conditions of possibility of that synthesis through aesthetics, Tanpınar excavates a submerged continuity and attempts to create a new totality and wholeness that could cure social and individual psychoses, and eventually achieve the much-needed “peace of mind.”

### **A “Bergsonian” Historiography and Social Doctrine**

The first attempt to move beyond the two dominant positions represented by traditionalists and Westernists came from a group of writers who gathered around the literary and critical journal *Dergâh* that was launched in 1921. These figures, among whom were the influential poets Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884-1958) and Ahmet Haşım (1884-1933), were called the Bergsonists due to their insistent treatment of some of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 648

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Bergson's key ideas and notions.<sup>26</sup> Erol Köroğlu notes that Bergsonism, as it was promoted by that group of young professors and intellectuals—some of whom had their higher education in Europe—was a reaction to rationalism, mechanical evolutionism, and absolute progressivism that the proponents of Westernization supported to varying degrees. Familiar with continental philosophy, culture, and political currents, the *Dergâh* group was also against the established conservative position that was staunchly anti-West, pro-Ottoman, or outright Islamist.<sup>27</sup>

The writers of *Dergâh* openly critiqued the positivistic sociohistorical doctrine of Ziya Gökalp, who collected his writings in a 1923 book that famously laid out the fundamental principles of Turkish nationalism and had a significant influence on the republican movement.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Gökalp's nationalism that envisaged a break with the Ottoman identity, the *Dergâh* advocated Bergson's idea of *élan vital*. As Köroğlu outlines, during the War of Independence and the Allied occupation of Istanbul, the *Dergâh* writers held the following political and philosophical position:

Our resistance to the Western invasion stems from a momentous condition of life and death struggle, and from an extremely violent tension of survival that has been triggered by it. The secret of our success is not figures, numbers, measures, and positive sciences. These are valuable only as a means. The secret of our success derives from all living beings' dominant power in their struggle for life, i.e., their instincts, and from their "*élan vital*."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Erol Köroğlu, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'ın Zaman Anlayışı," in "*Bir Gül Bu Karanlıkarda*": *Tanpınar Üzerine Yazılar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, 3F Yayınevi, 2008, pp. 485-507; 492-493.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 493

<sup>28</sup> See Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, trans. Robert Devereaux, E.J. Brill, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Köroğlu, "Tanpınar'ın Zaman Anlayışı"; 493

Having this standpoint, these intellectuals viewed the success of the War of Independence as the “victory of quality against quantity and creative *élan* against mechanism,” and it was precisely that creative thrust and instinctual will to persist in being that made possible the conception of history as a totality or as a process of “change within persistence and persistence within change.”<sup>30</sup> Between 1919 and 1923, Tanpınar attended the Faculty of Letters at Istanbul University and took classes with Yahya Kemal; through the latter’s influence, he became familiar with Bergson, embraced his mentor’s understanding of history, literature, and art, and published his first poems in *Dergâh*, thereby becoming a part of that circle.

This view of history immediately politicized Bergson’s philosophy and integrated it into a cultural program that was intended to counterbalance the Turkish national core narrative as well as the obliviousness it imposed. It thus tried to answer the question “how to move forward” vis-à-vis the chasm in collective time and memory that was caused by the wholesale Westernization policy of the republic. This question, Çimen Günay-Erkol suggests, “crystallizes the critical position of [*A Mind at Peace*] in its insistence on the political responsibility of the intellectual elite”<sup>31</sup> who were to form the abovementioned program that, rather than “being stuck in the past, would let the inner continuity of the past carry over into the present and the future.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Çimen Günay-Erkol, "Sleepwalking in Istanbul: A Man in Anguish in A.H. Tanpınar's *A Mind at Peace*." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2009, pp. 85-106; 101.

<sup>32</sup> Köroğlu, “Tanpınar’da Zaman Anlayışı”; 496.

On numerous occasions in *A Mind at Peace*, Tanpınar meticulously outlines through the protagonist Mümtaz and his paternal cousin İhsan the essential tenets and scope of that Bergsonian historiography. The novel is composed of four parts; the first and the last parts, which are set in the present time of narration and enframe the middle two, take place within a single day in August 1939, that is the twenty-four hours right before the outbreak of World War II with the Nazi invasion of Poland. *A Mind at Peace* opens and closes with Mümtaz trying to find a nurse and a doctor for İhsan who is severely ill. In the middle parts, Mümtaz remembers the time he spent with Nuran, the woman with whom he had a passionate love affair, and the sites of Istanbul they visited, the classical songs they listened to, the poems they recited, the books they discussed; in short, everything that enabled Mümtaz to live in a realm of concord and wholeness that centered on the figure of Nuran. Mehmet Kaplan, Tanpınar's assistant in the Faculty of Letters and later a professor of modern Turkish literature, states that *A Mind at Peace* was written in accordance with Mümtaz's "sense of temporality," nothing of consequence really happens in it, and that the readers who love to see "movement and important events and occurrences" in a novel might find it tedious.<sup>33</sup>

The accuracy of this statement notwithstanding, the "event" of *A Mind at Peace* is the very construction and deployment of a dream aesthetics based on its protagonist's "sense of temporality," and as I will try to illustrate later in this chapter, this aesthetic construction is not limited to the subjective experiences of Mümtaz, but it increasingly expands so as to contain the collective memory and consciousness, the present and the

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<sup>33</sup> Mehmet Kaplan, *Türk Edebiyatı Üzerine Araştırmalar 2*, Dergâh Yayınları, 2014; 321.

future of society. “By distancing herself from him,” the third person narrator of the novel says, “Nuran had been cleansed of all her faults and all they’d shared, assuming the radiant hardness of this diamond in an inaccessible stratum of existence. Separation had thus transformed her into a mythical presence beyond Mümtaz’s realm of being. *Had I only experienced her at a distance like this, so alone, inherently beautiful, and removed from everything.*”<sup>34</sup> What matters to Mümtaz, whether they are together or separate, is the mood or the psychological-cognitive experience of wholeness that he can generate by means of Nuran as its catalyst. Similarly, what is important for Tanpınar is “not the past itself, but its absence and the emptiness that it leaves behind.”<sup>35</sup> This emptiness makes possible and necessary at one and the same time both the dream aesthetics and another vision of history. At this point, before I move to Mümtaz the aesthete, I would like to focus on his relationship with İhsan the historian.

With the intellectual and professional roles he assigns to Mümtaz and İhsan, Tanpınar has the opportunity to connect two disciplines crucial to the conceptualization of a history and a culture that can stand as alternatives to those envisioned by the republican project. Mümtaz’s father is killed by an Ottoman Greek during the occupation and torching of his childhood village S. and within a couple of weeks, he loses his mother in the Mediterranean town A. to which they have immigrated. He is then sent to Istanbul: “Following the demise of both his father and mother within a span of just a few weeks, his cousin raised him. İhsan had been both father and mentor. So too in France, where

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<sup>34</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 67.

<sup>35</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, "Tanpınar'da Görünmeyen." *Defter*, no. 5, 1988, pp. 97-105; 97.

he'd been sent for two years (...) his cousin's influence persisted; in those new surroundings with so many temptations, he'd been spared the inaugural experiences of decadence in part due to İhsan's guidance, and thus hadn't squandered his time."<sup>36</sup> Here, Tanpınar intersects the lives of two characters belonging to two generations—late Ottoman and early republican—separated by a radical break, and the mentioned mentor-pupil or father-son relationship conjoins the old and the new not within an antagonistic frame but in the form of a desired transference of knowledge and experience to youth and vitality. In this regard, it is telling that the novel opens with the history professor İhsan lying in his deathbed with pneumonia whereas the aesthetics tutor Mümtaz, who is working on a novel about the eighteenth-century Sufi poet Shaykh Galip, is close to thirty with a supposedly promising life ahead. However, what is even more telling is that Mümtaz calls İhsan his older brother, thereby implying that the latter might be regarded as another son of the lost or murdered father, a theme that is frequently visited in Tanpınar's essays and fiction. İhsan and Mümtaz represent two different periods which, taken together, display an increasingly intensifying sense of fatherlessness. This does not prevent İhsan from taking up the role of mentor for Mümtaz, though, nor does it lead the younger cousin to a chaotic state of mind or decadent rebellion. İhsan's fatherly care continues even when Mümtaz goes to France and he oversees the young man's intellectual formation without letting him waste time. Why time is so precious and neither Mümtaz nor his generation should waste it can be grasped with regard to Jusdanis' notion of belated modernity, and when İhsan's observations on the problems of Turkish

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<sup>36</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 24.

modernization are presented, the solutions are almost always formulated on the basis of a strong sense of being late. Nurdan Gürbilek suggests that the entire late-Ottoman and early-republican literary and intellectual establishment, including Tanpınar, lived in a “society that is ‘belatedly modernized,’ a system of thought that has come to accept its inadequacy before a modern one presuming to be superior, and a culture that has adopted an infantile role when confronted by foreign ideals.”<sup>37</sup> It is within such a society feeling forever infantilized and belated vis-à-vis the West that the bond İhsan forms with Mümtaz figures as the principal means, on the level of culture, of reestablishing the link between the past and the present by taking responsibility for the education and upbringing of young generations in a way different from the republican cultural politics that is beholden to the impossible Western ideal.<sup>38</sup>

Jale Parla provides an analysis of one motive underlying the function İhsan fulfills in *A Mind at Peace*. In her study on the epistemological foundations of the Tanzimat novel that introduced the genre to the Ottoman society, Parla, quite in tune with Tanpınar,

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<sup>37</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol 102, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 599-628; 599. İhsan's role of the mentor or educator gains more importance when it is considered within the context of a society that feels forever infantilized.

<sup>38</sup> As regards the trope of a young individual's development and education, Gürle discusses whether or not the Turkish novelistic hero bears any resemblance to that in the works of European *Bildungsroman*. As she writes: "While the classical *Bildungsheld* is ambitious and bent on achievement, its Turkish equivalent does not strike us as a man of action. Lethargic and melancholic even when in transformation and spiritual growth, he is usually portrayed as doomed to a self-imposed confinement. His *Bildung*, therefore, should not be understood as integration to civilization, but as an effort to reconnect to the culture he once belonged to. (...) The Turkish novelistic hero, therefore, typically yearns for a time when the split between public and private spheres was not so sharp, and when the bourgeois ego had not established itself as the sole truth. He hopes to define himself in reference to the aesthetics of such a time, from which he is abruptly and tragically disconnected." See "Wandering on the Peripheries"; 99.

defines the collective psychological mood of the period with respect to fatherlessness. As she argues, the Tanzimat novelists, in the absence of a father, found it necessary to take over his role and showed great responsibility for the education and guidance of people in a time of rapid modernization or Westernization.<sup>39</sup> İhsan is one of these father-orphans taking care of his brother and society in general:<sup>40</sup>

Mümtaz came to know İhsan later, upon entering into an intellectual life. Without letting on, İhsan had kept an eye on the youth, observing and nourishing his aptitudes and inclinations. When he'd reached the age of seventeen, Mümtaz felt ready to cross a threshold of life, ready to cross over. He'd read the classical Ottoman divan collections and had savored the delicacies of history. İhsan himself taught the history course at Galatasaray [an elite French lyceum]. (...) He'd seized [the entire class] from the first day, and though he hadn't taken them up to a Mount Olympus, he'd nevertheless transported them to the heights of a path they would subsequently descend by themselves.<sup>41</sup>

In his conversations with Mümtaz and his friends, İhsan proves to be an ardent ideologue engaged in scripting the future of his country, the “right path” Turkey should take. He intends to collect his ideas in a work which will be co-written by Mümtaz—his participation in İhsan's grand project suggests that Mümtaz is also equipped enough to be a deliverer of the right idea Turkey needs in order to move forward in its present circumstances: “İhsan aspired to write a comprehensive history of the Turks. It was to be a vehicle for organizing the social doctrine he espoused. (...) Mümtaz would help with

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<sup>39</sup> Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri*, İletişim Yayınları, 2014; 30.

<sup>40</sup> For a remarkable discussion of how the bond between Mümtaz and İhsan, and their withdrawal into an aesthetic, intellectual, and philosophical world could be interpreted as a “unique mechanism of homosocial desire,” see Günay-Erkol, “Sleepwalking in Istanbul.”

<sup>41</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 43.

the project; specifically, he was to prepare the art and intellectual history sections.”<sup>42</sup>

This is obviously a deliberate division of duty on the part of Tanpınar. Having İhsan and Mümtaz specialize in two different yet complementary disciplines, he shows the awareness cultivated by the *Dergâh* group that historiography and studies on the history of culture and arts would restore the sense of continuity and wholeness to the traumatized Turkish society by giving it a kind of sentimental framework that reconnects its present and past.

İhsan’s Turkish history should begin “with the economic conditions the Ottoman Empire had inherited from the Byzantines” and “continue up to the present” by tracing the Turkish society’s fundamental traits without crediting the myth of rebirth and distinct separation upon which the republic established its nationalist discourse and cultural politics. Given Tanpınar’s and İhsan’s concerns, it is possible to argue that this history will not be of events, individuals, distinct periods or intervals as these are elements, when emphasized too strongly, would break into fragments the *durée* which is always translated by the “Bergsonists” of the *Dergâh* into the deep undercurrent of history and the profound reality of time that feeds into collective memory and culture. The recent history of great individuals and momentous events is what the republic is anxious to produce; İhsan and Mümtaz, however, are interested in unearthing what is categorically suppressed by the official historiography.

The way İhsan’s literary and artistic interests have developed, next to the book he plans to write, is significant in the sense that it adds a crucial component to the overall

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 44.

theme in *A Mind at Peace* of reconciliation of the old and the new, the Western and the local, and of the integration of the past into the present:

İhsan wasn't an artist. His creative side had been subsumed by history and economics. Even so, he understood poetry and painting well. In his youth, he'd read the French writers methodically. For seven years, during its heyday, he'd lived in the Latin Quarter together with other international cohorts. He'd lived out many trends, witnessed the birth of various theories, and participated in the roaring harvest fires of aesthetic debates. Later, after he'd returned to Istanbul, he'd abruptly forsaken it all, even the poets he loved the most. In an unanticipated way, he only occupied himself with topics pertaining to the Turks, cultivating this interest to the exclusion of others. Since he'd developed the measure of his aesthetic sense in Europe, he didn't particularly distinguish local choices in art from others. He introduced Mümtaz to the works of Ottoman poets like Bâkî, Nef'î, Nâilî, Nedim, and Shaykh Galip, along with musicians like Dede and İtrî. And it was İhsan who handed him a copy of Baudelaire.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Mümtaz starts reading not only *Flowers of Evil*, but also Régnier, Hérédia, Verlaine, Mallarme, Nerval, and numerous other European poets and writers. İhsan's intellectual formation demonstrates that even if he is very well-versed in Western art and thought, soon after he returns to Turkey, he sets out to cultivate his taste for classical Ottoman music and literature. In his person and teachings, he crystallizes a different mindset that is neither traditionalist nor occidentalist. In that respect, İhsan is the exact opposite of the "dandy" type that was one of the favorite figures depicted in the satirical examples of the Tanzimat novel, including the Bihruz Bey of *A Carriage Affair*. In his work on the character of Turkish modernization, Şerif Mardin deals with the problem of what he calls excessive Westernization and notes that after the Tanzimat, there emerged a type in Ottoman society who was educated in at least one European language, brought up

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 45.

according to Western values, but was eventually driven to denial and disdain for the traditional culture of his own country in a kind of superiority complex strangely generated by his feeling of inferiority before the West.<sup>44</sup> In the first novels written by the Ottoman authors, this type is caricaturized and harshly criticized for aping the European lifestyle, using a French word or expression in almost every sentence he utters, and pretending to be modern by practicing the most debased habits of the decadent European aristocracy or the parvenu bourgeoisie such as prodigality, conspicuous consumption, pompousness or debauchery. Mardin states that these ridiculous characters suffer from the same “illness of civilization,” which is rootlessness and immaturity.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, his Western education and familiarity with European culture causes aloofness in İhsan neither from the current situation of Turkey, nor from its historical culture. That he does not distinguish the local art from the foreign, far from signifying a defect, evidences that these cultures are successfully integrated in İhsan’s mind and practices. Gökner emphasizes that “Tanpınar’s understanding of the ‘national life’ is bound to his ideals of synthesis and continuity, which he believes will transcend the pervasive crisis of the ‘divided self.’” In a 1943 essay titled “The Real Source,” Tanpınar writes:

We can consider the East or the West only as two separate sources. Both exist for us, and quite extensively; that is to say, they are part of our reality. However, their presence alone can’t be of any value, and remaining [separate] that way, they are an invitation to create a vast and comprehensive synthesis, a life meant for us and particular to us. For the encounter and fusion to be fruitful, it must give birth to

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<sup>44</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Türk Modernleşmesi*, İletişim Yayınları, 1991; 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 40

this life, to this synthesis. And this is possible by attaining the third vital source, which is the reality of the nation.<sup>46</sup>

For Tanpınar, the reality of the nation consists of its social relations, historical and economic conditions, cultural dilemmas and contradictions; it is neither an identity fixed within a bygone era, nor a schema that is imposed on the nation and is not in tune with its concrete situation. It does not allude to yet another type of nationalism, either; it rather stands for the national situation as a whole, both internally and externally, and calls for a sustained effort to be understood and made into a totality for those who live in it. İhsan's project concentrates on accomplishing this task driven by the conviction that, in its existing condition, Turkey cannot do without the West or the East; without taking into consideration its historical and cultural background or the broader system which it is now compelled to enter. This seeming contradiction is the very source of vitality for Turkey and İhsan, who for many critics was modelled after Tanpınar's own mentor Yahya Kemal, maintains that the Turks ought to become a living synthesis of these poles.

*A Mind at Peace* abounds in episodes in which İhsan explains the essentials of his sociological doctrine; however, the main principle of this program becomes clearer in his conversation with a parliamentarian<sup>47</sup>, who is an old friend of his from the Faculty of Political Sciences:

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Gökınar, "Ottoman Past and Turkish Future"; 659.

<sup>47</sup> This conversation takes place in 1938, a year before the diegetic time of the novel. In 1938 (and until 1946), Turkey had a single-party regime and was ruled by the People's Republican Party that had been founded by Mustafa Kemal. So, in this episode, İhsan is talking with an MP from the cadre that carried out the series of cultural reforms which changed the whole composition of social life.

“İhsan, you appear to be of a rather modern cast. It seems to me that you’re not so fond of your generation, are you?”

“I am not. Or rather, let me put it this way: I’m no advocate of revolution. But am I modern, truly? To be modern, I must be a man of the times in which I live. Meanwhile, I yearn for different things! To be modern, I should accept perpetual transformation along with the revolution. Whereas I’m one who admires consistency in certain ideas and contexts.”

“But all revolutions aren’t this way. Take ours, for example...”

“Our revolution is of another variety. In its natural form, revolution occurs when the masses or society transcends the state apparatus. With us, the masses and society, that is, the collective in question, is obligated to catch up to the state. Even including, more often than not, intellectuals and statesmen . . . Walking down a path preordained by an idea! At least since 1839 and the Tanzimat it’s been this way . . . That’s why our lives are so tiring...”<sup>48</sup>

İhsan’s statements parallel the arguments made about the characteristics of belated modernities or state-promoted revolutions from above, and in his opinion, revolutionary masses such as the ones he describes have never emerged in Turkey. One advantage of İhsan’s critique, however, is that he can conceive of Turkish modernization as a long process at least going as far back as 1839 contrary to the canonical official view freezing the pre-republican Ottoman society into an image of complete stagnation or fatal inertia. The “natural revolutions” İhsan evokes is an expression of how Tanpınar perceives European modernization—a process in which the actual needs of life and measures taken to meet them emerge more or less simultaneously without violating the sense of sociohistorical continuity and totality. Leaving the validity of this political reading aside because its motivation is more important for the purposes of this chapter, I would like to underline a significant aspect of Turkish modernization, which for İhsan is the main cause of the overwhelming fatigue the nation suffers: Turkey not only tries to tread a

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<sup>48</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 367.

progressivist line that has been created ideationally rather than naturally, it is also doomed to have an ever-accelerating experience of historical time for it is a newcomer to modernity—a point that Jusdanis observed in the Greek situation.

The “right path” İhsan teaches in the novel is not the one at the end of which Turkish people will inevitably fail to repeat the Western model, but it is “their” way gaining velocity from the needs of “their” own life; in other words, both the goals and the direction of this path should originate in themselves and thus be autochthonous and authentic. Here, one might suggest that the real problem is not so much modernizing the country as how to do it without causing damage in Turkish culture and collective identity, which should always be in accord with the economic-political tasks and doctrines the country endeavors to realize, and vice versa. “On one hand we’re experiencing a crisis of civilization and culture; on the other we’re in need of economic reform,” says İhsan, “economic life must start and flourish, and society must regain creative impulses. (...) Furthermore our present engagement with the modern and the West amounts to emptying into a gushing river as an afterthought. We’re not simply water, we’re a human society, and we’re not a tributary joining a river; we’re a society appropriating a civilization along with its culture, within which we possess a particular identity.”<sup>49</sup> According to İhsan’s program, Turkey must become a country living by its own labor and production; it must build anew the family, the household, the city and the village, and it must deal with humanity in a constructive way and create the new, authentic individual: “First, bring everybody together. So be it if the standard of living among them varies, it’s enough that

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 283.

they feel the urge for the same New Life . . . Suffice it that one group isn't the mangled remnant of traditional culture and the other newly settled tenants of the modern world. We need a synthesis of both. Second, we need to establish a new relationship to our past."<sup>50</sup> Here, the mission İhsan assigns to the nation, namely giving a new composition to geography, culture, and everyday life, emerges as a full-blown doctrine of overcoming modernity through the imagining of a national community that significantly differs from the republican model. İhsan rejects the ideology of break and separation in favor of historical and cultural wholeness; furthermore, he tries to consolidate society both by obliterating its internal material differences and by formulating its desired new life as an extension of its creative evolution and *élan vital* allegedly stemming from its authentic values. Gökner asserts that both Tanpınar's "third source" and İhsan's comprehensive history of the Turks are "a call for a more inclusive 're-writing' of the national core narrative so that it reflects the realities of everyday life and the influences of the recent Ottoman past, of its society, its religious traditions, and its culture."<sup>51</sup> However, İhsan's re-narrativizing of the national situation in order to create a meaningful whole that can put Turkish society on the right path is found by Nuran as prescriptive and quasi-scientistic, perhaps even as an echo of republican cultural politics and its social engineering: "The cerebral way that you regard society, as if virtually preparing a synthetic concoction . . ." And she repeated to herself phrases that she recollected from Yaşar's vitamin prospectuses: *'Vitamin B cannot be readily extracted from foods in*

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>51</sup> Gökner, "Ottoman Past and Turkish Future"; 659-660.

*which it naturally occurs. As a result of great scientific endeavors, our laboratory has consequently . . .*”<sup>52</sup> Nuran is justified to recall the chemist friend of hers: İhsan’s social doctrine and rewriting of history are intended as a medicine and are no less “synthetic” than a prescription drug. It is Mümtaz who will try to supplement İhsan’s project from the domain of culture, art, and aesthetics, thereby making it even more complete and in a way, “organic.”

### **Love, Wholeness, and Counter-Memory**

İhsan’s doctrine has two components pertaining to two levels of temporality: the urgent needs of the country that involve the time and relatively shorter cycles of production, institutions, and politics; and the more essential cultural and psychological needs that refer to the time of traditions, the long history of collectivity and its self-perception. Mümtaz’s recalling of history to the present with the aim to create a unified spiritual and cultural framework for Turkish people is based on the latter understanding of time and, although he is not indifferent to the former kind of temporality, his mind operates largely on the level of the second mode for his endeavor is poetic and aesthetic. As he remarks: “I’m no Aesthete of Decline. Maybe I’m searching for what’s still alive and viable in this decline.”<sup>53</sup> What gets destroyed by the assault of radical change, Mümtaz tries to salvage and integrate it into the present and the future.

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<sup>52</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 294.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

*A Mind at Peace*, not only in terms of its thematic concerns, but also with its language, form, and narrative style, is a novel testing the workability of a particular kind of aesthetics in the construction of a wholeness that Turkish people can comprehend and identify. As mentioned before, the novel is set in a single day and a single place, Istanbul, and we read Mümtaz's endless ruminations and musings about love, art, literature, existence, death, and many other subjects both in the framing chapters where he wanders in various districts of the city to find a care-taker for his cousin and in the middle part of the book that is composed of his recollections of the previous summer he spent with Nuran. There is a consensus among literary scholars and critics that in *A Mind at Peace*, Tanpınar indeed presents one of the most monumental love affairs in modern Turkish literature. As Fethi Naci observes, whereas during Mümtaz's solitary strolls Istanbul is portrayed as a decrepit city with impoverished inhabitants living under the threat of an imminent world war, within the memories of that past summer, it is depicted as a place where history and nature, love and art intermingle, thus producing an experience of perfect unity untouched by even the slightest feeling of fragmentation or decomposition.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Berna Moran writes that in place of the wretched streets, old ruined houses, and "sick" roads that the forsaken Mümtaz comes across in the first and the last chapters, the middle two features the exquisite shores and gardens of the Bosphorus, pavilions and kiosks, moonlight pouring onto the Marmara Sea, and numerous artworks and objects constituting Mümtaz's enamored world where everything is beautiful and interconnected with everything else by threads that only Mümtaz can see

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<sup>54</sup> Fethi Naci, *60 Türk Romanı*, Oğlak Yayınları, 1998; 174.

(or imagine).<sup>55</sup> Arguably, the creation of Mümtaz's aesthetic project is intensified in those chapters and the elements of the totality that would serve as the cultural cosmos of collectivity are brought together through Mümtaz's constant overlapping of Nuran with the classical Ottoman music, literature, history, Istanbul's nature and architecture.

Mümtaz is a character whose most private, psychological or aesthetic experiences are always depicted as mirroring the experiences of the community in which he has grown up and lives his adult life; in this sense, there is a certain allegorical dimension to even his childhood dilemmas and inner conflicts. While he and his mother immigrate with a large group of locals after his father was killed and village was destroyed, for the first time in his life, Mümtaz feels the anguish of guilt:

He felt deep inside that he'd sinned irrevocably; he felt guilty of vague transgressions. Had they interrogated him at that moment, he might have said, "I'm the one responsible for the death of my father." It was a horrendous sensation that made him feel utterly deplorable. This paradox of mind would plague Mümtaz for years and trip him up at every step and stride. Even after he'd reached adolescence, Mümtaz wouldn't be able to escape such feelings. The images that filled his dream-chambers, the con-founding hesitations, anxieties, and the array of psychological states that comprised the agony and the ecstasy of his existence were all bound to this twinned convergence.<sup>56</sup>

The "twinned convergence" that determines Mümtaz's existence all through his life is the painful juncture of patricidal guilt and the discovery of sexuality. In the coach taking the immigrants to the Mediterranean town A. is a young woman beside whom the little boy sleeps. There, to the suspicion of having a part in the killing of his father, Mümtaz adds

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<sup>55</sup> Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 1: Ahmet Mithat'tan Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'a*, İletişim Yayınları, 2009; 236.

<sup>56</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 31.

the latent shame of desire felt in such a catastrophic moment of his life: “Carnal desires churning by themselves, burning embraces, and moans that filled their barrenness in opposite proportion contained sorcery of a hitherto unknown ilk. Consequently, he couldn't manage to extricate himself from her embrace and simply abandoned himself to that peculiar twinned state...”<sup>57</sup> Patricidal guilt, unsettling desire, the psychology of a strange and dual personality driven to an alien power whose breath “seemed to melt everything it contacted into soft ore”<sup>58</sup>—all these affects and subjective moods are repeated two years later in Tanpınar’s essay “Changing of Civilization and Inner Man” in a seemingly different context, with reference to Turkish people’s Oedipal guilt instigated by the Tanzimat reforms desiring to attain modernization and Westernization at the expense of a familiar world. What this crime denotes in the public dimension strongly resonates with and influences Mümtaz’s private life, and his childhood unrest is only increased in his adulthood by this national sense of guilt. Throughout *A Mind at Peace*, Mümtaz’s struggle to overcome this dual state of mind intermingles with his eagerness to console the public conscience burdened with the responsibility for its father’s disappearance. The title of the novel, in this regard, refers to the individual and collective states of mind that are never separable.

The preoccupation with cultural continuity is expressed right in the opening sequence of the novel set in a poor district near İhsan’s house, where Mümtaz wanders like a sleepwalker occasionally awakened by his memories of Nuran and ruminations

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

about the approaching war (he keeps hearing the whistles of trains transporting conscripted youth to military barracks). During his walk, Mümtaz encounters a group of girls playing a traditional game in a neighborhood where a few decades ago Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha lived:

*Open the gate, toll keeper, toll keeper.  
What will you pay to pass on through?*

The girls were hale and hearty, but their clothes were in tatters. In a neighborhood where Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha's manor had stood at one time, these houses like Remnants of Life, these poor clothes, and this song brought strange thoughts to his mind. Nuran had certainly played this game in her childhood. And before that, her mother and her grandmother sang the same ditty while playing this game.

*What should persist is this very song, our children's growing up while singing this song and playing this game, not Hekimoğlu Pasha himself or his manor or his neighborhood. Everything is subject to transformation; we can even foster such change through our own determination. What shouldn't change are the things that structure social life, that mark it with our own stamp.<sup>59</sup>*

Material aspects of life may change or be revolutionized at will, what should be perpetuated, however, is a style of living, a certain taste bearing a people's character. This is the first instance where we see Mümtaz singling out the elements that he will use to reconceive cultural wholeness and social totality. The game and the song remind him of Nuran seemingly as a result of his keenness to see her everywhere and in everything; however, before long, the lost beloved becomes a representative of Mümtaz's generation, then his train of thought stretches to Nuran's family who are well-versed in the classical music and poetry, her Sufi grandparents, and her upbringing in this environment.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 22.

Mümtaz's reassuring conviction that these three generations in Nuran's family must have sung that song and played that game reveals one of the aspects of his operation of superimposing the private and the cultural, and also how the individual needs and desires that condition Mümtaz's memory quickly translates into those that shape cultural memory which needs a new composition.<sup>60</sup>

“In Tanpınar,” as Gürbilek suggests, “the longing for the past, cultural wholeness and continuity are always expressed in terms love—love for a woman”<sup>61</sup> and the moments he feels engulfed by love give him the strongest sense of belonging and spiritual unity. Love, however, is often not only itself; what the libidinal provides as a remedy is first transposed onto the existential as a larger framework, and then the latter is elevated to the realm of the cosmic, and Mümtaz always returns to the cultural with the troves of that last realm. Consider the passage set in the said Mediterranean town where Mümtaz frequents the mountains nearby the sea and finds a refuge saving him from the terrifying recognition of his uprootedness. He is now fatherless and, just as importantly, he discovers that this feeling also arises from one of the fundamental qualities of finite human existence:

(...) at times he did go farther, to the rocky outcroppings that overlooked the sea from the heights; thereabouts, at the edge of the precipice facing seaweed patches, he observed how the placid water exposed itself to the last bounty of the evening like a viridian and porphyry mirror, gathering shards of light and harboring them like a maternal womb before occluding them gradually. After the muffled rasping of waves, moving to and fro far below, after the fleeting pianissimo, the whispers of love, the fluttering of wings, the splashing; in sum, after the enunciations of mysterious beings living only for the twilight hour filled quiet interstices between

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<sup>60</sup> For a detailed discussion of this overlap, see Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies*; 135-142, and Gürle, “Wandering on the Peripheries.”

<sup>61</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, *Yer Değiştiren Gölge*, Metis Yayınları, 1995; 18.

dusk and nightfall, he was summoned by vast invitations with scalloped edges and colorful spectra, by the articulations of thousands of numina dormant in who knows which mother-of-pearl shell, fish scale, rock hollow, moonbeam, or starlight. Wherever were they inviting him? Had Mümtaz known, maybe he would have rushed to the occasion. For the sound of the sea is mightier than the sough of love and desire. In darkness, the roar of water spoke in tongues of Thanatos.<sup>62</sup>

The language used here is unmistakably Freudian and one might even say, Lacanian. This is not due to the critic's temptation to psychologize or psychoanalyze a text or a character, but it is Tanpınar himself who Oedipalizes the nation and famously writes in his novel *Mahur Beste* [Song in Mahur] that "We are the children of a world that Freud and Bergson share together."<sup>63</sup> (This statement is highly important to grasp Tanpınar's dream aesthetics and I will return to it later.) What Mümtaz experiences while watching the sea and what he wishes to experience by his totalizing aesthetics are almost identical. The womb-like green water that pulls every detached natural element into a single order and composition seems to evoke the pre-birth vacuum of nothingness. It might also be an allusion to the pre-Oedipal stage in which the male child can attach himself to the mother without shame or the mediation of a chastising father—and here, we might consider that the *patria* in the Turkish language and culture is almost always associated with the

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<sup>62</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 35. It is noticeable how in the last two sentences the voice of the third person narrator and Mümtaz's own thoughts become indistinguishable from each other. Berna Moran suggests that, rather than seeing this as a kind of failure or shortcoming in Tanpınar's narrative technique, we should consider how this "transgression" contributes to the overall aesthetic of the novel. Also, this choice further proves the autobiographical quality of *A Mind of Peace* in which İhsan, as mentioned before, is the counterpart of Yahya Kemal and Mümtaz Tanpınar himself. See Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*; 271.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste*, Dergâh Yayınları, 1988; 170.

mother's body.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Tanpınar's metaphors might gain a richer significance with Lacan, who theorizes this pre-Oedipal phase as something akin to a complete mode of being in which the infant lives symbiotically with its mother, identifies with virtually everything in its universe, and has ultimately no "self" in the way we understand the term. It seems possible then to suggest that there is a similar longing in Mümtaz to regress/ascend to that unfragmented mode of being as during his meditations generated by the sea he enjoys an unusual sense of unity with nature, immortality, and eternity. He relives the same wholeness in his adult life while in love with Nuran: "Mümtaz (...) believed he was living through a Mi'raj of Being<sup>65</sup> and an Exaltation of *Eşya*<sup>66</sup>. So fully did he feel the forces of Creation in his flesh, during certain nocturnal hours he wondered why he wasn't indeed conversing with rocks, birds, and blades of grass in the garden. The secret of this enigma again rested with Nuran. She was no ladylove of sterile contentments, hidden and jealous. Complete abandon issued from her persona. Nuran depended on a minimum level of selfhood. She lived through her milieu."<sup>67</sup> Needless to say, Nuran has acquired the virtue of selflessness and immersion in her milieu as a result of her Sufi upbringing—an important component of the old culture whose values have been forgotten or suppressed in modernity.

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<sup>64</sup> The association made between the *patria* and the mother's (or the beloved's) body, as I will try to discuss in the next chapter, will assume a profoundly allegorical role crucial to analyzing Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*.

<sup>65</sup> "Mi'raj" is "ascension to the skies" and it also refers to Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven.

<sup>66</sup> "Eşya" means "things."

<sup>67</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 189.

In Tanpınar's formula, a child's fear of death and existential anxiety constitute an analogue implying that the collectivity and its culture, like nature, can turn mortality into immortality, rupture into continuity, and fragments into a whole. In a 1944 essay titled "People and Society," Tanpınar writes that "When the idea of society is introduced, the tragedy of fate diminishes, because unlike for the individual, there is no death for society. Continuity exists there. The chain continues for all eternity. (...) As individuals—that is, as people diverge from the consciousness of society—they are nothing but an aggregate of weaknesses. As they enter and adopt the life of society, they overcome these weaknesses. (...) Only society, and its historical manifestation, the nation, can withstand fate and time."<sup>68</sup> The sea which spoke to Mümtaz in his childhood and said "For whatever reason did you go and become the plaything of dreary suffering? Come, return to me, dissolve in whole synthesis, you'll forget everything, and sleep the comfortable and blithe sleep of dumb matter,"<sup>69</sup> later transforms into the nation which calls him to partake in and adopt its life, leave aside the miseries of his individuality, and feel immune to fate and the accidents of time, both of which ultimately refer to the rhythms and structure of modern life.

The nation into which one infuses oneself (and vice versa) in the sense of entering a sea and becoming one with it resembles the "oceanic feeling" Freud discusses in *Civilization and its Discontents*.<sup>70</sup> The book is a polemic with a friend of Freud's who

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Göknaç, "Ottoman Past and Turkish Future"; 650.

<sup>69</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 35.

<sup>70</sup> That Tanpınar is familiar with Freud's book becomes clear when İhsan, the designer of an alternative path for Turkey, comments after a mystical music recital, "Being faithful to myself, that is, adopting certain ethics, is what separates me from my surroundings. Necessarily I'd slip

claims that the inclination towards religion or religiosity is endemic to the human soul and shared by all as no one is devoid of the fear of death and everyone needs to have “a sensation of *eternity*, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded, something ‘oceanic.’”<sup>71</sup> Freud does not agree that this feeling is a fixed component of the psyche and exists virtually in everyone:

I cannot discover this “oceanic” feeling in myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One may attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where that is impossible – I am afraid the oceanic feeling, too, will defy this kind of classification – nothing remains but to turn to the *ideational content* which most readily associates itself with the feeling. If I have understood my friend aright, he means the same thing as that consolation offered by an original and somewhat unconventional writer to his hero, contemplating suicide: “Out of this world we cannot fall.” So it is a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole. To me, personally, I may remark, this seems something more in the nature of an *intellectual judgment*, not, it is true, without any accompanying feeling-tone, but with one of a kind which characterizes other equally far-reaching reflections as well.<sup>72</sup>

For Freud, the “oceanic feeling” has not an instinctual content, it is ideational; it essentially denotes an intellectual operation rather than a “natural” mode of being such as living without being conscious at all times of the existence of one’s limbs—a simile that Tanpınar uses in “Changing of Civilization and Inner Man” when he talks about the Turks’ perception and experience of their old culture. Consequently, following Freud, the real organicity or wholeness that Tanpınar privileges should not include in fact the

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away from ordinary people. After finding myself at this extreme, I'd return to them again. That's why I'd admire them and, as you say, nurture them in my own being. To enter into a mystical trance state or to lose myself in the ‘oceanic’ would serve no purpose for me or my surroundings.” *A Mind at Peace*; 292.

<sup>71</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere, Dover Publications, 1994; 1. Original emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis added.

“oceanic feeling” if it is being one with itself or immediateness that characterizes a genuine social wholeness. In that respect, Nuran proves to be the most useful means of naturalizing the “oceanic feeling” in the form of the nation, the historical manifestation of society, mainly because the immediate profound sensation of unity with the beloved also envisioned by Sufism functions as the guarantor of the indispensability and naturalness of all other oceanic feelings, including the social. As Freud writes, “towards the outer world (...) the ego seems to keep itself clearly and sharply outlined and delimited. There is only one state of mind in which it fails to do this – an unusual state, it is true, but not one that can be judged as pathological. At its height, the state of being in love threatens to obliterate the boundaries between ego and object. Against all the evidence of his senses, the man in love declares that he and his beloved are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.”<sup>73</sup> This is exactly what happens to Mümtaz. Yet, for him, the obliteration of boundaries between himself and Nuran, or between himself and everything that is condensed in the figure of Nuran, is not a threat at all; he willingly allows love to facilitate it.

Göknar raises an important question, which I believe is relevant to Mümtaz as well, about the protagonist of Tanpınar’s 1950 novel *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (Those outside the Scene) set in the occupied Istanbul and the period of national resistance: “Why (...) in Tanpınar’s fictional world (...) do we witness a reluctance to relinquish individuality and introspective thought for the sake of the national collective?”<sup>74</sup> One of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2-3

<sup>74</sup> Göknar, “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future”; 650.

the reasons Gökner mentions is the problem of cultural rupture and the ensuing anxiety about the future of the country. “Thus, a predicament arises: an individual willing to sacrifice himself for the nation (...) realizing the uncertain future of that social body—which is the object of his self-sacrifice—can no longer act.”<sup>75</sup> It can be argued that what pushes Mümtaz and Tanpınar to the creation of dream aesthetics is the prolonged uncertainty about the character which could make Turkish society a whole—that kind of collectivity to which one can dedicate oneself in more concrete or material ways still does not exist; it must be imagined, the unifying culture that the republic has failed to promote must be constructed by another aesthetic paradigm. It is in this sense that *A Mind at Peace* is a colossal attempt to build a cultural archive of the past and the present whose purpose is to function as a kind of counter-memory, an antidote to the ongoing cultural revolution.

### **A World Shared by Freud and Bergson**

Tanpınar’s 1944 novel *Song in Mahur* traces the life of Behçet Bey, an old Ottoman gentleman who looks and talks in such a manner that he instills in those around him a “time in nuclear form,” that is the “most indivisible of all indivisibles, the time of an intuition and a memory.”<sup>76</sup> By taking Behçet Bey as the nucleus of his novel, Tanpınar gradually draws expanding circles around him and with each circle, a host of new characters are included into the narrative, thereby making the writing/narrating process

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste*; 169.

more and more complex. *Song in Mahur* cannot reach an end; Tanpınar finally disrupts the narrative and writes a letter to his protagonist as the appendix of his unfinished novel. There he explains to Behçet Bey how he decided to narrate his story, how in the course of time the narrative got out of his control, and why he had to stop writing: Behçet Bey, as the nuclear time, has generated so many different yet interconnected stories of other characters that finally he has become a multitude of lives and voices. Tanpınar tells Behçet Bey that “[T]his is no longer your story. It has started off as yours, but you have carried onto the stage such a crowd that it has ceased to be your story. It has become the story of all of us, or more precisely, of the times you have lived through, we have lived through. (...) So many people have gathered around me. They are all talking simultaneously . . . I must orchestrate their voices.”<sup>77</sup>

In order to justify his narrative choice of dispensing with realism which mechanically reflects or reports the outward appearances of people and things (an attitude that is reproduced by official, “realistic” historiographies), Tanpınar tells Behçet Bey that “We are the children of a world that Freud and Bergson share together,”<sup>78</sup> and that in this world, there is no place for a realistic use of language and narration. As Seval Şahin notes, by referring to these two figures, Tanpınar emphasizes the importance of two notions for his writing, the unconscious and *durée*, the latter of which he uses interchangeably with time in nuclear form.<sup>79</sup> In his letter, Tanpınar also recounts the day

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>79</sup> Seval Şahin, "Mahur ve Mahmur Bir Beste - Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'ın Mahur Beste Adlı Romanı Üzerine," in *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2010, pp. 467-486; 483.

he and Behçet Bey first met: “You were only a past time like a calendar far away from the present, one that has been forgotten where it was hung. You resembled a clock that has been unwound for so many years.”<sup>80</sup> Şahin draws attention to the fact that in Turkish, the words used for winding a clock (*kurmak*) and fiction (*kurgu*) share the same root, and by integrating Behçet Bey into a fictional narrative, Tanpınar happens to set this time in nuclear form (or *durée*) in motion inside a temporal dimension that is hostile to it; that is divisible and measurable by clocks.<sup>81</sup> Even so, Tanpınar has to narrativize Behçet Bey’s life precisely because he has a project in mind that is both aesthetic and sociocultural: “[Gradually] you have transformed from an individual case into a symbol. (...) The symbol of home [that you initially were] has been replaced by a world of value judgments. A very fine symbol that merges with what you told me, it reminded me of the changes that our society has undergone for a century.”<sup>82</sup> Behçet Bey loses the significance of his individuality although he is the indivisible nucleus around which a great variety of lives and voices are collected and orchestrated into a structure that is ultimately symbolic (or better still, allegorical) of “our society.”

This expansive narrative movement finds its most developed application in *Mind at Peace* which is obsessed with time not only in the sense of (cultural) history but also as subjective, everyday experience of time that cannot be detached from the former. In 1921, during the occupation of Istanbul, Ahmet Haşim, a prominent poet in the

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<sup>80</sup> Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste*; 169.

<sup>81</sup> Şahin, “Mahur ve Mahmur Bir Beste”; 485.

<sup>82</sup> Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste*; 172.

*Dergâh* circle, published an influential short article titled “Muslim Time” that expressed the dramatic change in the late Ottomans’ perception of time. Haşim wrote:

The most clandestine and effective of the assaults that have transformed Istanbul and confounded its inhabitants has been the introduction of *foreign time* into our lives. (...) The beginning of the Muslim day is determined by the first light of dawn and its end by the light of dusk (...) [this time] constitutes the *sacred time of memory*. The foreigners [of the Allied occupation] who have arrived have reorganized time and our lives according to an unknown doctrine and have made it unfamiliar to our souls. (...) Now the clock in a Muslim home, as if keeping the hours of another realm, indicates nighttime in colors of day and daytime in the colors of night. Like wayfarers who have lost their way in the desert, we are now *a people lost in time*.<sup>83</sup>

To be sure, in this article, the Allied occupation is a metonymy for the occupation of the organic community by modernity, and as Turan Alptekin suggests, the temporality of this society is perceived through “insects, waters, sounds, stars, lights, and landscapes,”<sup>84</sup> as well as the cycles of craft production and the bazaar that make up what Haşim calls the Muslim day. Hence, the significance of the occupying army and the temporality it imposes on the Istanbulites’ lives, among other obvious reasons, resides in the matrix of discipline it shares with the factory and the capitalist workday prevalent in Europe, which has “innumerable slaves to put to work underground possibly for the longest periods of time.”<sup>85</sup> Tanpınar satirizes precisely this type of mechanical and disciplinary time

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Erdağ Gökner, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel*, Routledge, 2013; 35. Original emphasis.

<sup>84</sup> Turan Alptekin, *Bir Kültür, Bir İnsan*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010; 57.

<sup>85</sup> Ahmet Haşim, "Müslüman Saati." [ahmethasim.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/musluman-saati/](http://ahmethasim.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/musluman-saati/). Accessed 30 June 2017.

deployed to engineer a modern society of worker-citizens in his 1954 novel *The Time Regulation Institute*.<sup>86</sup>

Tanpınar was a university student when he read “Muslim Time” and it is not difficult to imagine how much he must have been impressed by Haşim’s Bergsonian view of temporality. This is reiterated in “Antalyalı Genç Kıza Mektup” (Letter to the Young Girl from Antalya) written in 1961 in response to a high school student’s inquiry about his aesthetic influences and poetics. In the letter, Tanpınar first mentions the influence on his mind and poetry of Ahmet Haşim and Yahya Kemal, and that with the help of the latter, he became familiar with and loved the classical Ottoman poets Galib, Nedim, Bâki, and Nailî.<sup>87</sup> However, he continues,

French poetry and its Baudelaire-Mallarmé-Valéry line have left the greatest impress on me. (...) My real aesthetics came into being after I had come to know Valéry between 1928 and 1930. It is possible to define this aesthetics around the term “dream” and the idea of conscious work. (...) Change Valéry’s statement “Even a man who wants to write his dreams should be awake to the utmost degree” into “Constructing the dream state in language with the most wakeful endeavor and work,” and you will get my poetry. (...)

Bergson’s concept of time has an important place in my view of poetry and art. Although I have read very little of his work, I am indebted to him as well.<sup>88</sup> (...) The question of dreams also took me to Freud and psychoanalysts. (...)

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<sup>86</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, trans. Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe, Penguin Books, 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 350.

<sup>88</sup> At this point, I would like to reemphasize that I am essentially interested in how Tanpınar uses Bergson and Freud even though he might have misread or misinterpreted their work. As a matter of fact, such misreadings and misinterpretations, one might say, reveal more about Tanpınar’s aesthetic and cultural commitments. Some critics of modern Turkish literature, for instance, argue that Tanpınar’s work “has nothing to do with Freudian psychoanalysis and his notion of dreams.” See Konur Ertop, “Gerçeğin Dışına Taşan Öyküler,” in *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2010, pp. 175-190; 179. However, Tanpınar does use Freud’s structural model of the mind as is evidenced in his 1943 story “Abdullah Efendi’nin Rüyaları” (The Dreams of Abdullah Efendi): “To tell the truth,

[M]y view of the novel is not that different from how I view poetry. There, too, what I have said about dream, and even the dream order itself, are determining.<sup>89</sup>

In his 1944 essay “Şiir ve Rüya” (Poetry and Dream), Tanpınar explains what he means by “dream order,” how it departs from dream itself but eventually creates something that is of a different nature. As he suggests, a dream is a medley of absurdities, illogicalities, and contingencies, and telling one’s dream or mimicking the accidents of a dream in a work of art is nothing but constructing a series of oddities through various irregularities that human imagination can easily adopt at will. However, what makes dream’s supernatural aspect is not those qualities; it is in fact the “indecipherable psychological state that animates them and the mood that dream creates around us by means of that state.”<sup>90</sup> An artist should try to “establish that mood and show things from beneath that intensity of affect.”<sup>91</sup> It is only in this way, then, by disregarding the manifest content and movements of a dream and by concentrating on the unique mood and affect that a dream

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Abdullah Efendi was one of those people who until the end of their days cannot escape from being themselves, who cannot forget themselves even for an instant, who even when they let go of themselves the most into the atmosphere around them, still feel in some corner within them the presence of an inquisitive, unhappy, tyrannical second person, just like an upper story tenant who follows with great curiosity everything that happens on the floor below with a bitter smile and a haughty pride taking delight in repudiation and contempt and having a way of summoning the soul to an unfair accounting for every instant. Ah, this second Abdullah Efendi, this top-floor tenant.” Translated by Sarah Moment Atış, *Semantic Structuring in the Modern Turkish Short Story*, E.J. Brill, 1983; 25.

<sup>89</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 351-352.

<sup>90</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler*, ed. Zeynep Kerman, Dergâh Yayınları 1977; 34.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

generates (joy, cruelty, happiness, sorrow, holiness or sinfulness)<sup>92</sup>, can an artist give order to the fragments and contingencies of life.

Tanpınar's dream order as an aesthetic principle, strikingly enough, also assumes the role of enabling the artist and the public to intuit a certain co-extensiveness with things and others in the national community. In the letter to his young reader, Tanpınar refers to one of his best-known poems "Ne İçindeyim Zamanın" (Neither Am I inside Time)<sup>93</sup> and writes that it conveys the "unification of cosmos and man, and as such, it is a kind of delving into oneself, a dream state. You see, it has nothing to do with the coincidences and oddities of a real dream. (...) I can express this as going to a time unlike the one we live in—a time with another rhythm; one that inwardly fuses with places and things."<sup>94</sup> This mystical experience, with Tanpınar's discursive move in "Poetry and Dream," gains the same structure and principle as the sense of wholeness that national life and history provide. As he argues, the intensity of the mood and the psychological state that a dream generates arises from an "inscrutable atavism" and all that exists "in

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>93</sup> "Neither am I inside time, / Nor altogether without; / In the unbroken flow of / An instant singular and vast. // Each shape has been aetherized / By the hue of an uncanny dream, / Even a feather on the wind / Isn't as weightless as I am. // My head is a limitless mill / Grinding through silence; / My inner heart's now sated / Dervish without cloak or post; // I sense a world entwined, // Its roots extending from me, // As I float at the center of / A light the bluest of the blue." Translated by Erdağ Göknar, *Northwestern Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2010; p. 102.

<sup>94</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 351. In "Poetry and Dream," Tanpınar describes the same experience by using the Ottoman word "*temessül*," which the Turkology scholar Baki Asiltürk explains as "identification with things, entering the same structure as things, mutual assimilation of things and human beings." See "Parçalılıktan Bütünselliğe Bir İdealar Tablosu: Her Şey Yerli Yerinde," in "*Bir Gül Bu Karanlıklarda*": *Tanpınar Üzerine Yazılar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, 3F Yayınevi, 2008, pp. 724-730; 728.

our whole organism as an inheritance from our ancestors.”<sup>95</sup> The biological and the social are overlapped here, and the source of dream aesthetics is shifted almost imperceptibly from the affective experience of a subject having a dream (fear of death, sorrow, joy, holiness, etc.) to ancestors and their collective, historical affects which are expressed in culture and myths. “All myths are children of dreams,”<sup>96</sup> writes Tanpınar; in other words, myths give a structure to the contingencies, fragments, and oddities in the life of a civilization, whereby all these things are turned into a meaningful totality—myths, in this regard, have a dream order of their own. *A Mind at Peace* hence becomes a myth created by Tanpınar himself as a strong refusal of the republican myth of the Turkish nation.

The affects that accompany Tanpınar’s counter-myth are love and peace of mind, as the novel’s title indicates. Nuran, like the Behçet Bey of *Song in Mahur*, is the nucleus, the vantage point, which provides Mümtaz with the opportunity to overcome his dual personality—the “twinned convergence” of the agony of Oedipal guilt, rootlessness, and finitude, and the ecstasy of the unity with nature and its temporality. I have suggested before that Mümtaz’s sense of wholeness, in the final instance, is always framed within the culture and deep temporality of the nation that too is in need of overcoming its own psychosis. Below is a passage that deserves to be quoted at length as it demonstrates how Tanpınar typically uses dream aesthetics as a procedure to merge the subjective-existential and collective-cultural:

Another night, returning to Kandilli from Çengelköy, they'd named the otherworldly shadow cast onto the Bosphorus surface currents by the trees before the Kuleli Military Academy the “Nühüft song.” This was such a realm of inner

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<sup>95</sup> Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi*; 34.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

radiance that its faithful representation could be found only in the dark emerald mirror of the Nühüft, reflecting spectacularly sparkling stirrings of a reclusive countenance.

By and by, they gave names to locales of their choosing along the Bosphorus, as the Istanbul landscape of their imagination merged with traditional Ottoman music, and a Cartography of Voice and Vision steadily proliferated.

As Mümtaz slowly gathered around Nuran the things he admired and longed for, he found himself more in command of their powers. Like great novelists of the age, he began to feel that he was truly living only when he relied upon his woman. Before, he'd read widely and had weighed and considered matters; but now he understood that these things had become part of his life with more vitality; through his love for Nuran, they'd now entered into a living and breathing realm. She effectively became a luculent cluster between what rested in his thoughts and what existed in his surroundings, illuminating everything such that the most disparate elements became part of a synthetic whole.

Ottoman music was one of these elements. After he'd met Nuran, this art form had in effect thrust open its doors. In music, he found one of the purest and most rejuvenating wellsprings of the human soul.

One day they roamed together through Üsküdar on Istanbul's Asian shore. First, to avoid waiting for the ferry at the landing, they visited Sinan's mid-sixteenth-century mosque of Mihrimah Sultana, daughter of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent and the storied Roxelana. Then they went into the early eighteenth-century Valide-i Cedid Mosque of Emetullah Gülnüş Sultana, the queen mother of Ahmet III.<sup>97</sup>

In this and other similar passages, Orhan Pamuk rightfully detects a museumizing attitude and suggests that “the elements of Ottoman culture which are seen one after the other, recognized and cherished as if we were walking in a museum, are slightly displaced with love (...) the characters are enchanted not only by each other, but by the Bosphorus, classical Ottoman music, the antique objects they come across in the houses they visit.”<sup>98</sup> The objective is surely to make the readers admire and appreciate the traditional Ottoman culture as an effect of their admiration for Mümtaz’s love for Nuran. By the same token,

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<sup>97</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 193-194.

<sup>98</sup> Orhan Pamuk. "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar ve Türk Modernizmi." *Defter*, no. 23, 1995, pp. 31-45; 38.

Mümtaz's every experience, thought or remembrance in a given place, every song or conversation he overhears, every stranger he sees in the street, triggers an ever-widening movement that departs from his memory, passes through Istanbul, and then spirals out to draw a geographical, historical, and cultural atlas for the post-Ottoman Turkish community.<sup>99</sup>

As part of his cartographic effort, Tanpınar makes Mümtaz crisscross Istanbul and visit many places which, Birol Emil argues, can be discussed in two categories: coincidental and special places of meditation.<sup>100</sup> The first category refers to places that Mümtaz happens to visit or pass through like the poor district, one might say, in which he sees the little girls playing a traditional game and singing a folk song—there, Mümtaz ponders about continuity within change and concludes that, as they have done over centuries, the girls' game and song must persist in the future too. In the second category are places that “feature historically important architectural structures or are important just by their names,”<sup>101</sup> such as the Bosphorus or Üsküdar with all its beautiful mosques that we read about in the passage quoted above. In his book-length essay *Beş Şehir* (Five Cities), Tanpınar thinks about Istanbul's small squares which can be regarded as other “coincidental places” and writes that “There are very few things in the city as attractive and delightful as the little squares. These are compositions of a variety of beliefs,

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<sup>99</sup> Birol Emil calls this museum or atlas, the “literary geography of Istanbul” and makes a list of the places and districts of Istanbul Mümtaz visits by himself or with Nuran. Expectedly, it is a very long list. See “Huzur'un İstanbul'u,” in *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2010, pp. 109-140; 117.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

traditions, pleasures that turned into instincts, and they owe their existence to a great deal of coincidence and even to centuries of oblivion. There is no waste or pretension in them, other than the generosity of nature that makes thrive roses, cypress and sycamore trees. In time they came into being drop by drop.”<sup>102</sup> It may come as a surprise that Tanpınar speaks of those places favorably despite that they have come into being as a result of coincidences which are also determinant in the unformed, irregular dream substance that art must turn into a kind of dream order. However, these places are spared the chaos of fragmentation precisely because they can transform all the disparate elements they contain into the culture of a collectivity. Moreover, as Özen Nergis Dolcerocca suggests,

[Those little squares] are not “carefully planned” but have grown up accidentally and effortlessly. They are slow but active, alive in an organic sense, unlike those monumental urban objects that assert a permanence behind which exists a relentless pursuit of novelty. Even nature itself, its trees and roses, can “afford” a thick shade, going unnoticed by urban “renewal.” The temporal order in which they exist is fundamentally different from modern temporality, conceived in Benjamin’s terms as a “phantasmagoria” of progress. These squares assert synchronicity and an alternative temporality: they do not exist in the same “now” as the Place Vendôme or Taksim Square.<sup>103</sup>

Wide boulevards, large and imposing state buildings, and huge city squares like Taksim that were built after 1923, were the monuments to the republican modernization and Westernization in Turkey, signifying also the infiltration into every domain of life—except Tanpınar’s small city squares, Üsküdar, and the Bosphorus—the process that symbolically started with the building of the first clock towers amidst the late-Ottoman

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, “Chronometrics in the Modern Metropolis: The City, the Past and Collective Memory in A.H. Tanpınar.” *MLN*, vol. 130, no. 5, 2015, pp. 1150-78; 1151.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

society. What is truly monumental for Tanpınar are not those pretentious displays of progress, but the “places of meditation” with their sublime nature or architecture, instilling a deep sense of subjective, temporal, and cultural wholeness and continuity in Mümtaz (and the reader).

Apart from Bergson and Freud, Tanpınar’s understanding of multilayered time and dream aesthetics that largely derives from the affective experience “places of meditation” initiate can be compared to Heidegger’s valorization of the “work of art” as opposed to technology, and by extension, to the experience of modernity.<sup>104</sup> Heidegger claims that art is the setting of a certain truth to work and examines what truth occurs in a work of art and if truth can “happen at all and thus be historical.”<sup>105</sup> His famous example in this context is the Greek temple that depicts nothing, only stands where it is built, and as such, circumscribes the figure of the god, thereby making it present in a certain site. Neither the temple and its precinct, nor the people living there exist within an indeterminate framework. “It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does the nation first return

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<sup>104</sup> We know that Tanpınar read Heidegger and referred to him in his lectures which were among the earliest examples of comparative literature teaching in Turkey. See Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Dersleri*, ed. Abdullah Uçman, Dergâh Yayınları, 2013; 123. Tanpınar was also a colleague of Eric Auerbach’s in the Faculty of Letters at Istanbul University during the latter’s exile in Istanbul.

<sup>105</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F. Krell, Harper, 1993; 163.

to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, the work of art in the form of the temple creates around itself a world, a dwelling, within which the historical people lives according to a certain “destining” that is at once congealed and revealed in the figure of the temple, which means its “presencing” of that world for the historical people. This is how tradition may not be only a stagnant set of rules and customs but can contain the dynamics of a future that needs to be recognized by the historical people.

*A Mind at Peace* is full of places and works of art that function in the same way as Heidegger’s Greek temple and whenever they appear in the novel, a world and a dwelling slowly come into being in which the members of the historical Turkish people can merge their individual tragedies and fates so as to transcend them by means of a collective myth and memory projected onto the future. In fact, we might say that *A Mind at Peace* itself wants to be this Greek temple which both totalizes the national community and gives it a sense of rooted destiny that undoes disconnected fates. From a broader perspective, one can assert that Tanpınar’s novel does reveal “the will of the great modernist works to be something more than mere art and to transcend a merely decorative and culinary aesthetic, to reach the sphere of what is variously identified as the prophetic or the metaphysical, the visionary or the cosmic, that realm in which aesthetics and ethics, politics and philosophy, religion and pedagogy, all fold together into some supreme vocation.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 167

<sup>107</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, Columbia University Press, 1994; 80.

## When the Mirror Cracks

As suggested before, one of the intended effects of dreams aesthetics is to reproduce the Sufi notion of living through one's milieu that Mümtaz first sees in Nuran and then makes into a kind of artistic objective. Nevertheless, the programmatic quality of both dream aesthetics and Mümtaz's approach to life and external realities is acknowledged in a scene that takes place in one of the most intense sequences in which all the primary and secondary characters of *A Mind at Peace* gather together to listen to mystical music and the *ney* recital given by Emin Dede, an old and revered Sufi figure. After pages of description of musical movements and the impressions they simultaneously generate in Mümtaz, the narrator intervenes:

Astonishingly, not once during the entire performance had he felt any mystical awakening. The associations he'd conjured congregated around either Nuran or the work he was in the process of writing. Was Dede Efendi responsible for this lack? Or was it just a function of Mümtaz's nature? Now he, too, was astounded at his impoverishment of spirit. Or was his stance toward *a la turca* music completely affected? Had he appropriated it as well, like so many other facets of his life, like his love of Nuran, in which he so exalted, instrumentally, as nothing more than a means to an end? Was he only involved cerebrally, forcibly flogging his imagination?<sup>108</sup>

Here, Mümtaz slowly begins to understand both the ideational character of the "oceanic feeling" that Freud unveils and the motivated selectivity in his appropriation of a set of certain cultural and affective elements. He feels guilty because, while listening to Emin Dede, "this little-known dervish consisted of repeated self-renunciations,"<sup>109</sup> he becomes

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 299.

aware that maybe he experiences love and music “not as what they are, but as vehicles that will take him to the work of art that he yearns to create,”<sup>110</sup> that is the novel he writes about Shaykh Galip and his world, and the same point can be made regarding the role of culture (and nature seen through culture’s prism) in Tanpınar’s aesthetic paradigm.

Surely, the world or the “dwelling” Tanpınar constructs for the reader via his protagonist resembles a hall with a single, vast mirror that is often identified as Nuran, and sometimes as music, architecture, or the Bosphorus: “[Mümtaz] occasionally wondered, ‘Do we love each other or the Bosphorus?’ (...) no possibility existed of extricating Istanbul, the Bosphorus, Ottoman music, or his dulcinea from one another. The Bosphorus contained a prearranged existential framework through its history, the hours of the day it inherently regulated, at least in certain seasons, and its diverse beauty that bespoke vivid *memoria*.”<sup>111</sup> As a place enclosing a wholeness outside the temporality of huge city squares, the regulated day of modern work or successive historical breaks, the power of the Bosphorus for Mümtaz comes from the fact that nothing can escape its mirroring surface. On the Bosphorus, everything is a reflection: “Light was reflection, sound was reflection; sporadically, here, one might become the echo of an array of things unbeknownst to oneself.”<sup>112</sup> What is reflected from the Bosphorus is the very vision of wholeness that Mümtaz imagines for himself and the national community, and it is in this way, first by receiving that vision and then by reflecting it back to the protagonist and the

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<sup>110</sup> Handan İnci, *Orpheus'un Şarkısı: Tanpınar'ın Romanlarında Aşk ve Kadın*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014; 56.

<sup>111</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 238.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

reader does the Bosphorus serve as a prearranged existential framework. Gürbilek suggests that there is nothing outside this world made present by Tanpınar's dream aesthetics, and as she adds, in *A Mind at Peace*, "the external world responds to the gaze of the subject, it stimulates interiority and this becomes possible only in [Mümtaz's] dream, in the dream city Istanbul, and within a history reconstructed by the mind. (...) In the dream, the external world, the outside, turns into symbols and terms that illuminate the dreamer's past. In it, the external world or the past often turn into a mirror: What is seen in that mirror is often the face of the beholder."<sup>113</sup>

This mirror, however, inevitably cracks, and as Sibel Irzık observes, it was already cracked and the dream was already over in the beginning of *A Mind at Peace*.<sup>114</sup> The cause of Mümtaz's alienation from Istanbul and all that he combines within the image of that dream city is not that he sees ugliness (decrepit streets, for example) where he used to see beauty and finds despair where he used to find the promise of wholeness. His perception changes, Irzık argues, because within the space of the diegetic day of the first and the last chapters of the novel, Mümtaz "lives through a suspicion which denotes the repudiation of the aesthetic consciousness that used to attach him to the city,"<sup>115</sup> and thus to the old civilization, culture, and Nuran. Considering that the "gaze of the subject which cannot detach itself from its self-image and desire to become one with what it sees transforms both the gazed and the object of remembrance,"<sup>116</sup> and that this is a kind of

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<sup>113</sup> Gürbilek, "Tanpınar'da Görünmeyen"; 90.

<sup>114</sup> Sibel Irzık, "Edebiyatta Kişileşen, Metinleşen, Silinen Kentler," in *Kara Kitap Üzerine Yazılar*, ed. Nüket Esen, İletişim Yayınları, 1996, pp. 262-272; 265.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>116</sup> Gürbilek, "Tanpınar'da Görünmeyen"; 16.

unwanted manipulation experienced by the gazed, it can be suggested that the repudiation Mümtaz suffers is triggered by the seen object's resistance to being wholly consumed by his mind, which "resembled a small dynamo stamping everything that passed beneath its cylinder with his shape and essence, and, thereby, obscured and disposed of its actual meaning and form."<sup>117</sup> This resistance first comes from Nuran; she realizes that they live in a dream-play carefully structured with elements that lend themselves to Mümtaz's aesthetic plan:

Mümtaz's obsession with things past gave Nuran the inkling that he wanted nothing more than to be sequestered in catacombs. The world certainly offered myriad pleasures and other modes of thought. She liked Üsküdar, but it was dilapidated and its inhabitants were impoverished. Among the throngs of unfortunates, Mümtaz forged ahead, blithely spouting "Acemaşiran" and "Sultanîyegâh." But what about society? Where was the overture to life?<sup>118</sup>

And a few pages later, we are told that "Nuran had been gradually growing tired of his life and thoughts. The anxiety that he'd been confined to an absolute idea, to an orbit of sterility that took him outside of existence gnawed at him like a worm. It represented a vein of decay that would only grow with time."<sup>119</sup> Consequently, Nuran challenges the role and meaning Mümtaz has imposed on her and when the catalyst that gives a dream tone to this order disappears, everything Mümtaz has gathered around her falls into disarray. Dede, Hafız Post, Shaykh Galib, Itrî, Seyit Nuh; Song in Mahur, Acemaşiran, Sultaniyegâh, folk songs of Rumeli, Kozan, Afşar, Kütahya, Trabzon; the Bosphorus, the cemeteries, small squares, pigeons, fountains of Istanbul; the past, the present, and the

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<sup>117</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 65.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

future—in short, all that constitutes the memory, the geographical and cultural map of a Turkish community that can live free from collective psychosis loses its unity.<sup>120</sup>

Consequently, Mümtaz’s mind devolves into the painful and split experience of his life’s “twinned convergence” once again.

When the mirror cracks, the inside deteriorates and Mümtaz falls outside, into the existing Istanbul populated not by historical, literary, and artistic figures but real people living in poverty.<sup>121</sup> The ruined districts that Mümtaz sees while looking for a doctor are in stark contrast to the dream city of the central section; furthermore, even if they are “coincidental places,” these districts still contribute to the imagining of cultural continuity because Mümtaz is keen to find it everywhere. Walking in these alleys,

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<sup>120</sup> Including the places on Birol Emil’s list of the novel’s literary and historical geography: “Eyüp, Kapalıçarşı [Grand Bazaar], Kocamustafapaşa, Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa, Yedişehitler, Kozyatağı, Bayezit, Sahaflar [used book shops], Bitpazarı [flea market], Bedesten, Mahmutpaşa, Tophane, Mısırçarşısı, Çadircılarıçı, Çengelköyü, Nuruosmaniye, Eminönü, Emirgan, Kandilli, Beykoz, Ada (Büyükkada-Adalar) [Princes’ Islands], Boğaz [the Bosphorus], Yeniköy, Arnavutköy, Bebek, Büyükdere, Üsküdar, Kızkulesi [Leander’s Tower], Marmara açıkları [offshore waters of Marmara], Libadiye, Çamlıca, Boyacıköy, Beylerbeyi, Akıntıburnu, Anadoluhisarı, Kanlıca, Vanıköy, İstinye, Boğaz tepeleri [hills on the Bosphorus], Kavaklar, Beykoz, Taksim, Beyoğlu, Yıldız, Kuleli, Atikvalde, Ortavalde, Sultantepe, Kısıklı, Sarıyer, Sümbül Sinan, Merkez Efendi, Bebek (... koyu) [the bay of Bebek], Göksu, Kabataş, Tellitabya, Talimhane, Şehzâdebaşı, Köprü, Şişhane, Tepebaşı, Galatasaray, Heybeliada (Sanatoryumu) [Sanitarium], Beşiktaş, Tophane (Kadirî yokuşu) [Kadirî slope], Hürriyet-i Ebediye tepesi [hill], Paşabahçe, Topkapı, Tünel, Surlar, Küllük, Sultanhamam, Fındıklı, Unkapanı, Boğaz iskeleleri [the Bosphorus piers], Sirkeci, Kazancılar (yokuşu) [slope], Soğanağa, Vezneciler, Dolmabahçe, Toptaşı, Aksaray.” See “Huzur’un İstanbul’u”; 117.

<sup>121</sup> In this connection, the point can be made that, given Tanpınar’s “cartographic” or “museumizing” intent, *A Mind at Peace*, with all the names of classical composers, artists, and writers it refers to, can be read as an attempt to imagine a Turkish literary and artistic canon too. After all, as Mümtaz says, “Today in Turkey we wouldn’t be able to name five books that consecutive generations read together. Except in rare instances, those who take any pleasure in older authors are increasingly fewer in number. We’re seemingly the last link. Soon poets like Nedim or Nef’î, or even traditional music, ever so appealing to us, will join a category of things from which we’re forever estranged!” *A Mind at Peace*; 289.

Mümtaz faces the dramatic difference of that other Istanbul from that of his own making. The cityscapes of decay and the views of wretched people slowly wake him up from his dream. When he comes across a street porter suffocating under his heavy load, Mümtaz, almost automatically, starts to observe his movements and physique from within an artistic system or mode of perception:

For Mümtaz, this anatomical geometry recalled Pierre Puget's caryatids in Toulon. But he immediately doubted his own description. *Did such an economy of line truly exist?* The porter, more exactly, in order to see his way, trudged forward with his entire face exposed upright. *Its rather that his head isn't situated upon his shoulders but appears to emerge from his torso.* Voilà, this was a head that had been adjoined to the torso. But that wasn't quite accurate either. *We're unable to see! We pay scant attention to detail! We simply speak from rote!* (...) The porter was only seven or eight strides beyond him. Where the edge of the weighty wooden crate ended began the full, formless, patchwork drape of white muslin pantaloons. *He doesn't resemble Puget's giants at all. They display an expression of taut muscle and might emanating from the entire body. Meanwhile, this poor man has been swallowed whole by the load on his back!*<sup>122</sup>

Only after these intellectual ponderings does Mümtaz ask, “Who was he? How did he live and what did he think about?”<sup>123</sup> These are the people who, according to İhsan, should feel the “urge for the same New Life” although they live different lives. This and other scenes of despair and poverty undermine Mümtaz’s belief that these people, to whom he wants to “give back” their unbroken spirit and culture, can share with him the same sentiments and desires. Mümtaz now understands that he will never be able to know these people fully; they will remain obscure to him unless they are “seen” in the magical light of the Bosphorus, Nuran, and so on. These people in the forgotten districts of Istanbul are many and diverse to be “sequestered in catacombs,” and they too resist to

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<sup>122</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 388-389.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

being effaced by Mümtaz's gaze. The antique objects he used to look at in awe; the objects that invited him, just like the Mediterranean Sea in his childhood, to the "comfortable and blithe sleep of dumb matter" afforded by the cultural universe—they are swept away by all sorts of forsaken things in the flea market that belong in a different world: "Every accident, every illness, every demolition, every tragedy that occurred in the city each day and each hour had cast these objects here, eliminating their individuality, making them public property, and forging an aggregate arranged through the hand-to-hand cooperation between chance and misery."<sup>124</sup> The objects of memory that bore time in its nuclear form and emanated what Tanpınar, with reference to Bergson, called "rich and whole time," disappear one after the other. Mümtaz finds himself in a world of fragments where "contingency dominates the [aesthetic] will"<sup>125</sup> and the search for the perpetual is interrupted by the temporality of war, destruction, ready-made images, newspapers, and commodities.

In the closing pages of *A Mind at Peace*, Mümtaz gradually gets into a delirious state and at one point, he hears the disembodied voice of a man (presumably his other persona) which says, "[Y]ou had been regarding your surroundings from the perspective of your identity. You were actually observing your own self. Neither life nor objects constitute a totality. Wholeness is a phantasy of the human mind."<sup>126</sup> Tanpınar, having struggled to construct a form of totality and wholeness, reaches a limit where it is impossible to write a narrative in the mode of the "unbroken flow of / An instant singular

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>125</sup> Irzık, "Edebiyatta Kişileşen, Metinleşen, Silinen Kentler"; 266.

<sup>126</sup> Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*; 440.

and vast.” He knows, Parla reminds us, that the novel is ultimately the genre of “fragmented, broken time.”<sup>127</sup> Even if he is aware of that impasse, Tanpınar insists on pushing the novel from within to abolish that particular temporality of which it is both the outcome and the utilizer. What, then, provides the narrative closure if everything, including Mümtaz himself and his dream order, has fallen apart by the end of the novel? As I have tried to demonstrate, Istanbul presents the grid needed for a totalizing narrative and its closure; yet, an equally important structuring principle is contemporary history itself. *A Mind at Peace* is inserted between the two world wars and it ends with the outbreak of World War II announced on the radio. This radio broadcast and Mümtaz’s nervous breakdown overlap in the final sequence of the narrative and when these two planes of temporality—individual and world-historical—intersect, *A Mind at Peace* seems to have reached its limit coinciding with the supreme limit-case of history, which is war. The workability of dream aesthetics and the narrative it creates ultimately depends on the carving out of a space that is untouched by the movement of history, and as it becomes evident in the end, nothing remains immune to the effects of capitalist modernity which imposes its own logic even on the most carefully designed order of an aesthete. Hedayat, on the other hand, deploys a narrative form that abolishes history and time altogether, and now I would like to turn to that literary Möbius band which makes use of allegory to represent the Iranian national situation in its totality.

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<sup>127</sup> Jale Parla, "Taksim Kabul Etmiş Zamanın Aynası Roman: Mahur Beste," in *"Bir Gül Bu Karanlıklarda": Tanpınar Üzerine Yazılar*, eds. Abdullah Uçman and Handan İnci, 3F Yayınevi 2008, pp. 650-664; 650.

### **Chapter Three: *The Blind Owl* Narrative Möbius Band, Allegory, and the National Situation**

Sadeq Hedayat is the modernist author *par excellence* of Iranian literature.

Literary historians and scholars unanimously proclaim that modernist fiction in the Iran of the post-constitutional revolution (1906-11), and more specifically of the Reza Shah period (1925-41), emerged with the short stories Hedayat published in the early 1930's, and that various techniques associated with the European modernism took root in the Iranian literary soil as Hedayat's career advanced, ultimately bearing their emblematic fruit in the form of *The Blind Owl*—Hedayat's best-known and by far the most controversial work.

Hedayat was born in the Iranian capital into an aristocratic family some of whose members were high-ranking officials in the Qajar state—the Turkic-speaking tribal dynasty which had ruled the country for about two centuries before it was dissolved by Reza Khan between 1921 and 1925. After the elementary school, Hedayat enrolled in the Dar-el Fonun (polytechnic), the only European-style high school in the Iran of the time where classes were taught mostly in French. The education Hedayat received at the Dar-el Fonun was modeled on the curricula used in the West and was given by European instructors. This provided Hedayat with the opportunity to speak and write fluently in French. His interests lay clearly in arts, though, specifically in literature, and accordingly, he enrolled in the Saint Louis Academy in Tehran to study the Western literary canon, and throughout his life, he proved to be particularly inspired by Rilke and Kafka. Hedayat

spent five years between 1925 and 1930 in Belgium and France on a state grant to pursue a university degree in the sciences, which he never obtained. While he was expected to become a teacher in his home country after he completed his university training, he made an unsuccessful suicide attempt in 1927 by throwing himself into the river Marne and in 1951, during his second visit to Paris, he gassed himself to death. The mystique that surrounds the person of Hedayat and the Hedayat scholarship largely derives from his suicidal tendencies which are seen as the psychological source of his deeply pessimistic views on human existence.

Acquiring an education in one of the most revolutionary periods in the history of modern Iran which bore witness to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the establishment of Reza Shah's authoritarian regime in 1925, Hedayat was also influenced by the prevailing romantic-nationalist, anti-religious, and modernist ideals of the time.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he developed an interest in the Aryan religion (Zoroastrianism), language (Pahlavi), and literature of the pre-Islamic Iran, and from the Islamic period, he admired the poetry of the twelfth-century philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician Omar Khayyam, who was deemed heretical and materialistic by the Iranian religious orthodoxy. In 1923, he published his early study on "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," which he revised and republished in an extended form in 1935 with the title *Khayyam's*

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of the significant changes in Iran's legal system after the 1906 constitution, see Janet Afary, "Civil Liberties and the Making of Iran's First Constitution." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2005, pp. 341-59.

*Quatrains*. Hedayat's second most remarkable literary critique is the introduction he wrote to the Persian translation of Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* in 1948.

*The Blind Owl* first came out in 1936 in stencil-duplicated copies while Hedayat was on a visit to a friend of his who worked as a diplomat in India. The several dozen copies, most of which were posted to Hedayat's Persian acquaintances in Europe, were marked "Not to be distributed in Iran." That was the period in which Reza Shah's modernizing project had reached its peak and no or very little tolerance was shown to the intellectuals who were even slightly critical of the regime and its cultural politics. Hedayat was one of those writers deemed nihilistic and decadent, hence dangerous for the young generation. In fact, before leaving for India, Hedayat had been forced by the state to sign a legal document that banned him from publishing in Iran ever again. The Bombay episode in Hedayat's life, in that respect, is closely related to the despotism and the oppressive political climate pervading the Pahlavi era.<sup>2</sup>

Homa Katouzian classifies Hedayat's work into four categories that have inevitable overlaps: "romantic nationalist fiction, critical realist stories, satire and psycho-fiction."<sup>3</sup> *The Blind Owl*, which belongs to the last category, could be published in Iran only after Reza Shah had been abdicated by the Allied forces (Britain and Russia) in 1941. However, drawing on Hedayat's letters and the personal testimonies of those

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of Hedayat's life and struggle with the political establishment in the so-called "Golden Era" of Reza Shah's rule, see Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*, I.B. Tauris, 1991; 47-66.

<sup>3</sup> See the introduction to Sadeq Hedayat, *Three Drops of Blood and Other Stories*, trans. Deborah Miller Mostaghel, Oneworld Classics, 2008; viii.

within his circle, some researchers have suggested that he had already written a draft of *The Blind Owl* by 1930 but refrained from submitting it to the public for fear of being censured or even detained.<sup>4</sup> This claim becomes even more persuasive especially when one considers that *The Blind Owl* has much in common in terms of style, form, and subject-matter with the two collections of short stories Hedayat published in 1930 (*Buried Alive*) and 1932 (*Three Drops of Blood*) after returning to Tehran from his long stay in Europe as a student.

Although it may sound naïve as a wish stated in a scholarly work, making *The Blind Owl* speak to the reader is arguably a difficult task. This is so because it is one of the densest and most puzzling works not only of modern Iranian literature but of international modernism at large. Mohandessi cites some reviews written after *The Blind Owl*'s publication in France in 1953: André Breton celebrated it in *Le Médium* by writing that "If there is any such thing as a masterpiece, this is it." And André Rousseaux stated in *Le Figaro Littéraire* that "the inspiring effect of [*The Blind Owl*], Hedayat's masterpiece, is sufficient to place him, at first contact, among the most eloquent and expressive writers of the present time."<sup>5</sup> The British response to *The Blind Owl*'s English translation which came out in 1958 was generally uncomplimentary. One reviewer wrote, for instance, that "This narrative is a rambling, inchoate mass, a sort of verbal bouillabaisse. A western nightmare is a small marvel of lucidity beside this eastern fable.

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<sup>4</sup> See Manoutcherh Mohandessi, "Hedayat and Rilke." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1971, pp. 209-216; 211. Katouzian agrees with this suggestion albeit reluctantly; see *The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*; 31-47.

<sup>5</sup> Mohandessi, "Hedayat and Rilke"; 211.

Mescaline before reading might help, but don't try."<sup>6</sup> The cause of such conflicting responses, that is the experience that Hedayat's novel inflicts on the reader, is comparable to one that is created by a dream which spirals in and out of yet another dream duplicating and refiguring the already exiguous and minimally identifiable initial material. Focusing on a disease of the mind that he mentions right at the beginning, the narrator of *The Blind Owl* recounts certain events as a consequence of which he has come to have a delirium. The novel not only recreates, but also enacts or embodies the narrator's disease, thereby offering its audience a correlating experience that exceeds the act of reading and borders on violation or contagion.

What is more, the temporal-spatial referents of *The Blind Owl* start to disappear just a few pages into the novel; meanwhile, Hedayat's peculiar mode of emplotment operates with repetitive contractions creating narrative pleats, as it were, that keep folding onto each other. It thus quickly becomes clear that the plot's clock runs counter to the logical or sequential flow of a narrative one cannot help but try to impose on the novel. At the very least, the inclination remains and one expects to perceive something resembling a temporal procession or outline even to be able to continue reading. Despite this effort and the narrator's quasi-programmatic enunciation of the reason for telling his story (to know himself before he dies), what the reader undergoes is essentially a constant disorientation.

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in M.R. Ghanoonparvar, "*The Blind Owl* (Sadeq Hedayat, Iran, 1941)," in *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti, vol 1, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 794-801; 794.

In this chapter, I will discuss *The Blind Owl* with regard to its broadest problematic, that is knowing the self by narrating it. To the degree that the situation giving him a disease of the mind is portrayed as a sickening milieu, the narrator's desire to know himself obtains the quality of an act that strives to break out of these coordinates. Alongside the narrator's decision to write about his condition, the climaxes of the two main stories in *The Blind Owl* present us with two acts—one artistic and the other murderous—attempting to transcend this disease-generating situation. Insofar as what has befallen the narrator within this milieu has caused his contamination, the question of knowing the self through writing becomes a question of recovery or healing. This chapter will try to demonstrate that for Hedayat, the mentioned recovery is not a goal that can be achieved solely on the basis of self-examination or introspection; nor is it something that the protagonist can attain by sheer willpower or conversion to a different attitude towards his existence. Instead, in *The Blind Owl*, knowing the self requires knowing the collective Iranian experience, and as Hedayat is keen to illustrate, it is fundamentally a question of being able to map or constellate the social-ideological mechanisms that contaminate the individual self. Accordingly, the novelistic structure Hedayat uses in *The Blind Owl* is created precisely to totalize the national situation and allegorical writing plays a central role in the author's endeavor to produce such a narrative. In what follows, I will discuss extensively the novel's emplotment because not only *The Blind Owl*'s symbolic elements but also its very structure can be read as allegorical of the collective consciousness of the modernizing Iran as it is perceived by Hedayat.

## Overview of *The Blind Owl*

*The Blind Owl* opens with a grim statement that has powerful pathological evocations: “There are sores which slowly erode the mind in solitude like a kind of canker.”<sup>7</sup> The unnamed narrator believes that these cankerous sores are symptoms of a disease that is unbearable on the part of the victim, yet incredible and inconceivable on the part of witnesses. Even though he is not sure whether it is possible to relate this aggrieving condition truthfully, the narrator sets out to write about a certain case of it which has “shattered my entire being” and “poisoned my life for all time to come.”<sup>8</sup> He states that his wish is to put together the events of this case in the order they have retained in his memory. “I may perhaps be able to draw a general conclusion from it all,”<sup>9</sup> he adds, but this is not the main motive behind his decision to write about a malady whose representability is highly questionable in the first place. What pushes the narrator is rather a desire to attain self-knowledge: “My fear is that tomorrow I may die without having come to know myself. (...) If I have now made up my mind to write it is only in order to reveal myself to my shadow. (...) It is for his sake that I wish to make the attempt. Who knows? We may perhaps come to know each other better.”<sup>10</sup>

*The Blind Owl* is composed of two main parts inserted between a prologue, an interlude, and an epilogue. In the first part, we read about the narrator’s tomb-like house,

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<sup>7</sup> Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. D. P. Costello, Grove Press, 1957; 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

isolated existence, dull daily life, and “ludicrous trade” (he is a pen-case decorator). One day, the narrator’s old uncle, whom he has never met, comes to visit his nephew. While reaching for a wine bottle to serve his guest, the narrator, through a ventilation hole in the wall, sees the single most central image of the novel: “On the ground outside my room I saw a bent old man sitting at the foot of a cypress tree with a young girl—no, an angel from heaven—standing before him. She was leaning forward and with her right hand was offering him a blue flower of morning glory. The old man was biting the nail of the index finger of his left hand.”<sup>11</sup>

As the narrator gazes at the “ethereal” girl, she makes an unsuccessful attempt to cross the stream between her and the old man, whereupon the latter bursts into a laughter: “It was a hollow, grating laugh, of a quality to make hairs of one’s body stand on end; a harsh, sinister, mocking laugh.”<sup>12</sup> We hear that same laughter from different characters throughout the novel and see the same scene turn up in different contexts. Nonetheless, it is quite perplexing to realize early on that we have first encountered this scene on the pen-case covers the narrator decorates; it is exactly the same as the picture he has been drawing obsessively and involuntarily for a long time. “Had I seen the subject of this picture at some time in the past or had it been revealed to me in a dream?”<sup>13</sup> asks the narrator. He does not know, yet the question itself makes one sense a strange kind of reverse foreshadowing.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The narrator tries to resist the temptation of checking the air-hole to see the girl once more; however, each time he makes up his mind, the old man's eerie laughter holds him back. He finally draws aside the curtain in front of the wall; yet, to his bewilderment, "[t]here was no trace of aperture or window."<sup>14</sup> For two months and four days, he tries to locate the cypress tree and the stream he has seen before. After his last nighttime walk in a drizzling rain in the misty outskirts of the city, he returns home and finds the girl sitting on a stone bench by his door. They enter the house silently, and the mystical girl lies on the bed keeping her eyes closed. The narrator pours some wine into her mouth thinking that she might be thirsty—that same wine he served his uncle and which we are told was laid aside by his parents at his birth. Now he feels the warmth of the girl's body and can smell the odor of her damp hair into which he puts his fingers by some inexplicable impulse. But he is shocked once again to realize that "[i]t was cold...utterly cold. It was as though she had been dead for several days. I was not mistaken. She *was* dead."<sup>15</sup> He then undresses and lies beside the dead body hoping to infuse warmth and life into it, but to no avail. At that point, he feels a sudden surge of inspiration caused by the fear that he might lose forever the calming yet poignant gaze of the ethereal girl's eyes. He spends the night drawing numerous portraits of the girl.

Relieved to have "possessed" the girl's gaze, the narrator decides to cut up and bury the corpse so as to let no stranger set eyes on what now belongs to him. At dusk, while he is out to find someone to help him transport the suitcase filled with the pieces of

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

the dead body, he comes across an old hunchbacked hearse driver who is also a gravedigger. The narrator climbs up the hearse and lies down in the coffin-space with the suitcase pressing down on his chest. Pulled by two sickly horses, the hearse passes by hills covered with “weird, crouching, accursed trees” and “ash-grey houses shaped like pyramids, cubes, and prisms, with low, dark windows without panes.”<sup>16</sup> At last, they arrive at an enclosure with vines of blue, scentless morning glory that looks familiar to the narrator although he claims to have never seen it before. While digging a grave, the driver finds a Rey-style antique vase which he gives to his client, letting out a laughter that brings out “gooseflesh” all over one’s body. Having buried the suitcase, the narrator returns home only to discover that the panel of the vase bears the portrait of the ethereal girl: “There was no atom of difference between my picture and that on the jar. (...) The two were identical and were, it seemed obvious, the work of one man, one ill-fated decorator of pen cases.”<sup>17</sup> He gets transfixed, feels utterly dejected, and eventually resorts to an opium trance: “Then I felt as though the course of my life had been reversed. One by one past experiences, past states of mind and obliterated, lost memories of childhood recurred to me.”<sup>18</sup>

In the interlude, the narrator wakes up from his opium sleep with bloodstains all over his clothes; however, he is in a different room in the ancient Iran that somehow feels much more familiar and natural. He is now anguished that the police might come any

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 42.

moment to arrest him. Should this happen, he says, he will drink from the poisoned wine he keeps on the top shelf. This is his heirloom, the same wine he served his uncle and poured into the ethereal girl's mouth, and the reader is told only after the first part has ended that this wine is poisoned. The narrator is anxious to write all that he has undergone; it is almost an obligation imposed on him.

In the second part, too, the main question presented right at the outset is knowing oneself through the practice of (self-)writing: "I wish now to squeeze out every drop of juice from my life as from a cluster of grapes and to pour the juice—the wine, rather—drop by drop (...) down the parched throat of my shadow."<sup>19</sup> When he starts telling his story, the narrator is not sure where he is or what day it is; moreover, he is now a white-haired, hunchbacked old man (like his uncle and the hearse driver/gravedigger) for whom neither the past and the future, hours, days, and months, nor childhood and maturity, matter. He has severed all ties with the outer world populated with "the rabble." This "new world" is set in the city of Rey at the peak of its glory and splendor, when it was called the Bride of the World. The four walls of his room built on the ruins of the ancient city, enclose and protect his life from the rabble-men whom he detests. These people are not only money-grabbers contemplating only their bellies and genitals, they are also the narrator's competitors when it comes to his wife, or as he calls her, "the bitch." Apparently, their marriage has not been consummated; she has chosen to give herself to strangers, to the ordinary people instead of the narrator: "I desired at all costs to establish

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

contact with her lovers. (...) I put up with every sort of humiliation in order to strike up an acquaintance with them. I toadied to them, urged them to visit my wife, even brought them to the house. (...) I wanted my wife's lovers to teach me deportment, manners, the technique of seduction!"<sup>20</sup> Unsuccessful as a "pimp" and disappointed at the lack of deportment in the rabble-men, the narrator succumbs to a "physical" illness that gives him the feeling that his whole being is slowly deteriorating.

One day he goes out and starts wandering in deserted streets on the sides of which are lined ash-colored houses with "strange, geometrical shapes—cubes, prisms, cones—with low, dark windows."<sup>21</sup> His legs eventually take the narrator to the bank of the river Suran where he sits by an old cypress tree. Resting in its shade, he sees a little girl running in the direction of a nearby castle. He follows the girl and reaches a spot that strikes him as familiar—he has been there years ago, with his mother-in-law and "the bitch." He played hide and seek with the girl, and at one point, while he was chasing her, she lost her balance and fell into the river: "The others pulled her out and took her behind a cypress tree to change her clothes. I followed them. They hung up a woman's veil as a screen in front of her but I furtively peeped from behind a tree and saw her whole body. She was smiling and biting the nail of the index-finger of her left hand."<sup>22</sup> Thus, we realize that the source of that iconic scene the narrator draws obsessively on pen-cases in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 63-64

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

fact lies in his childhood in the city of Rey, and that the ethereal girl in the first part is a reflection of the image of his would-be wife.

Having learned that his wife is pregnant, the narrator's health condition worsens generating even more grotesque and longer-lasting hallucinations. Since there has been no sexual intercourse between him and his wife, the narrator begins to suspect everyone belonging in that group he simply calls the rabble. Two characters, however, are singled out in the novel: one of these characters is the butcher across the street. In front of his shop are displayed carcasses of sheep transported there by two sickly horses (exact same images of the two horses harnessed to hearse in the first part). Drenched in blood, the butcher seems to be enjoying greatly cutting up the sheep with his bone-handled knife. The second character is an old, hunchbacked, turbaned odds-and-ends man who peddles on the narrator's street and reads out verses from the Koran every Thursday (once again, a mirror image of the uncle and the driver/gravedigger). He is a more significant figure since he turns out to be the favorite lover of the narrator's wife.

One night, in a fit of delirium, the narrator disguises himself as the odds-and-ends man and goes up to his wife's room with a bone-handled knife hidden under his cloak. As he enters the dark room, she wraps her legs firmly around his body and her arms around his neck. While kissing him passionately, she bites his lips so hard that it gets cut through. "I thought to myself that she had gone mad. As we struggled, I involuntarily jerked my hand, I felt the knife, which I was still holding, sink somewhere into her flesh.

A warm liquid spurted into my face. She uttered a shriek and released me.”<sup>23</sup> Next, he looks into the mirror and sees the image of an old, white-haired and bearded man staring at him: He has been possessed by a new spirit and has become the odds-and-ends man.

In the epilogue, the narrator wakes up from his opium sleep into his previous environment—he hears a cock crowing and the charcoal he lit to smoke opium has burned out. He looks for the antique vase from Rey but now it is in the hands of a bent old man escaping with a laughter terrifying enough to give one goosebumps. Finally, the narrator is all alone in his room feeling the weight of a woman’s dead body on his chest.

### **Debate Around *The Blind Owl*’s Style and Structure**

How can this lengthy overview be justified, or what really necessitates it? In one sense, it is impossible to provide a short overview of *The Blind Owl* and at the same time to sufficiently convey the intricacies of its plot and symbolism. Furthermore, there is another, rather paradoxical sense in which *The Blind Owl* resists both being summarized and being submitted to an in-depth analysis that admits the inclusion of terms and concepts from outside the closely-knit universe that Hedayat has created. Consequently, much of the Hedayat scholarship, from the early examples to the most recent ones, has revealed the presence of this dual difficulty, and the greatest effort critics have devoted to *The Blind Owl* has concerned its structure, and more precisely, how the two stories of the novel connected to each other. The second and equally important issue has been

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

determining what *The Blind Owl* was all about and what kind of an interpretive practice was needed to analyze it.

It can be stated that there is a stylistic juxtaposition made between the two parts of the novel which has now become a commonplace observation among scholars, namely that the stylistic register of the first part of *The Blind Owl* is surrealism or expressionism whereas the narrative tone and style used in the second part is realistic.<sup>24</sup> At first glance, this distinction seems irrefutable; but in fact, it depends on a notion of realism for which the main criteria appear to be the presence (or absence, thereof) of naturalistic descriptions and whether or not the actions and affects of the narrator can be accounted for in a causal way. It is true that in the first part there is not a clear motive for the narrator's obsessive drawing of the same scene on pen-cases; there is no apparent reason why the narrator should see that scene through an imaginary ventilation-hole in the wall; it is hard to tell why certain images and actions are reduplicated over and over (the uncle, the bent old man in the drawings and outside the house, and hearse driver, for instance); and finally, both the sudden death of the girl and the turning up of her portrait on the antique Rey vase are a mystery. Without even raising these questions and possible others, one could simply say that the first part of *The Blind Owl* is told as a story of enchantment, a desperate quest made under a spell, therefore by its very nature, it should defy logic and realism.

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<sup>24</sup> For one of the earliest and most canonical of such commentaries written in 1951, see Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "The Hedayat of *The Blind Owl*," in *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann, University of Texas Press, 1978, pp. 27-43.

Nevertheless, this can only be suggested at the expense of the maze of narrative devices Hedayat uses in the second part. It is remarkable how nearly all the critics and commentators dealing with the style and form of *The Blind Owl* have somehow overlooked the fact that the allegedly realistic narrative in the second part is indeed a dream had in an opium sleep the narrator has fallen into at the end of the first part. In that respect, it should be featuring a dream inside a dream.<sup>25</sup> Even if one chooses to ignore this significant detail for the sake of argument, the question remains as to how one is to make sense of the dislocation of the novel's setting four or five centuries back in time. The second part also abounds, in an utterly surrealistic fashion, in mirror images and duplicated actions, some new and some taken from the preceding narrative section. Besides, although it may be possible to point out the narrator's motives in some of the actions he commits (he calls his wife "the bitch" because she sleeps around; he hates and eventually kills her because she keeps rejecting and humiliating him, and so forth), it does not seem as easy to tell, for instance, why he offers his wife to the rabble-men whom he detests so strongly, and this is so not despite *but* because of the reason he gives to justify his action. In other words, it is the reason itself that does not stand to realism; it can at best be a fantasy that is couched in or screened by the strange reasoning of the

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<sup>25</sup> Nasrin Rahimieh emphasizes this point in a review of the most recent English translation of *The Blind Owl* by Naveed Noori which she praises for being more faithful to the original Bombay edition. As she writes: "For example, in the Bombay edition's second part of the narrative every paragraph is preceded by double quotation marks, implying a narrative within the narrative. Given the doubling of so many elements of the first part and the second part, the absence of the double quotation marks impacts our understanding of the narrators of the two sections being the same or different." See "The Blind Owl by Sadeq Hedayat." *Middle Eastern Literatures*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2014, pp. 107-09; 108.

narrator (I will return to this point and argue that this fantasy is indeed a collective one). Everything obeys the rules of simple causality in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, for instance, which Hedayat translated from French in 1948. There is nothing in the family members' behaviors or in their presentation to the reader that cannot be understood within the category of narrative realism. However, one morning the protagonist wakes up as an insect and this seems to be enough reason to wonder where one is to situate Kafka vis-à-vis realism. Likewise, in the second part of *The Blind Owl*, when the narrative ends, the narrator has literally become the odds-and-ends man; in fact, when the part opens, he is already that man. Realism, thus, may not be the most useful tool to grasp Hedayat's stylistic maneuvers. It is either too amorphous or too rigid to analyze also the form and structure of *The Blind Owl*.

Two of the most exemplary approaches to the structural aspects of the novel can be found in Iraj Bashiri and Hassan Kamshad. Bashiri's much debated thesis is that "*The Blind Owl* is a combination of two short stories of different lengths [and] that the latter of the stories 'includes the whole narrative of the *Buddhacarita*.'"<sup>26</sup> For Bashiri, the reference to Buddhism and the application of the narrative scheme of the *Buddhacarita* (the myth of the Buddha's birth, his resistance to the debasing demands of his own self, the trials he undergoes, his many lives, purification, death, and rebirth) to *The Blind Owl* are warranted by Hedayat's deep interest in Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, it is just as

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<sup>26</sup> See Michael C. Hillmann, "Introduction," in *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillman, University of Texas Press, 1978, pp. 1-12. Also, see Iraj Bashiri, *Hedayat's Ivory Tower: Structural Analysis of The Blind Owl*, University of Minnesota Press, 1975; 23-46.

widely claimed that Hedayat traveled to India not to flee Reza Shah's despotism but to learn the Pahlavi Persian of the pre-Islamic Iran and to study Hindu myths, including the *Buddhacarita*. Relying heavily on this bit of biographical information, Bashiri forecloses any other interpretation as to the structure of *The Blind Owl* and what it might be about or allegorize. He thus concludes that Hedayat's novel portrays a solitary character in his quest for self-knowledge, authenticity, and perfection, and as the parallelism between the Buddha and *The Blind Owl* suggests, this quest has a successful ending. After all, attainment of self-knowledge is what the narrator declares to be his fundamental goal and the Buddha's life provides Hedayat with a perfect blueprint to model his novel upon.

Although he does not argue for a structural correspondence, as far as the mood and the content are concerned, Kamshad too resorts to Buddhism. He writes that in *The Blind Owl* "Buddhist ideas are mostly infused with Hedayat's own pessimistic views. The whole story revolves around Buddha's *inward contemplation and meditation*, that is, the command to 'look within.'"<sup>27</sup> This argument seems to be in tune with the understanding of modernist literature as essentially subjective, oriented towards the senses, consciousness, and of course, the unconscious. Yet, it is at this very point that Hedayat requalifies what has been established as the modernist aesthetic program so as to endow it with a different character that speaks to the Iranian situation. Even if one admits that *The Blind Owl* is a quest narrative, this quest is certainly an unsuccessful one—the narrator neither attains self-knowledge in the spiritual sense suggested by Buddhism, nor does he

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<sup>27</sup> Hassan Kamshad, "Hysterical Self-Analysis," in *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann, University of Texas Press, 1978; 21. Original emphasis.

reach a state that can in any way be called self-perfection. Consequently, any reading of *The Blind Owl* as a kind of *Bildungsroman* also would fatally miss the point that the idea of subjective betterment or development is already paralyzed by the all-pervasive sickness that Hedayat struggles to represent and contain. It is in this sense that *The Blind Owl* signifies an attempt mainly to portray its profoundly diseased world, and the key to its structuring principle must be sought in what it tries to contain, and not in one of the numerous literary, aesthetic or philosophical bits it keeps devouring.<sup>28</sup> And, what does the narrator really find when he looks within? The answer is everything “without.” He sees nothing that is proper to him when he looks into his soul, and as his “inward contemplation” gets deeper, the narrator feels much more invaded by the rabble-men, the tradition of past generations, social roles and masks, and by the *ressentiment* stemming from and targeting the outside world. Hence, interiority and exteriority collapse into each other in *The Blind Owl*, so much so that one is tempted to argue that Hedayat uses tactically the structure of psychosis to create a total narrative.

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<sup>28</sup> That Bashiri and Kamshad are somewhat pressured to apply the myth of *Buddhacarita* to *The Blind Owl* to make sense of its structure, form, and subject-matter doubtless reveals that difficulty modernist literature brings to the fore, which is finding a narrative closure and formulating the interaction of diegetic motives. Faced with the extremely contingent and inexplicable movement of events, actions, and affects in *The Blind Owl*, and intrigued by the seemingly unmotivated ending, the commentator almost inevitably searches for a deeper ground-plan and finds it in the *Buddhacarita* drawing on the author’s biography. There is also a more secular, as it were, understanding of the relationship between myth and the modernist work: “In modern times, private mythologies have often been produced by writers of ‘inner emigration’: Hedayat’s fiction, for instance, represents both the perpetuation and the disintegration of ‘received’ mythology in whose place he put his own myths of spiritual chaos.” Talat Sait Halman, “Death and Rebirth of Myths in near Eastern Literatures.” *Books Abroad*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1974, pp. 25-33; 32. It is on account of this view that Omar Khayyam, Rilke, and Kafka are often presented as the pillars of Hedayat’s personal myth of the groundlessness of human existence, universal alienation, and spiritual chaos.

According to Michael Hillman, the significance of Kamshad's commentary rather lies in its conviction that, because of its peculiar structure and style, making a critical analysis of *The Blind Owl* is impossible. Implicitly shared by many other critics, this claim is based on the argument that "the reader, despite all his awareness, is constantly driven into a hypnotic dream state. He starts reading with a determined critical approach, but gradually an atmosphere of obscurity creeps in; the thread of events becomes blurred, and in the end an attitude of uncritical acceptance prevails."<sup>29</sup> Kamshad is justified to emphasize that *The Blind Owl* does not lend itself to a reading that promises the kinds of pleasure more conventional narratives, following a more or less recognizable development and building up to a cognitively assimilable end, may give to the reader. While Hedayat's undermining of the reified, habitual reading procedures, let alone critical ones, might be seen as integral to the modernist estrangement, it might as well be the case that what he aimed for was a form that was suited to the material *The Blind Owl* wanted to represent. To use the Freudian terminology, this material itself may have required to be expressed by a certain kind of manifest content which is the emplotment and form that *The Blind Owl* bears. Consequently, an interpretive engagement with the novel becomes even more urgent due to its very "psychotic" quality.

The reference to the myth of Buddha as the source of *The Blind Owl*'s structure (and its metaphysical thesis) also rests on the novel's content. In the second part, the narrator tells his family history and says that he was born to Bugam Dasi, an Indian

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<sup>29</sup> Kamshad, "Hysterical Self-Analysis"; 16.

temple dancer. His father meets her during one of his business trips to India; captivated by her exotic dance, which is depicted in a highly sensual language, he falls in love with her and changes his religion in order to become a part of her community. Yet, his uncle, who is his father's twin brother, deceives Bugam Dasi into sleeping with him, whereupon she asks both men to go through a "trial by cobra" that consists in staying in a dark room with a venomous cobra snake. The one who leaves the room alive, Bugam Dasi declares, should become her husband for the rest of her life. One of the two men passes the trial but no one can tell whether the survivor—a demented, white-haired hunchback who cannot speak—is the narrator's father or uncle.

Although it certainly deserves attention, this information about the protagonist does not guarantee a solid basis upon which *The Blind Owl* might have been constructed. Moreover, it is quite confusing to read in Bashiri's own words that there is "no documentary evidence regarding Hedayat's knowledge of the *Buddhacarita*, the book he utilized in the running narrative of *The Blind Owl*, has come to light."<sup>30</sup> On the other side, Homa Katouzian, who authored one of the most definitive critical monographs on Hedayat, writes that the latter's "interest in Indian culture, and vague sympathy for Buddhism" notwithstanding, "his visit to India was purely an accident, and no part of a design to pursue Buddhist studies and experiments. Nor did he go to Bombay to study the Pahlavi language, as is sometimes supposed with greater plausibility."<sup>31</sup> And finally,

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Richard A. Williams, "Buddhism and the Structure of *The Blind Owl*," in *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann, University of Texas Press, 1978, pp. 99-107; 101.

<sup>31</sup> Katouzian, *The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*; 59.

even if one espouses the view that the structure of *The Blind Owl* must have been modeled on the *Buddhacarita*, one would still need to consider the fact that the events of the Buddha's life (from the birth to the trials and to the final awakening) "are, in fact, repeated patterns in all such celebrated calls to adventure in the biographical literature of Indian saints," and such cycles "are not limited to religious literature, but are common to all the quest and voyage literature of ancient Indian narrative," whence they are carried over into later narratives of "self-realization and fulfillment, in other words, quest literature in general."<sup>32</sup>

As suggested before, *The Blind Owl* might be compared to quest narratives only with certain qualifications: if it makes use of the quest pattern at all, it does so in order to undermine it or to show its dysfunctionality or futility in the world that it depicts. The Buddhist or Indian myths, sharing in the inadequacy of realism as a critical term, are either too generic morphologically or too archetypal philosophically to contextualize and thus singularize *The Blind Owl* as a modernist Iranian novel. Their inadequacy or limited relevance, when not made part of a reading that is at least as totalizing as *The Blind Owl* itself, leads one to conclude that what the narrator (and the novelist) seeks in this world is "beauty, purity, and noble ideas,"<sup>33</sup> or that *The Blind Owl* "is an attempt to comprehend the eternity of beauty. It is the vengeance of the mortal, short-lived man against this life, against this atmosphere [i.e. the modern world]."<sup>34</sup> Widespread in the Hedayat

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<sup>32</sup> Williams, "Buddhism and the Structure of *The Blind Owl*"; 101-102.

<sup>33</sup> Kamshad, "Hysterical Self-Analysis"; 19.

<sup>34</sup> Al-e Ahmad, "The Hedayat of *The Blind Owl*"; 29.

scholarship, these two judgments are made in contrast to the debased values of the rabble the narrator abhors, and in relation to the typical images *The Blind Owl* seems to have borrowed from the traditional Persian love poetry and painting to glorify the ethereal girl. Nevertheless, how *The Blind Owl* transvalues in its particular milieu the abovementioned traditions—the quest form and love poetry—goes unnoticed. Put differently, both what Al-e Ahmad calls “this atmosphere” and *The Blind Owl* itself remain in the dark unless one tries to see how Hedayat repurposes the mentioned forms in an attempt to map his own time and space. Such a critical look would enable the text to emerge as a work dealing with issues more concrete than “ancient Aryan skepticism, (...) Buddha’s Nirvana, (...) Iranian gnosticism, (...) and the Yogi-like seclusion of the oriental person.”<sup>35</sup>

Hillmann’s warning as regards Kamshad’s and Bashiri’s approaches to *The Blind Owl* is noteworthy: “Ultimately,” he writes, “the critical reader needs the caution of Kamshad and the conclusiveness of Bashiri, avoiding errors of both.”<sup>36</sup> Unlike Bashiri, Hillmann maintains that *The Blind Owl* is a single novel, and that “what convinces the reader that the [first] story is nowhere near over is that the narrator has yet to achieve his explicit purpose, that is, of introducing himself to his shadow, of getting to know himself before he dies.”<sup>37</sup> While I unhesitatingly agree that *The Blind Owl* is not composed of two separate stories, I do not think that this is because the narrator must achieve his

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Hillmann, “Introduction”; 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

purpose only at the end of the second story and thus provide the narrative with a closure. Instead, as I will try to demonstrate below, what makes *The Blind Owl* a single novel is its unique form that resembles a narrative Möbius band as well as its content that exceeds the subjective and presents the national situation as the truth of the personal story. In this movement the narrator's self-proclaimed desire is the propelling force but it is not necessarily fulfilled as merely a subjective task as in the course of the novel self-knowledge allegorically becomes coterminous with comprehending the social totality.

### **Narrative Time-Space and the Total Form**

This totalizing impulse can be illustrated first by examining the narrative time and the diegetic space in *The Blind Owl*. Let us go back to the opening sentence of the novel: "There are sores which slowly erode the mind in solitude like a kind of canker."<sup>38</sup> This statement creates in the reader the expectation that the narrator would explain what he means by the disease simile and what these sores refer to. But this sentence is also a paragraph and, apart from an enigma that passes as etiology and immediate symptoms, which are obviously not the disease itself, in the rest of the novel, very little is said or depicted to elucidate the nature of that incurable malady. Instead, amidst his ceaseless suffering and moaning, the narrator protests that any mention of this disease is met with doubt or incomprehension: "The reason for this incomprehension is that mankind has not yet discovered a cure for this disease."<sup>39</sup> Just as a question that is deemed unimportant or

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<sup>38</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

meaningless simply because there is no known answer to it, this disease is relegated to the category of the absurd, or is at best relativized if not altogether trivialized—resembling the way in which truth questions, for instance, are continuously relativized in modernity where opinions reign supreme, or as the narrator puts it, “in the light of current beliefs, the individual’s personal beliefs in particular.”<sup>40</sup> Already in the prologue, then, the narrator implicitly evokes something the existence of which should not be questioned despite that it is incommunicable. This disease has the nature of a transcendent fact in the face of which opinions and beliefs, various personal ideologies and perhaps even collective ones lose all value they may claim to have.

This very gesture has largely determined the critical analyses of *The Blind Owl* and has caused Hedayat’s novel to be seen either as a bleak rendering of universal human condition or as a glorification of aesthetics and eternal beauty. The question as to the validity of these suggestions aside, what “transcends the ordinary experience” in *The Blind Owl* is the disease itself, “this reverberation of the shadow of the mind.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the transcendent Hedayat evokes can be neither the human condition nor pure aesthetic gratification for, among other things, these too may well be subsumed under the rubric of subjective opinion and taste, and are difficult to imagine as the mind’s agonizing shadow. The disease the narrator alludes to, the only transcendent that the novel is fixated on, is inside and outside the mind concurrently. Being a shadow, it is external; yet, inversely, because it is a shadow, it must also require the mind, the thing

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

that it is a shadow of, thereby not quite completely transcending the cognition and the experiences of the narrator. It is in this very sense that the disease *The Blind Owl* is centered on is both an introjection and a projection, and as the seamless movement back and forth between the narrator himself and his shadow evinces, it figures as an immanent-transcendent that the narrator is anxious to make sense of from within a mind which has already been conditioned and affected by it.

Besides, just as the fact that the narrator does speak about a disease has hardly provoked any curiosity, it has been generally ignored that nowhere in the prologue the narrator “owns” this disease to give the impression that it originates in him. Instead, it is presented as a catastrophe that has befallen the narrator and it appears less as his disease than as an overwhelming infectious fact. The opening sentence of the novel is carefully impersonal, so are the sentences in which this suffering is mentioned: “It is impossible to convey a just idea of the agony which this disease can inflict.”<sup>42</sup> Or take, “Will anyone ever penetrate the secret of this disease which transcends ordinary experience?”<sup>43</sup> Or consider this passage:

I propose to deal with only one case of this disease. It concerned me personally and it so shattered my entire being that I shall never be able to drive the thought of it out of my mind. The evil impression which it left has, to a degree that surpasses human understanding, poisoned my life for all time to come. I said “poisoned”; I should have said that I have ever since borne, and will bear for ever, the brand-mark of that cautery.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.

That disease has not stemmed from the narrator's inner self or from any such place pertaining to interiority, but has been inflicted on him by what he perceives as a sickening condition that others fail to recognize. The narrator here seems to echo Joë Bousquet who wrote, "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it."<sup>45</sup> The disease becomes his when he begins to bear its marks and takes on the task to write it: *The Blind Owl* as a novel constellates the disease that has called it into being to be registered by it. The narrator's desire to know himself and to make his shadow know him also means for the disease to know itself and this endeavor relies upon his capability of drawing a total picture of that disease-generating situation that he has come to embody. This doubtlessly necessitates the invention of a particular form and style adequate to achieving such an embodiment. *The Blind Owl* thus invites a reading that too constructs and maintains a kind of rapport between the narrator's experiences, thoughts, and affects, and that disease which appears to be much more situational than subjective. Leaping off to universal human condition or pure aesthetics from *The Blind Owl* would mean to overlook the reciprocity the novel itself establishes between "the mind" and "the disease." If the temptation of uncritical acceptance is to be resisted and the abovementioned relationship be maintained, one must cross a totalizing trajectory similar to the one the narrator announces he must tread.

Next to attaining self-knowledge, the narrator writes a specific case of "this disease" due to an anticipation of imminent death:

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Continuum, 2001; 169.

My one fear is that *tomorrow* I may die without having come to know myself. (...) If I have *now* made up my mind to write it is only in order to reveal myself to my shadow which *at this moment* is stretched across the wall in the attitude of one devouring with insatiable appetite each word I write. It is for his sake that I wish to make the attempt. Who knows? We may perhaps come to know each other better.<sup>46</sup>

What captures attention in this passage is the narrator's unmistakable embeddedness in the present, and that this embeddedness emits a certain sense of immediacy in which the act of writing and the act of reading become almost synchronous, so much so that they could more properly be called storytelling and hearing. The here-and-now of the narration is characterized by the urgency resulting from the narrator's fear of sudden death as well as his striving for self-knowledge. However, given that the disease he suffers "surpasses human understanding" and that it is the double of a mind whose very being has been "shattered" by it, the question arises as to who or what the narrator's real addressee might be. He claims to address his shadow but as it has been suggested before, this shadow is used interchangeably with the disease and with the narrator's mind. In this regard, he is addressing himself by using self-writing as a means of organizing his thoughts and affects into a kind of autobiography; but he also uses this life-story as a grid to map the disease as a whole, which is to say that he is addressing the latter, too.

It should be noted at this point that, having stated how tormenting the thoughts of this disease are, the narrator abruptly shifts his focus to his fellow beings and obliquely points to another possible addressee: "Ever since I broke the last ties which held me to

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<sup>46</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 2. My emphases.

the rest of mankind my one desire has been to attain a better knowledge of myself.”<sup>47</sup>

And he continues with several questions that are hard to tell whether rhetorical or self-revelatory:

Do not the rest of mankind who look like me, who appear to have the same needs and the same passions as I, exist only in order to cheat me? Are they not a mere handful of shadows which have come into existence only that they may mock and cheat me? Is not everything that I feel, see and think something entirely imaginary, something utterly different from reality?<sup>48</sup>

The answer to the last question, which retracts just as abruptly the tone and the content of the preceding ones, has to be both affirmative and negative. Setting aside for now the truthfulness of his paranoid suspicions about other people, it can be suggested that the reader never knows what this reality the narrator mentions is, for it is never told as it is. Whatever is recounted in *The Blind Owl*, it is filtered through a shattered narrative mind; therefore, this reality has to be arrived at through a kind of reconstruction that Hedayat demands of the reader. This is a profoundly modernist gesture in that it makes the work of literature contain the concept of its own reception and interpretation as a result of which what the narrator feels and thinks may be shown to coincide with reality, or may be deemed unreal vis-à-vis what “the rest of mankind” perceive as real.

So, after all, we are faced with our own problem of narrativization. Reality cannot be taken for granted; it is not a given for which one should only seek correspondences in representation. On the contrary, it must be reconstructed and narrativized to begin with,

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

and this is the latent operation even in the most orthodox prescriptions of realism in literature. The narrative nature of “reality” and the inadequacy of realism as a critical term become even clearer when Al-e Ahmad, with a striking twist to the established argument for the surrealism of the first part of *The Blind Owl*, suggests that “in the representation of this dream the realism is so great that even for the reader it goes beyond a dream: ‘My God, I hope Hedayat didn’t chop the girl’s body into pieces with the knife of the old odds-and-ends man!’”<sup>49</sup> Realism in Al-e Ahmad’s use of the term seems to mean something close to vividness and a gripping storytelling that largely derives from the narrator’s cold but also agitated, unthinking yet at the same time meticulous cutting up of the ethereal girl’s body so that it fits into the suitcase. We have, then, a hallucination sequence written extremely faithfully to how the chopping up of a body in cold blood should happen, or in all probability, happens. Needless to say, such a realism implies complete authorial control over the narrative material and form, which may be just another reason why *The Blind Owl* is not composed of two unrelated stories put side by side rather unreasonably.

Nonetheless, what is even more striking is the fact that there is a logical error in Al-e Ahmad’s statement, and that is because when we read the dismemberment scene, there is no way we can know about the odds-and-ends man and of the bone-handled knife which actually belongs to the butcher—these figures are introduced in the second part. Why, one wonders, does Al-e Ahmad make such an error in one of the most

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<sup>49</sup> Al-e Ahmad, “The Hedayat of *The Blind Owl*”; 30.

conscientious analyses ever written of *The Blind Owl*? I maintain that Al-e Ahmad unintentionally reveals the unique structural aspect of the novel which is Hedayat's formal solution to the problem of writing the situational disease in its totality: *The Blind Owl* has the form of a Möbius strip and its two parts are not only not detached from each other, but in the final moment, they are the same story. The novel presents us with a continuous narrative space which seems to have two sides at first glance; two different stories, one of which, depending on the interpretive choice, might appear to be the cause, the starting point or the precedent of the other despite the fact that neither of these stories has precedence over the other temporally or causally. One cannot make sense of *The Blind Owl* gradually as the reading proceeds; it makes sense all at once, only when one has viewed it in its entirety. That is the way in which the dismemberment scene gains the kind of realism that grips Al-e Ahmad, and it does so only retroactively, when recast within the entirety of the novel.

As stated before, for Bashiri the two parts of *The Blind Owl* are completely separate in terms of content, and that the novel's structure is based on that of the *Buddhacarita*. Yet for him, this myth provides the quest theme and structure especially of the second part. As for the first story, Bashiri suggests that it reflects Hedayat's struggle with Rilke's assumed influence on him: "According to Bashiri, Part I is an occult expression of the author's decision, 'with the help of the old man,' to 'bury Rilke's *Notebooks*,' which, on returning to Tehran from Paris, he is said to have 'secretly' carried

with him 'in his pocket.'"<sup>50</sup> Kamshad, on the other hand, "seems to have overlooked the existence of Link I [the interlude; the narrator's opium sleep and waking up in the past], therefore thinking that Part II of the story is also meant to be a contemporary experience. This is why he ventures the suggestion that perhaps Part II should have come before Part I."<sup>51</sup> In Katouzian's own reading of *The Blind Owl*, "Part I refers to a contemporary experience which turns out to be the counterpart of a similar experience in a bygone era. And the Links relate them to each other back and forth."<sup>52</sup> Consequently, after the second story of "the bitch," the narrator, through Link II (the end of the second opium sleep), returns to the story of the "the ethereal woman," that is the contemporary experience.

Although I agree with Katouzian on the general movement of the plot, in my view, the first story of *The Blind Owl* is not contemporary but is moved, above all grammatically, to the past vis-à-vis the prologue. That much should seem obvious, even unavoidable—how could the narrator tell his story except in the past tense? The point, however, is that the first part is even more distanced and carries a stronger sense of remoteness due to the immediacy of the present tense, the intensity of the here-and-now in the prologue where the narrator's act of writing is inaugurated, not to mention the ambiguous temporal referents of the story that follows it. What is truly contemporary is thus the prologue itself, the very moment of the narrator's decision to write one case of that disease he has suffered. It is highly important to understand that this dimension of the

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<sup>50</sup> Cited in Katouzian, *The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*; 134.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

“presentness” of the act of writing (and by extension, of reading) in fact runs through the entire narrative. It traverses both the hallucination sequence and the story that takes place in the ancient Rey, thereby functioning as the overdetermining pleat or contraction that repeatedly catapults the narrative back to the time of the prologue.

As shown in the overview, there are some expressions in the first part which give the impression that they may be alluding to certain events or occurrences in the narrator’s past. Consider, for instance, how the narrator sees in the ethereal girl’s eyes an “expression of reproach as though they had seen me commit some unpardonable sin,”<sup>53</sup> and in the eyes of the portrait on the vase “a look of reproach as though they had seen me commit some inexpiable sin of which I had no knowledge.”<sup>54</sup> Having read the second part, we realize that this reproach is transferred from the eyes of the wife who presumably saw the narrator as he murdered her. Or, let us recall the narrator’s curiosity as to why he might be drawing repeatedly the exact same scene on pen-cases: “Had I seen the subject of this picture at some time in the past or had it been revealed to me in a dream?”<sup>55</sup> And what he says about the burial place: “On the other side of the hill was an isolated enclosure, peaceful and green. It was a place which I had never seen before and yet it looked familiar to me, as though it had always been present in some recess of my mind.”<sup>56</sup> Once again, we understand that the burial place is the duplicate of the riverbank where the narrator saw the girl, his future wife, naked for the first time, and that the pen-

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<sup>53</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

case drawing is a re-composition of various elements picked from that scene as well as from his adult life (the old man, his appearance, the terrifying laughter, etc.). Since such reverse foreshadowings are eventually fulfilled in the second part, one is tempted to conclude that the first part is indeed the narrator's imaginary compensation for the profound guilt he feels for the crime he has committed, and that everything that happens in the first part somehow has its roots in the distant past and has been predetermined by it.

In his study of Hedayat's treatment of the theme of history in *The Blind Owl*, Elton Daniel notes that the spatial setting of both parts of the novel is relatively easy to specify: "Although the narrator of *The Blind Owl* declares that he does not know if he is, in reality, in Nishapur or Balkh or Benares, his own comments reveal that he is, in reality, in the city of Rayy."<sup>57</sup> Daniel enumerates the points where the narrator, quite incidentally yet repeatedly, makes mention of certain landmarks in Rey. Hedayat's choice of this city as the geographical setting of *The Blind Owl* strikes Daniel as peculiar in that "these repeated references to Rayy (...) contribute to the novel's affected air of extreme disdain for time. Rayy, one of Iran's most ancient cities, is a logical place to evoke an aura of the distant past and of historical continuity."<sup>58</sup> The temporal setting, however, poses greater problems. Both by tracing the histories of the prominent architectural structures and cityscapes named in the first story, and by using as more reliable evidence the coins the

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<sup>57</sup> Elton Daniel, "History as a Theme of *The Blind Owl*," in *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann, University of Texas Press, 1978, pp. 76-86; 77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

narrator offers the hearse driver/gravedigger, Daniel states that “the first part of *The Blind Owl* had to take place no earlier than 1800 and not later than 1930. Therefore the narrator’s explicit plans to write (...) could have coincided with the precise moment Hedayat began to write *The Blind Owl*.”<sup>59</sup> And the same method of tracing elements such as architecture, landscape, and coins enables Daniel to locate the historical setting of the second story at around the Mongol invasion of Iran, that is the early thirteenth century, when the medieval Rey was called the Bride of the World.

Nevertheless, while he closely examines and posits the existence of different historical settings, Daniel problematizes Bashiri’s and Kamshad’s structural analyses of *The Blind Owl* and their keeping separate the modern times and the medieval period as two temporal frames of the novel. As opposed to this chasm made absolute, he argues that the timeframe of the novel is contemporaneous with Hedayat, “and that the deliberate evocations of the medieval period are designed to tell the reader about the narrator’s psychological aberrations, about his belligerent insistence that time has no meaning, and about his assertion that the past is more real for him than the present (...).”<sup>60</sup> If time has no meaning for the narrator and Hedayat, that is because the medieval Rey is not much different from twentieth-century Tehran and that the former is still determining the reality of the latter even though there might be some differences in appearance. Moreover, I am also convinced that the moment of Hedayat’s writing of *The Blind Owl* is the framing temporality of the novel and that the novel is set in the key of the coincident moment the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 81.

narrator decides to write his painful experience for his shadow and for the very situation that generates the disease. And this is so precisely because the double of the narrator's mind is not only an outward projection of his supposed self, it is at the same time a system of all that is external, a structure that seems to have brought the narrator's particular interiority into existence in the first place. Moreover, at this point it should be clear that the owl-shaped shadow "which at this moment is stretched across the wall in the attitude of one devouring with insatiable appetite each word I write,"<sup>61</sup> or "my unsubstantial self, my shadow, that sinister shadow which at this moment stretched across the wall in the light of the oil-lamp in the attitude of one studying attentively and devouring each word I write,"<sup>62</sup> is the reader as well. If *The Blind Owl* is a single novel, then the same speaker must have uttered these two statements, and if something broader than self-examination or self-knowledge is meant in these passages, that shadow must also be the people, the rabble, by whom the narrator hopes to be read and finally understood despite his ambivalent aloofness.

One must not take the temporal division of *The Blind Owl* at face value, Daniel asserts, otherwise one would have to claim that "both sections of the novel are 'real,' literal, and independent, not mutually symbolic."<sup>63</sup> I also think that the two main stories of *The Blind Owl* are neither literal nor independent; together they form a single story, intertwined and coextensive, and what ensures this continuity, alongside the mutual

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<sup>61</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel, "History as a Theme of *The Blind Owl*"; 81.

symbolism of the two parts, is the multilayered allegorical character of the text (those symbols also refer to the novel's social context) and its shifting and overlapping figurations deployed to achieve narrative totality. In the interlude, the narrator tells the reason for being of the second part of his narrative, which is the same reason given in the prologue. This time too, the narrator wishes to rid himself through writing of the horrifying effects—both physical and mental—of a disease that is at least as abstract as the one presented in the prologue and never identified afterwards: “I hoped by this means to expel the demon which had long been lacerating my vitals, to vent onto paper the horrors of my mind. Finally, after some hesitation, I drew the oil-lamp towards me and began as follows.”<sup>64</sup> That this statement is set in the past tense results from the fact that the interlude still operates within the timeframe of the first story. Accordingly, as the structure of the text suggests, had it not been for grammatical necessity, that is, had the text not been transitioning into a story told within a story, that statement would have been set on the same temporal plane as “I am writing only for my shadow, which is now stretched across the wall in the light of the lamp”<sup>65</sup> from the prologue. This is how the sense of the present, of the moment of writing/storytelling firmly established at the beginning, keeps reclaiming the entire narrative.

In fact, we encounter some passages in the second story that reveal the real time, the dominant temporal thread that runs throughout the novel. I shall cite two examples

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<sup>64</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

from the second part that envelops the story that takes place in the medieval Rey. The following is from the opening section:

I wish *now* to squeeze out every drop of juice from my life as from a cluster of grapes and to pour the juice (...) down the parched throat of my shadow. All that I hope to do is to record on paper before I go the torments which have slowly wasted me away like gangrene or cancer here in my little room. This is the best means I have of bringing order and regularity into my thoughts.<sup>66</sup>

And towards the end of the part the narrator says:

My life appeared to me just as strange, as unnatural, as inexplicable, as the picture on the pen-case that I am using *at this moment as I write*. I feel that the design on the lid of this pen-case must have been drawn by an artist in the grip of some mad obsession. Often when my eye lights on this picture it strikes me as somehow familiar. Perhaps this picture is the reason why... Perhaps it is this picture that impels me to write.<sup>67</sup>

How are we to interpret these passages, particularly the italicized expressions, which stand out of a part that is predominantly narrated in the past tense? Examined closely on its own terms, the novel rules out all explanations except one, namely that “this moment as I write” can only be the framing time of *The Blind Owl* as a whole and what resurfaces each time Hedayat violates the narrative logic of the second story can thus be identified as the “now” of the prologue. Similarly, the pen-case that the narrator uses should be one of those he himself decorates, and the scene that impels him to write, the picture he feels he has seen before, should be the one the narrator living in the “modern period” draws obsessively. As for the shadow that finally takes the shape of a “screech

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 46-47. My emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 104. My emphasis.

owl,” it must be the same shadow we were introduced in the opening pages of the novel. These reduplications together with the mirror images that proliferate in both parts eventually leave us with a Möbius-like narrative that makes indiscernible anteriority-posteriority and logical causality. Indeed, it seems justified to argue that with *The Blind Owl*, Hedayat aims to create a spatial work that reveals itself all at once like a painting or a map. The disease the narrator alludes to is the social totality itself, and for Hedayat, this totality is strictly non-representable from within an aesthetic and formal paradigm based on realism and narrative linearity mainly because it is everywhere simultaneously and is thus non-sequential and non-localizable. In this regard, neither the first nor the second story in itself tells the reality or the authentic experience of the narrator. It is rather the case that each story deals with the same set of experiential and affective phenomena from its respective angle. Taken in isolation, each story is incomplete and as regards the question of knowing the self, neither is able to provide the narrator (and his shadow) with sufficient and definitive information about the person that he is and his situation. That is why the two stories must be overlapped and the narrator as the artist/intellectual must meet the resentful Iranian in himself, whereas the latter must comprehend how his traumas are articulated in the former’s fantasies.

Two seemingly irreconcilable terms—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “rhizome” and Raymond Williams’ “structures of feeling”—may help us shed more light on not only the distinct structure and style but also the historical content of *The Blind Owl*. These terms would prove most useful especially when the form of the novel is grasped as a constellation of allegorical elements with heterogeneous and altering

significations. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes and geometry of intensities stress the affectivity of *The Blind Owl* and provide concepts able to address the "somatic" character of the novel which has been referred to in this chapter with such terms as contagion, enactment, and the continuous narrative space. Structures of feeling, on the other hand, suggest that the affects at play in Hedayat's novel themselves may be mediating ideologies or what can be called the collective unconscious of the early-twentieth-century Iran—a level that needs to be reached through interpretation.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, *The Blind Owl* itself intimates such a dual effort on the part of the reader: The intermingled images of mist, fog, steam, and water, and those of digging, climbing, cut-up bodies and landscapes, imply a constant movement between "horizontal" and "vertical" readings, as it were, or between a synchronic formal analysis and a historical-political interpretation. Let us recall Deleuze's remark that

[Joë Bousquet] apprehends the wound that he bears deep within his body in its eternal truth as a pure event. To the extent that events are actualized in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us: "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it." It is a question of attaining this will that the event creates in us; of becoming the quasi-cause of what is produced within us, the Operator; of producing surfaces and linings in which the event is reflected (...).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> In a 1937 letter addressed from Bombay to a friend of his in London, Hedayat describes *The Blind Owl* as an "unconscious" "historical fantasy": "This is not a historical novel, but a kind of historical *fantasie [sic]* which the narrator has imagined as a result of *simulation [sic]*, or *instinct dissimulation [sic]*, and has *romancée [sic]* in his own [contemporary] life. It is not a historical narrative, but something like a *roman inconscient*." Cited in Homa Katouzian, "Precedents of *the Blind Owl*." *Middle Eastern Literatures*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2012, pp. 171-77; 172.

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*; 148.

It is in this sense that one is to identify the “event” of *The Blind Owl* and trace the “surfaces” or planes that embody and reflect it.<sup>70</sup> This event is the encounter between the narrator and the ethereal girl, and this is the reason why the same scene turns up several times in various contexts throughout the novel. Besides, since the ethereal girl is the mirror image of the narrator’s wife in the second story, the meaning of the encounter with her should be contained in the identity of this event, too. We should further consider the fact that there is not a single encounter either in the first part or in the second. Although the initial encounters in both stories figure as foundational events determining the overarching sense of the novel, they are repeated each time with a difference, with a shift in perspective, affect, and content. These differences or shifts, far from undermining Hedayat’s totalizing endeavor, ensure its success. Just as importantly, the wounds or the

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Beard talks about a similar mechanism in relation to the notion of incarnation in the novel: “A strategy that pervades both the short stories and *The Blind Owl* is that of concretion, materialization of the abstract. It echoes everywhere – both on the level of style and theme: in short stories where a sublimated or figurative concept is punctured by exposure to its repressed or literary counterpart (...) even in Hedayat’s theory of Omar Khayyam’s materialism, which supposedly reinterprets ethereal love conventions into sensual ones. The most thorough such relation is between the two parts of *The Blind Owl*, a relation summed up by the term *mojassam* (embodiment, incarnation), which is a key term in the book. It is visible not just on the level of individual stories but between them as well.” See *Hedayat’s Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, Princeton University Press, 1990; 29. Beard’s understanding of embodiment in *The Blind Owl* seems to rest on a dualism between the sublime and the profane, and by implication, Hedayat becomes an author who implicitly sides with the mind despite that he also likes to shock his reader by dragging the mind into the scandal of the body. Accordingly, the first part of the novel might be seen as the site of the abstract and the sublime, and the second as its troubling underside. In my use of the term, neither of the stories embodies the other, nor is embodiment exercised on more abstract parts or ideas within each part. Rather, embodiment is what *The Blind Owl* as a whole does vis-à-vis the event and the situation that have called it into being. In this regard, its form becomes its content due to the fact that the form itself functions as an allegory of the national situation perceived as a space or entity generating a non-oriented, directionless total experience.

marks the narrator bears are at the same time the result of the disease as a non-subjective condition. Being infected by it might be taken as an event, as a kind of puncture in the narrator's life, but when seen as an outcome of a situation that generates it, it becomes clear that we must think of that disease as a process or as history as well.

Admittedly, what Deleuze and Guattari intended to argue with the image of the rhizome, or how they used this figure in their work, is significantly different from the way I am deploying it here. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari write in *Towards a Minor Literature*:

How can we enter into Kafka's work? This work is a rhizome, a burrow. The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren't very well known. (...) We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon. We will be trying only to discover what other points our entrance connects to, what crossroads and galleries one passes through to link two points, what the map of the rhizome is and how the map is modified if one enters by another point. Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.<sup>71</sup>

Also in *The Blind Owl*, no entrance is more privileged and neither story matters more than the other since the narrative prevents one from setting such priorities. This peculiar form is recognized in the first American review of the novel written in 1958, as well: "Like the architecture of colored tile and elaborate design which is the great Persian invention, detail and decoration are held together and enhanced by form and graceful

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<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, 1986; 3.

outline.”<sup>72</sup> This design together with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic model, one might argue, can compound the continuous narrative space and constellation in *The Blind Owl*. However, what makes necessary the introduction of interpretation into the critique is the very presence of its prelude which has a distancing effect—it in a way distances the narrator from the main narrative. It is as though Hedayat signals the reader to repeat the narrator’s initial gesture, thereby turning the novel into an entity to be inspected and analyzed. This gesture also calls us to see *The Blind Owl* not merely as a machine producing lines of flight and zones of intensity. As shadows or blind owls bending over the narrator’s desk to devour and understand each word he writes, we surely are expected to interpret, to be attentive to the signifier, and to move beyond the appreciation of Hedayat’s formal experiments only as formal experiments.

The rhizomatic or the tile form in *The Blind Owl*, then, produces and maps more than just affects and intensities.<sup>73</sup> The rhizomatic writing (like the collapsing of interior

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<sup>72</sup> William Kay Archer, “The Terrible Awareness of Time,” in *Hedayat’s “The Blind Owl” Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann, University of Texas Press, 1978; 12-15. This review is important also for its anticipating how *The Blind Owl* would later be appropriated by various “metaphysical” or “mystical” readings both in the West and in the East: “Yet there are dangers in store for *The Blind Owl*. It is susceptible to adoption by the coterie readers: tired of Vivaldi, fearing Beckett optimistic, wearying of Zen, they may easily find their newest frisson in this macabre Iranian sensibility, heightened by the author’s romantic suicide in—how appropriate! —Paris.” *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> In a similar attempt to find a model for *The Blind Owl*’s structure, Oktay Turan focuses on the sequence of the rather cubist city-scape and houses in the first part of the novel—a sequence that is repeated like many other narrative elements: “The period in which this wandering through the ‘unknown city’ occurs is a crucial stage of the narrator’s transition to the allegory. The terms ‘triangular, cubic and prismatic’ can hardly be perceived as direct references to particular styles as many architectural styles may have these kinds of characteristics. The notion of basic shapes in these statements may be understood as an attempt to underline the structural form of the novella.” See “Spaces of Suicide: Architectural Metaphors and Leitmotifs in Sadeq Hedayat’s *Blind Owl*.” *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2007, pp. 193-98; 195.

and exterior mentioned before) is used tactically as a tool to represent the social totality: *The Blind Owl* first abolishes the gap between the private and the public, and second, it powerfully suggests that the representations produced by the narrator's psychotic mind are in the last instance not distortions but the very character of reality. In this regard, the affects and intensities *The Blind Owl* works with should be seen also as structures of feeling mediating the social and the political. To be sure, in order to identify the event of *The Blind Owl* both as a puncture and as a process, we need to have a "story" that would function as that hypothetical line showing that a Möbius strip has only one surface and that it has no edges, just as Hedayat's novel is an edgeless, non-orientable narrative. This is also what the narrator asks us to do: "Past, future, hour, day, month, year—these things are all the same to me. (...) [M]y life has always known only one season and one state of being."<sup>74</sup> Möbius strip is the image for this unique state of being that undoes time, development, a possible beginning as well as an ending. "However," adds the narrator, "in order to explain my life to my stooping shadow, I am obliged to tell a story. Ugh! How many stories about love, copulation, marriage and death already exist, not one of

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On another note, the ruins amidst which Hedayat's protagonist wanders as well as the uncanny cityscape might be a narrative figuration of the new Tehran that Reza Shah built by destroying the old, familiar city: "A great advocate of urban renewal, he pulled down old buildings and constructed government offices, expansive squares, and Haussman-like boulevards. He named avenues after himself and placed his statue in the main squares. (...) To erase the Qajar past, he destroyed some two thousand urban landscape photographs on the grounds that they demeaned Iran. (...) In short, the overall urban appearance had drastically changed. The old mahallehs based on sect—especially Haydari—Nemati and Sheikhi—Motasheri identities—had withered away. The new districts were based more on class, income, and occupation." Ervand Abrahamian. *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge University Press, 2008; 89.

<sup>74</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 49.

which tells the truth! How sick I am of well-constructed plots and brilliant writing!”<sup>75</sup>

The narrator is ready to sacrifice all aesthetic considerations for the sake of truth; yet, even when the enunciation of the latter is concerned, not simply as the opposite of lying but as the disclosure of an irreducible reality, he is bound with the question of narrativity and is required to tell a story. One faces the same requirement and has to create one’s own narrative that would account for the unity of both stories and disclose their “truth.”

As is clear, in my narrative, the immanent-transcendent disease the narrator has been exposed to is named the Iranian situation, but I have yet to substantiate this thesis by focusing on some of the most prominent affects in the novel and by illustrating that they indeed signify collective structures of feeling prevalent in Iran in the first half of the twentieth century. Williams calls the site of a structure of feeling as a cognitive experience “practical consciousness,” which “is almost always different from official consciousness, and this is not only a matter of relative freedom or control. For practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, and not only what is thought is being lived.”<sup>76</sup> Not only Hedayat’s abolition of chronological time in favor of the actual and the present, but also the resurfacing of the moment of writing/storytelling throughout the novel find their theoretical echo in Williams’ theory of structures of feeling. What Williams aims to do with the introduction of this term is to emphasize the incompleteness of the emergent social and cultural forms as well as to capture the determining power of the lived experience of the present, which is almost always ambivalent and conflicted. At

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1977; 130-131.

stake, then, is the very “articulation of presence,” the “semantic figures” with which the historical moment is narrated,<sup>77</sup> and in this regard, Williams’ proposal seems to be even more relevant to transitional periods such as the global one that gave rise to literary modernism and the specific Iranian experience of modernization. In such periods, transformation is lived as a general phenomenon and it affects a whole range of “styles” of seeing, perceiving, and acting. With changes in structures of feeling, Williams refers to “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives sense of a generation or of a period.”<sup>78</sup> Among other things, it is such a change in the experience of sociality itself and the forms invented to represent that change which make modernism a period concept and Hedayat an author of the complications of Iranian modernization.

### ***The Blind Owl as Allegory***

There are many instances in *The Blind Owl* that have been used to argue that the novel is narrated by a delusional mind closed upon itself. Yet, when we consider the suggestion that in art and literature “the true social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind,”<sup>79</sup> we begin to suspect that what the following lines reveal might in fact be a structure of feeling in formation rather than personal psychosis: “At this very moment,” says the narrator, “I doubt the existence of tangible,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 133.

solid things, I doubt clear, manifest truths. If I were to strike my hand against the stone of mortar that stands in the corner of our courtyard and were to ask it, 'Are you real and solid?' and the mortar were to reply, 'Yes', I do not know whether I should take its word or not."<sup>80</sup> The same narrator, who constantly punctures the narrative with the here-and-now of the prologue, is also obsessed with history and cultural heritage: "Was I not myself the result of a long succession of past generations which had bequeathed their experience to me? Did not the past exist within me?"<sup>81</sup> He further asks:

Were not the substance and the expressions of my face the result of mysterious sequence of impulsions, of my ancestors' temptations, lusts and despairs? And I who was the custodian of the heritage, did I not, through some mad, ludicrous feeling, consider it my duty, whether I liked it or not, to preserve this stock of facial expressions? Probably my face would be released from this responsibility and would assume its own natural expression only at the moment of my death.<sup>82</sup>

Two affects can be identified in the statements above: On the one hand, the narrator is troubled by a sense of extreme uncertainty and ambiguity that pertains to his present and future. This clearing of fixed norms and realities might seem at first to provide the narrator with the possibility of remaking not only himself but also his relationship to the external world; however, it is rather perceived as an anxiety-inducing lack. On the other hand, this anxiety is coupled with the burden of tradition the narrator feels doomed to bear. He is unable to get rid of the facial expressions of past generations; in other words, he is unable to detach himself fully from the residual (and the dominant) structures of

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<sup>80</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 48-49.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

feeling and ideologies. The price he should pay is to never have a facial expression of his own as is evidenced by the recognition that his desire to know himself and presumably to discover his authentic identity is constantly undermined by the tradition that shapes his experiences and subjectivity. I maintain that these two affects together—anxiety and uncertainty resulting from the absence of coordinates ordaining social life and one’s place in it, and the fear of being colonized by an enduring tradition—give us one of the overarching structures of feeling that was prevalent in the modernizing Iran. This axis is reinforced in *The Blind Owl* by the attendant feelings of lack of autonomy and willpower, chronic loneliness, deception and abandonment by others, and resentment towards everyone including oneself.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, and perhaps more importantly, all these feelings intersect with a gender politics based on a split attitude—glorifying and hateful—towards the “ethereal girl” and the “bitch.” I will try to illustrate below how these feelings, which seem to be profoundly personal, reveal the predicament of Hedayat (and that of many a third world writer), namely that even the most subjective story, if it is to be told truthfully, cannot be disentangled from the dimension of history and collectivity.

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<sup>83</sup> This point seems to connect with the idea of the narrator’s ability to change his attitude towards himself and his life as a result of maturation, personal growth or education. However, in his article about the influence on *The Blind Owl* of Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Mohandessi writes that “Brigge’s exploration of his mind and emotions leads him forward to a realization that all he has felt and experienced has melded into something of value—a positive philosophy, a way up. Hedayat’s hero, on the contrary, by his own tragic act closes his trap upon himself.” See “Hedayat and Rilke”; 215.

In an article occasioned by Ahmadinejad's election for his second term in 2009, James Buchan first evokes Hegel's maxim that in order for history to be comprehensible it must repeat itself, and then he gives the reader one of the most deep-seated patterns of modern Iranian history:

The victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the tenth election for the Iranian Presidency on 22 Khordad, or June 12, was for his supporters an instance of divine grace and for his rivals a vulgar fraud. For the student of Iranian history, June 12 falls into a pattern in which popular revolutions (1906 and 1979) are disrupted by a coup d'état and then another and then another. In place of Muhammed Ali Shah Qajar, we have Ali Khamenei, for the Cossack commander Liakhov there is Interior Minister Mahsouli, and for Reza there is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a Persian Bonaparte in a car coat. (...) Within this perplexing pattern, there is a fundamental conflict which, as you might expect in the land that gave the world Manichaeism, takes different shapes at different historical epochs. Despotism fights Constitutionalism, Monarchy Parliament, Right Left, God the Devil, hard-liner reformer.<sup>84</sup>

Of course, in identifying this pattern Buchan has the advantage of looking back from a contemporary vantage point; nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the perception of a historical pattern repeating itself in ever more grotesque forms, the feeling of weakness to break out of this vicious circle, and the despair resulting from this experience were also prevalent in Hedayat's lifetime, too—perhaps this is part of the backdrop that gives way to the remark by *The Blind Owl's* protagonist that “Past, future, hour, day, month, year—these things are all the same to me. The various phases of childhood and maturity are to me nothing but futile words. They mean something only to ordinary people, to the rabble

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<sup>84</sup> James Buchan, "A Bazaar Bonaparte?" *New Left Review*, vol. 2, no. 59, 2009, pp. 73-87; 73-74.

(...) whose lives, like the year, have their definite periods and seasons and are cast in the temperate zone of existence.”<sup>85</sup>

Hedayat grew up in an Iran that witnessed the rise of constitutionalism and nationalism as opposed to the Qajar dynasty and the Western imperialist powers under which the Shah acted like a puppet. Mehrzad Boroujerdi provides an overview of this period which deeply affected Hedayat and his generation:

A host of events beginning with the 1906 constitutional revolution pushed the intellectual classes toward embracing nationalism as the dominant political-social ideology of their era. What came after the defeat of the constitutional revolution was a period of turmoil lasting thirteen long years (from the 1908 bombardment of the parliament to the 1921 coup by Reza Khan). This interval witnessed the destruction of the revolutionary forces; the accession of Ahmad Shah to power at the mere age of eleven (1909); Mohammad Ali Shah's attempt to come back to power (1911); the interest of imperialist powers in Iranian oil (discovered in 1908); World War I; Iran's occupation by Russian, British, and German forces (1914); typhus and the death of hundreds of thousands of people from drought and hunger; the access of Kurdish, Turkoman, and Baluchi tribes to European guns; the assassinations of various political personalities; the rebellions of Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani (1880–1920) and Mirza Kuchak Khan (1880–1921) in the north; the 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement signed under duress; the musical chair nature of cabinet changes (thirty-six different cabinets came to power); the closure of parliament for six years; the huge debts accumulated by the Qajar kings; the ineptitude of the bureaucracy; the nonexistence of a real military force; the nonproductive nature of the economy; and the inability of the state to collect revenues.<sup>86</sup>

What is missing from this picture of social devastation as well as political back-and-forth movement is that after it had been shelled, the Majlis (parliament) was reopened in 1909

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<sup>85</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 49.

<sup>86</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "'The West' in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919-1939)." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2006, pp. 391-401; 395-396.

but it rapidly lost its importance and influence. 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement was the most provocative act on the part of the Qajar dynasty before Reza Khan's coup d'état but it was preceded by several other significant events that led to Reza's seizing of power: Throughout the nineteenth century, Iran gave incredible political privileges and economic concessions to Britain and Russia, took huge amounts of debt from them, and allowed both to found two banks in the country that would function to varying degrees as the central bank of Iran controlling the budget and incomes, and giving more and more loans to the Qajar court.<sup>87</sup> In 1907, in an attempt to block the expansion of German capitalism in the region, the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed and Iran was divided into two parts separated by a no man's land; consequently, the north (including Tehran) fell under the Russian control, and the south (the zone that secured transportation route to India) was given to the British. The essential reason for the undermining of the second Majlis was the Russian ultimatum in 1911 given on the grounds that the Qajar dynasty and the parliament were getting unacceptably close to the British capital and politicians—the 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement on the control of the Iranian oil was the peak of this process.

Lucien Rey writes about the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement made against the rise of Germany that "Former rivalries in Persia were subordinated to a grander scheme. (...) Thus the political struggle in Persia was dwarfed by the political struggle of the

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<sup>87</sup> For a detailed account of the Russian and British rivalry in the second half of the nineteenth century for military, diplomatic, and commercial advantages in Iran that fueled the rise of constitutionalism and nationalism, see Lucien Rey, "Persia in Perspective 1." *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 19, 1963, pp. 32-55; 44-47.

imperialist powers in Europe and all growth stunted.”<sup>88</sup> I would like to suggest that one of the central themes in Hedayat’s work including *The Blind Owl*, i.e. the theme of fate or a grand, overwhelming force that crushes individuals or groups no matter how vigilantly they struggle to maneuver according to their wills, may be couched in this broader social feeling of powerlessness and uncertainty as to who determines the moves and direction of the nation. Ervand Abrahamian locates the roots of this feeling in the first decades of the nineteenth century when Iran suffered successive military defeats against Russia and Britain, and had to sign humiliating treaties with them. As he writes:

The treaties had far-reaching consequences. They established borders that have endured more or less intact into the contemporary age. They turned the country into a buffer and sometimes a contested zone in the “Great Game” played by the two powers. Their representatives became key players in Iranian politics—so much so that they had a hand not only in making and unmaking ministers but also in stabilizing the monarchy and influencing the line of succession throughout the century. This gave birth to the notion—which became even more prevalent in the next century—that foreign hands pulled all the strings in Iran, that foreign conspiracies determined the course of events, and that behind every national crisis lay the foreign powers. The “paranoid style of politics” which many have noted shapes modern Iran had its origins in the nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine that the “paranoid style of politics” that Abrahamian refers to must have continued during Reza Shah’s rule and the collective feeling of being dependent on the choices of Western powers must have increased with the invasion and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 48. On the other hand, Hamid Dabashi shows that this struggle for influence on Iran dates back to the period in which Napoleonic France tried to cut off Britain’s connection with India and clashed with both the British and the Russians to realize this goal. See, “The Poetics of Politics: Commitment in Modern Persian Literature.” *Iranian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2-4, 1985, pp. 147-188; 162-163.

<sup>89</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*; 36-37.

occupation of Iran in 1941 by the Anglo-Soviet forces that resulted in Reza Shah's abdication—and even more so with the CIA-organized coup d'état in 1953 that toppled the prime minister Musaddiq who had nationalized the Iranian oil in 1951.

Abrahamian further notes about the class motives of the Constitutional Revolution that they too were linked to the gradual penetration of Iran by the Western powers and capital. “This penetration,” he suggests, “weakened the tenuous links that had connected the Qajar court to the wider society. It did so in two concurrent ways. On one hand, it introduced a mutual threat to the many dispersed urban bazaars and religious notables, bringing them together in a cross-regional middle class that became conscious for the first time of their common grievances against the government and the foreign powers. This propertied class, because of its ties to the bazaar and the clergy, later became known as the traditional middle class (...). This vital link between mosque and bazaar, which has lasted into the contemporary age, can be traced back to the late nineteenth century.”<sup>90</sup> In December 1905, an event of tremendous significance took place in Tehran. While protesting the high inflation and taxes as well as the concessions given to Britain and Russia, a group of merchants were attacked in the bazaar by the Qajar police and two of them were bastinadoed in front of the crowd. This incident caused a wave of massive protests across the country and presented the first moment when the clergy and the bazaari shopkeepers and merchants began to act as a politicized class—as Abrahamian

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

states, at least they were the only organized and ordered group that acted more or less as a class before and during the Constitutional period.<sup>91</sup>

Lucien Rey, on the other hand, argues that in the Iran of that period, there was not an organized middle class (let alone a proletariat) that could realize and, more importantly, preserve a Constitutional system:

Still socially inchoate and culturally confused, the middle-class was unable to assume the political and ideological leadership of these national revolutions. Instead there was a loose front in which full-time politicians and petty bourgeois professionals and intellectuals, teachers, journalists, lawyers, etc., were prominent, but which also included anti-dynastic and patriotic landlords, clergy, army officers and minority groups as well as merchants and businessmen. Almost nowhere had the middle-class as such developed its own political instrument (...). In Persia, there was no party at all, merely congregations, mobs, brigades and conspirators.<sup>92</sup>

At any rate, it was mainly the loose coalition between the state bureaucracy, clergy, and the merchants and bazaari shopkeepers that worked as the mobilizing force behind the Constitutionalist movement. Their class interests sometimes made them anti-Qajar, at other times pushed them to align with the Western capital, Reza Shah, his son, and other contending figures and powers as long as they nurtured them. The flimsy and shapeshifting character of this coalition and its individual components is subjected to a scathing criticism in Hedayat's 1945 satirical novel *Hadji Aga*, where the protagonist, a cunning religious merchant, who has made a fortune by exploiting his relationship with the Qajar notables, later becomes a constitutionalist and an ardent supporter of Reza

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>92</sup> Lucien Rey, "Persia in Perspective 2." *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 20, 1963, pp. 69-98; 74.

Shah, and then cheers for his abdication and replacement by the British-backed crown prince, and for the complete reentry of Western capital into Iran. After the termination of the Qajar dynasty, he comforts his entourage by saying: “Don’t worry at all. Who cares about what’s happening? (...) In this delicate period, the fate of our country is in the hands of our supreme leader. No one can deny this: The imperial majesty Shanenshah, who is the most sublime and beneficent of all blessings right now, has put the new Iran on the course of progress by taking it out of an abyss.”<sup>93</sup> And after the chaos that causes Reza Shah to flee the country and the subsequent uncertainty come to an end, the narrator tells us that “all the thieves, traitors, spies, felons, and Hadji’s collaborators returned to Tehran victoriously. Hadji cut new deals with the factory owners in the city, calculated and regained what he had lost, and eventually changed his political views.”<sup>94</sup> As “democracy” and new ways of moneymaking are introduced by the British in Iran, Hadji Aga rejoices: “God damn them all! All these years they’ve made us fear democracy! If this is democracy, then I’ve been a democrat all through my life.”<sup>95</sup>

The Reza Shah period was marked by a state- and nation-building effort. As Mehrdad Kia writes about the post-1919 mindset of Iranian intellectuals, “In the midst of this anti-British nationalist fever (...) the revival of Zoroastrianism as the religion of the country and the re-establishment of a strong state on the model of the pre-Islamic Sassanid empire were offered as solutions to the backwardness of Iran and its domination

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<sup>93</sup> Sadık Hidayet, *Hacı Aga*, trans. Mehmet Kanar, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2013; 35. All translations from the Turkish editions of Hedayat are mine.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

and humiliation by the British empire. The new generation of revolutionary activists that came out of this experience was intensely anti-British, nationalistic and determined to turn Iran into a unified state with one language, one history and one culture.”<sup>96</sup> Needless to say, Reza Shah rises to the occasion and becomes the sole leader of Iranian modernization.<sup>97</sup> Considered, in Abrahamian’s terms, “a great ‘reformer,’ ‘modernizer,’ and even ‘secularizer,’”<sup>98</sup> he takes the surname “Pahlavi” with reference to the pre-Islamic Persian culture and even changes the name of the country following Hitler’s proclaiming himself the Führer in 1934. As Kia writes,

Greatly affected by the events in Germany and the Nazi ideology which emphasized the superiority of the “Aryan race”, the Iranian legation in Berlin suggested to the Persian foreign ministry in Tehran that since Iran was considered to be the birthplace and the original homeland of the Aryan race, the name of the country be changed from Persia to Iran. Reza Shah accepted the suggestion, and the Iranian government announced to the world community on the last day of 1934 that starting on 1 January 1935 the official name of the country would be changed from Persia to Iran.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, young intellectuals, including Hedayat himself, had conflicted feelings about Iran’s position before the West, the nature of the state, and Reza Shah’s ambitions. For one, there was an ambivalence stemming from the semi-colonial character of Iran. Rey observes that

(...) lacking the transparent modes of domination and the tangible physical presence of foreigners throughout the country which are characteristic of pure

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<sup>96</sup> Mehrdad Kia, "Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1998, pp. 9-36; 18.

<sup>97</sup> For a detailed discussion of Reza Shah’s modernizing and state-building reforms, see Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*; 72-91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>99</sup> Kia, "Persian Nationalism and Language Purification"; 21.

colonies, the special conditions of semi-colonialism create special difficulties for the anti-imperialist movement. In particular, there is extreme ambiguity about the nature of the state. The state embodies national continuity and is the repository of national traditions. (...) Hence the initial demand for a constitutional regime. Constitutional restraints, the separation of office from person, a popular chamber, would, it was thought, without affronting the crown and the historic and cultural values residual in kingship, yet change the relationship of the state with the foreigners. These formalist and timid aspirations failed to grapple with the realities of power. No meaningful transformation took place.<sup>100</sup>

This argument applies to the motives of the 1906 movement and the causes of its failure, the most emblematic sign of which was the turning of Majlis into a club of aristocrats without a consistent agenda of reforms. When in 1925 the Constituent Assembly finally abolished the Qajar rule and created a new Majlis, the reformists had great expectations; but eventually, this new parliament was filled with the representatives of propertied classes that swore an oath of loyalty to Reza Shah instead of the people. Gradually, the new state and its ruler became the target of intense criticism that was often suppressed with brute force. Abrahamian writes that

Much of the opposition to the regime came from the new intelligentsia—especially from young professionals who had been influenced by the left while studying in France and Germany during the turbulent early 1930s. They found little to admire in the shah. They deemed him to be not a state-builder but an “oriental despot”; not a selfless patriot but a selfish founder of his own dynasty; not a reformer but a plutocrat strengthening the landed upper class; not a real “nationalist” but a jack-booted Cossack trained by the Tsarists and brought to power by British imperialists. Some found his use—or rather, misuse—of history to be racist, chauvinistic, and designed to “keep them quiet.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Rey, "Persia in Perspective 2"; 72.

<sup>101</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*; 96.

The last vestige of hope the nationalists attached to Reza Shah was destroyed when he agreed on a convention in 1933 with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and for a very small increase on the Iranian share in profits, accepted to extend the concessions for sixty years—an act very much reminiscent of the privileges given to Britain and Russia by the Qajar shahs.

All of the mentioned classes that get into temporary alliances according to their interests and play a role in the shaping of political and social life of Iran are represented in *The Blind Owl*. They also have a significant impact on the narrator's life and especially three groups, the shopkeepers, the uneducated urban poor, and the adherers of traditional, religious culture constitute much of the world that lies outside the narrator's tomb-like room, and those groups are mainly represented by the figures of the butcher, the odds-and-ends man, and the healer respectively.<sup>102</sup> Yet, at some point, the narrator also cites others that have in different ways affected his life and these figures are "A tripe-pedlar, an interpreter of the Law, a cooked-meat vendor, the police superintendent, a shady mufti, a philosopher."<sup>103</sup> The narrator introduces the butcher as follows:

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<sup>102</sup> As the narrator's physical condition deteriorates, the healer is asked to examine him: "At last they sent word to the doctor, the rabble doctor, the family doctor who, in his own words, had 'brought us all up'. He came into the room in an embroidered turban and with a beard three hands-breadths long. It was his boast that he had in his time given my grandfather drugs to restore his virility, administered grey powders to me and forced cassia down the throat of my aunt. He sat down by my bedside and, after feeling my pulse and inspecting my tongue, gave his professional advice: I was to go onto a diet of ass's milk and barley-water and to have my room fumigated twice a day with mastic and arsenic. He also gave my nurse a number of lengthy prescriptions consisting of herbal extracts and weird and wonderful oils-hyssop, olive oil, extract of liquorice, camphor, maidenhair, camomile oil, oil of bay, linseed, fir-tree nuts and such-like trash." *The Blind Owl*; 65-66.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

The central feature of the city landscape as seen from my window is a wretched little butcher's shop directly opposite our house. It gets through a total of two sheep per day. I can see the butcher every time I look out of the window. (...) The butcher raises his greasy hand to his henna-dyed beard and begins by appraising the carcasses with a buyer's eye. (...) The butcher stands by the two bloodstained corpses with their gashed throats and their staring bloody-lidded eyes bulging from the bluish skulls. He pats them and feels the flesh with his fingers. Then he takes a long bone-handled knife and cuts up their bodies with great care, after which he smilingly dispenses the meat to his customers. How much pleasure he derives from all these operations!<sup>104</sup>

The narrator and the dog that watches the butcher's hand with regretful and innocent eyes both know that he has "the most exquisite pleasure" and delight while caressing the skinned bodies of sheep. And, then we get the description of the odds-and-ends man:

A little further away under an archway a strange old man is sitting with an assortment of wares spread out in front of him on a canvas sheet. They include a sickle, two horse-shoes, assorted coloured beads, a long-bladed knife, a rat-trap, a rusty pair of tongs, part of a writing-set, a gap-toothed comb, a spade, and a glazed jar over which he has thrown a dirty handkerchief. (...) He has inflamed eyelids which are apparently being eaten away by some stubborn, obtrusive disease. He wears a talisman tied to his arm and he always sits in the same posture. On Thursday evenings he reads aloud from the Koran, revealing his yellow, gappy teeth as he does so. One might suppose that he earned his living by this Koran-reading for I have never seen anyone buy anything from him. It seems to me that this man's face has figured in most of my nightmares.<sup>105</sup>

Inside this old man's shaven and turbaned head, thinks the narrator, all kinds of crass and obstinate ideas must have grown up like weed. The narrator dubs the people populating this world the rabble and in fact, we first encounter them, specifically the figure of the butcher, in *The Benefits of Vegetarianism* that Hedayat published in 1927. In this long

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

essay, Hedayat condemns meat-eating as barbaric, unnatural, and immoral, and he asserts that the history of humankind's artificial adoption of meat-eating is one of physical and spiritual degeneration that has given way to all kinds of maladies ranging from cancer to moral malevolence.<sup>106</sup> The slaughterhouse in this narrative becomes the epitome of a whole system of culture that glorifies dead and cooked foods as opposed to those that are alive and raw. "The whole nature is alive," says Hedayat, and "the practice of cooking destroys that life and transforms food into an unnatural being."<sup>107</sup> Alongside similar points he makes throughout the essay, this critique can be read as a general lament for the loss of natural authenticity and even as a subtler attack on modern mechanization or reification, with the slaughterhouse standing for the factory, the bureau, or the reproducer of any artificial and destructive idea, habit, and ideology, whose victims or captives are "innocent and calm animals."<sup>108</sup> In this connection, the butcher figure is not only a shopkeeper but also a more localized agent of an entire system based on cruelty and pursuit of money and self-interest, and it is worth noting that the disturbing description of the butcher and his shop in the passage quoted above is first made nearly verbatim in *The Benefits of Vegetarianism*.<sup>109</sup>

However, curiously enough, as Hedayat's argument unfolds, we understand that carnivorism, specifically in the context of Iranian history, signifies the corruption of the pre-Islamic Persia through the Arab conquest of the seventh century. As Hedayat

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<sup>106</sup> Sadık Hidayet, *Vejetaryenliğin Yararları*, trans. Mehmet Kanar, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014; 41.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

remarks, “The ancient Indian books reveal that the Aryans refrained from eating meat. (...) In Zarathustra’s teachings, those who kill the animals that Ahura Mazda created are called dirty murderers. (...) Ancient Iranians used to avoid the filth of animal food.”<sup>110</sup> The rabble lives unquestioningly, and even approvingly, in this debased culture whose moral mantra is “Be like vultures towards those who are weaker than you—the sick, women, the old, children—whoever is powerless, feed on their flesh.”<sup>111</sup> This is a cannibalistic social life and the perpetrators of this barbarism are the rabble-men who keep preaching about “decency, moral refinement, honor, modesty, and compassion. Judges, imams, teachers, poets, scholars, painters, writers, and those who think that they have nobler ideals in life than addiction to money and gluttony—their stomachs are filled up with the carcasses and coagulated blood of these living beings.”<sup>112</sup> The most important benefit of vegetarianism in this picture is that it provides society with a radically different conception of life; it almost gives the model of a whole new system that is egalitarian and solidarist, one that values life over death. Vegetarianism in this regard appears to be the name of a liberation practice, something akin to a complete cultural revolution that also necessitates the remaking of the political system. And as Hedayat argues, it is “the first step taken towards righteousness and honesty, and this step is extremely valuable for the future generations simply because it abolishes the master and slave relationship between human and animal. It eradicates ills such as forgery, parasitism, theft, and war.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 73.

Regardless of their conjunctural political leanings, the rabble clearly did not desire the kind of radical cultural and systemic change that was symbolized by conversion to vegetarianism in Hedayat's essay. Iranian intellectuals had intensified their criticism of the self-interested political insincerity, immorality, and fickleness of the rabble, or in more familiar terms, of the masses, as well as the nobles, politicians, and the clergy when the Anglo-Persian Agreement was signed in 1919 and it became a possibility that Iran might become a British protectorate. Aref-e Qazvini published a poem that was just one among numerous others voicing similar feelings:

. . . People of this lawless land are asses / By God both commoners and elite are asses / He who is the head of the ministers / I swear by the God of both worlds / Is a bigger ass than them all / In fact he is a stable full of asses . . . / Sheikh, police chief and the police are all asses / Wife, children and companion, all asses . . . / From the bazaar to the street, asses / Village, town and country, all asses / Those wearing hats and turbans, all asses / Worker and laborer, certainly asses / The preacher on the pulpit is an ass / From the altar to the door, asses.<sup>114</sup>

The elite aside, Aref was angry with the Iranian people precisely because they were politically ignorant, did not protect the constitution and the Majlis, their commitment to anti-monarchism was short-lived, and they quickly proved to be complicit in the corruption that the country fell back into. Katouzian emphasizes that in Iran "Politics itself was new. By the turn of the century there was not yet a Persian term for it, so the term *polteek*, a corruption of the French word *politique*, was habitually applied. It was

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<sup>114</sup> Aref ends his poem with these very intriguing lines: "The Bolshevik is the divine guide to salvation / — Blessed be Mohammad and his people — / O Lenin, O angel of blessing / Take the trouble if you please / You may nest in the apple of my eye / Please step in, the home is yours." Cited in Homa Katouzian, "Private Parts and Public Discourses in Modern Iran." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2008, pp. 283-190; 286.

later that the term *siyasat* was used, which did exist in Persian but had had other meanings.”<sup>115</sup> Also used in the Ottoman empire, the word “siyasat” comes from the same root as “seyis,” which means stableman or horse groomer.

Aref’s anger, moreover, demonstrates an important aspect of the Iranian intelligentsia that emerged along with the movements of constitutionalism and modernization, namely that they were all politically engaged thinkers and writers with aspirations that were not embraced in an organic way by the masses which rather depended on notable figures of the bazaar and tribal or religious leaders when making political choices. Speaking specifically about the anti-traditionalist writers of the pre- and post-constitutional period, Dabashi suggests that almost all of them had a sense of “ta’ahhod” (promise) or “vazifeh” (duty) to their people—terms he renders as “commitment”:

Commitment (...) is a preconceived notion of responsibility to supraliterary concerns, so that the artist enters the creative moment with the intention of conveying an idea, propagating an ideology, converting an audience, defending a cause, or mobilizing a mass. A noncommitted literature is not an artistic achievement devoid of any "social content" or "political concern." On the contrary, a work of art may very well reflect such sentiments or realities.<sup>116</sup>

It can be argued that the modern Iranian intellectual, by definition and as a result of a self-generated sense of duty, was expected to function as an orator or teacher. The intellectual was always already a public figure to whom the separation of the private from

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>116</sup> Dabashi, "The Poetics of Politics"; 150.

the public did not mean much. Hillmann makes the same point about the phenomenon of commitment on the part of Iranian writers:

From its very beginnings modernist Persian literature has been *engagé* as well, social commitment becoming a conscious *ta'ahhod-e adabi* [literary commitment] for Iranian writers by the 1960s. In fact, these modernist writers as a group of intellectuals advocating the same literary forms and modes of expression for basically the same purposes and confronting traditionalist opposition perceived as elitist and out of touch, a political power structure perceived as inimical and oppressive, and a populace perceived as uninformed and needing guidance, have constituted since the 1920s an important Iranian social movement.<sup>117</sup>

Hedayat too was a member of this generation of writers with a strong social commitment expressed through literary forms and styles that were still in their infancy—the first collection of short stories written in modern style had been published in 1921, poetry in 1922, and novel in “the early twentieth century.”<sup>118</sup> Having returned from France to Tehran in 1930,

(...) Hedayat joined the ranks of the students who had returned from Europe and who were facing repression, censorship, and threats of incarceration for their criticism of the regime. Among these returnees there were many who shared and supported Hedayat's antimonarchical, progressive, and isolationist views on the course that Iran should take. Indeed, three such young men, Mojtaba Minovi, Mas'ud Farzad, and Bozorg Alavi convinced Hedayat to organize a group to reflect their opinions. Hedayat agreed and soon a group called the *Rab'a* (Foursome) was ridiculing such conservative literati [who] clung steadfastly to the Iranian traditional literary staple, poetry (...). As expected, no sooner had the new

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<sup>117</sup> Michael C. Hillmann, "The Modernist Trend in Persian Literature and Its Social Impact." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1-4, 1982, pp. 7-29; 8.

<sup>118</sup> Mohandessi does not give an exact date for the publication of the first Iranian novel. See, "Hedayat and Rilke"; 210. Hillmann states that the first book of short stories was Ali Jamalzadeh's *Yeki Bud Yeki Mabud* (Once Upon a Time) published in 1921. The first collection of modern poetry was Nima Yushij's *Afsaneh* (Legend) that came out in 1922. See "The Modernist Trend in Persian Literature "; 10.

group begun its activities than it was denounced by the conservatives as "extremist" and was duly shunned by the majority.<sup>119</sup>

The anti-Islamist and anti-monarchical *Rab'a* came under the attack of not only the traditionalists but also of the emerging literary establishment sponsored by Reza Shah's regime to create the kinds of works that the new order needed to propagate its own nationalistic and corporatist ideology, not to mention the motive to deify Reza himself. Consequently, the group was officially disbanded in 1936; some of its members and followers were imprisoned and Hedayat had to flee to India, and "For a three to four year period—until after the [abdication of Reza Shah]—there existed no literary magazine throughout Persia, except the official magazine *Iran-i Imruz* (Contemporary Iran) whose editor was held in trust by the police."<sup>120</sup> Bashiri notes that in India, Hedayat started to doubt the possibility and meaning of creating literary works in Iran; he wrote in a letter that he had been taking lessons in Pahlavi, "But I believe that this (...) will benefit me neither here below nor in the hereafter... Now I realize that all that I have done and do has been and is futile... Recently I have been entertaining the thought of going into business with some partner and opening a small shop. But we lack sufficient capital..."<sup>121</sup>

This acute sense of isolation and being engaged in a futile endeavor finds its expression in the "ludicrous trade" of the narrator in *The Blind Owl*—like Hedayat, he is forced into self-exile epitomized by his tomb-like room and solitary existence in both

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<sup>119</sup> Iraj Bashiri, *The Blind Owl by Sadeq Hedayat*, 2013; 3.

[www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/BlindOwl/blindowl2013.pdf](http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/BlindOwl/blindowl2013.pdf). Accessed 18 Aug. 2017.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

parts. Given the brutal oppression and incarceration of intellectuals during Reza Shah's reign, it is quite understandable why Hedayat felt that way. Nevertheless, feelings of isolation and futility were not peculiar to that period; even if they had not been experienced as intensely and concretely as in the Reza Shah period, scholars underscore that ever since the early twentieth century, modernist intellectuals were in fact an isolated group without organic links with any social class and a larger public reading their works:

The presence of an intelligentsia was unique and unprecedented in traditional Iranian society. As a collectivity, this group, unlike any other, was alienated from a sense of solidarity with a particular class or status group. The attitude of the intelligentsia to religious and political authorities ranged from detached indifference to outright hostility; to propertied bourgeoisie, from benign neglect to moral indignation; and to the masses, from condescending sentimentality to self-sacrificing glorification. Thus a peculiar social stratum emerged that persistently remained isolated from the religious, political, and popular organizations of command and obedience, yet insisted on assuming moral and ideological leadership.<sup>122</sup>

Although Hedayat never glorifies or idealizes the masses even in his more "social-realistic" short stories about the downtrodden, he certainly joins the struggle for the moral leadership of society with one of his earliest published works *The Benefits of Vegetarianism*—an essay, as discussed before, that proposed a total cultural conversion to the set of values metonymized by vegetarianism. Dabashi further suggests that those intellectuals "were after grand ideas, eloquent ideals, abstract entities: liberty, equality,

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<sup>122</sup> Dabashi, "The Poetics of Politics"; 154. On the other hand, Hillmann asserts that the modernist writers "were not during the later Pahlavi years a professional class inevitably responsible and responsive to a magazine- and book-buying readership. Because their very limited readership consisted of themselves and other like-minded, mostly younger, modernists, they heard only encouragement for their modernism of form and content." See "The Modernist Trend in Persian Literature"; 23.

social justice. This gave the intelligentsia an air of lofty solitude, an ad hoc, unique, isolated, aloof, self-understanding: a messianic self-righteousness.”<sup>123</sup> No other expression than “lofty solitude” and “messianic self-righteousness” can better characterize the mindset of the narrator especially in the second part of *The Blind Owl*: He never stops attacking the rabble for being debased and worthless, and declares that with them he wants to have no relationship whatsoever. This resentment is stated most strongly when one day he decides to leave his sickbed in his tomb-like room: “I was running away from my own misery. I walked aimlessly along the streets, I wandered without set purpose among the rabble-men as they hurried by, an expression of greed on their faces, in pursuit of money and sexual satisfaction. I had no need to see them since anyone of them was a sample of the lot. Each and every one of them consisted only of a mouth and a wad of guts hanging from it, the whole terminating in a set of genitals.”<sup>124</sup> It is clear that this description is the same as the one made for all those that have internalized and learned to enjoy the culture of meat-eating or cannibalism. The narrator has no place in this detestable culture, and as his illness worsens, he begins to fantasize about death both to put an end to his pains and to get rid of this society of rabble-men forever: “What comforted me was the prospect of oblivion after death. The thought of an after-life frightened and fatigued me. I had never been able to adapt myself to the world in which I was now living. Of what use would another world be to me? I felt that this world had not been made for me but for a tribe of brazen, money-grubbing, blustering

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>124</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 72-73.

louts, sellers of conscience, hungry of eye and heart—for people, in fact, who had been created in its own likeness and who fawned and grovelled before the mighty of earth and heaven as the hungry dog outside the butcher's shop wagged his tail in the hope of receiving a fragment of offal.”<sup>125</sup> This society cannot understand and adopt the high moral standards of the narrator; they are Aref’s asses, and as such, they cannot follow the high political and social ideals of Iranian intellectuals, either.<sup>126</sup>

Alienation from society, resentment towards the people and their values, and eventually taking refuge in self-exile or madness are themes that Hedayat treats in “Three Drops of Blood” and “Buried Alive,” the two stories that are taken to be precedents to *The Blind Owl* thematically and stylistically. In “Buried Alive,” we are presented with an Iranian narrator staying in a hotel room in Paris who keeps record of his mental anguish and suicidal fantasies. Deteriorating health, recognizable marks of a disease, and the need

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>126</sup> Hillmann makes a striking comparison between Iranian modernist intellectuals’ failure to mobilize the masses and the Islamic movement’s rising success during the twentieth century that reached its climax with the Revolution of 1979: “But, it needs to be added that even if these [modernist] writers had been both prescient and political, it is doubtful that they would have been particularly influential through their writing, simply because—and the success of the Khomeini cassette tapes in 1978 is relevant evidence—in Al-e Ahmad's words ‘there are very few literate people and even fewer readers’ in Iran. In light of the thematic thrusts in modernist Persian literature cited above, the social and political direction Iran has taken to date in the post-Pahlavi era demonstrates that the influence of the content of this literature upon Iranian society at large during the later Pahlavi years was, in a word, negligible, despite its demonstrable popularity among some senior high school students, many university students, the nonestablishment literati and some other intellectuals, and some professionals.” See “The Modernist Trend in Persian Literature”; 23. Relatedly to this comparison, for a detailed discussion of how anti-modernist or anti-Enlightenment critiques of Western writers and philosophers (most importantly Heidegger) were utilized by the Iranian religious intellectuals including the Khomeini circle, see Ali Mirsepassi, “Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2006, pp. 416-433.

to write that experience even if it will not be understood by others are the central elements we read in the opening lines of the story which closely resemble those in the prelude and the interlude of *The Blind Owl*:

I'm short of breath, tears pour from my eyes, my mouth tastes sour. I'm dizzy, my heartbeat is laboured, I'm exhausted, beaten, my body is loosened up. I have fallen without volition on the bed. My arms are punctured from injections. My bed smells of sweat and fever. (...) A thousand kinds of astonishing thoughts whirl and circle in my brain. I see all of them. But to write the smallest feeling or the least passing idea I must describe my whole life, and that isn't possible. These reflections, these feelings, are the result of my whole life, the result of my way of life, of my inherited thoughts, of what I've seen, heard, read, felt, or pondered over. All these things have made up my irrational and ridiculous existence. (...) Nobody can understand. Nobody will believe. To somebody who fails at everything they say, "Go and lay your head down and die." But when even death doesn't want you, when even death turns its back on you, death which won't come and which doesn't want to come!<sup>127</sup>

Convinced that people do not decide to commit suicide but some are born and live with it, the narrator tells the reader how he has tried to die by keeping himself famished for a long time, by deliberately catching cold and having critically high fever, and by taking extreme doses of cyanide and opium, but none of these methods has worked. As he records these attempts and their physical and mental consequences, the narrator at one point states that "Now that I've written this down I am feeling a little better. It consoles me. It's as if a heavy burden has been lifted from my shoulders. How good it would be if everything could be written. If I could have made others understand my thoughts I would.

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<sup>127</sup> Sadeq Hedayat, *Three Drops of Blood and Other Stories*, trans. Deborah Miller Mostaghel, Oneworld Classics, 2008; 99-100. Although it is not found in the English translation of the story, "Buried Alive" has the epigraph "From the notes of a madman." See Sadık Hidayet, *Diri Gömülen*, trans. Mehmet Kanar, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014; 7.

No, there are feelings, there are things, which can't be conveyed to others, which can't be told, people would mock you. Everybody judges other people on the basis of his own values. Language, like man himself, is imperfect and incapable.”<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, a few pages after this statement, which is reused with slight modifications in *The Blind Owl*, the narrator changes his mind about the healing effect of writing because either its object is missing or it is too overwhelming a task as he must cover his whole life even to explain the slightest detail: “Finally I've been left alone. The doctor left just now. I've picked up paper and pencil. I want to write. I don't know what. Either I have nothing to write or I can't write because there's so much. This itself is a misfortune.”<sup>129</sup> At the end of the story he is found dead in his hotel room and the third person narrator that is introduced only then says that “These notes and a pack of cards were in his drawer. He himself was lying in bed. He had forgotten to breathe.”<sup>130</sup>

The third person narrator's last statement seems to reveal Hedayat's sarcastic approach to his character (in both senses of the word): “I always mocked life, the world and its peoples all seemed like a game, a humiliation, something empty and meaningless. I wanted to sleep a dreamless sleep and not wake up again,” says the writer of the notes found in that drawer. In this regard, he is not much different from *The Blind Owl's* narrator who displays a similar attitude of “lofty solitude” and moral negation of the world. Nevertheless, this attitude risks turning into a kind of philosophical dandyism if it

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<sup>128</sup> Hedayat, *Three Drops of Blood*; 109.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

cannot identify and articulate the true content or motive of the resentment upon which it builds itself. The narrator in “Buried Alive,” not knowing what to write or not being able to narrativize what he calls “my whole life (...) my way of life (...) my inherited thoughts (...) what I've seen, heard, read, felt, or pondered over,” gets into a paralytic condition and dies by forgetting even to breathe. In the end, all he can say is, “I am sick of myself and of everyone who reads this trash.”<sup>131</sup>

We encounter a similar paralysis in “Three Drops of Blood” whose narrator is in a mental institution and, once again, cannot explain what has caused his illness except by providing a story that reads like a whirlpool with its cyclical movement, mirroring characters, utterances, and other repeated narrative elements. The story, which does not at all see in psychosis freedom from the yoke of signification, opens with a paragraph that centers on the act of writing as a profound need and the potential remedy for an unknown ailment:

It was only yesterday that they moved me to a separate room. Could it be that things are just as the supervisor had promised? That I would be fully recovered and be released next week? Have I been unwell? It's been a year. All this time, no matter how much I pleaded with them to give me pen and paper they never did. I was always thinking to myself that if I got my hands on a pen and a piece of paper, there would be so much to write about. But yesterday, they brought me a pen and some paper without me even asking for it. It was just the thing that I had wanted for such a long time, the thing that I had waited for all the time. But what was the use? I've been trying hard to write something since yesterday but there is nothing to write about. It is as if someone is holding down my hand or as if my arm has become numb.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 9.

I would like to argue that whereas in “Buried Alive” and “Three Drops of Blood” the protagonists do not seem to have figured out the nature of their diseases and are unable to write into a sensible whole the etiology of their sufferings (of course this might be a result of the formal constraints of short story and the limited narrative material that it can contain), in *The Blind Owl*, Hedayat achieves what is left incomplete in his stories. And this takes me to the beginning of this chapter, namely the disease of the novel’s narrator and his endeavor to write it, thereby making himself known by his shadow and by the situation that has generated that disease.

Allegory is the name of the narrator’s whole procedure of making sense of his disease and allowing others to recognize themselves as its perpetrators in *The Blind Owl*. As Deirdre Lashgari notes, “The ‘disease’ from which the narrator suffers is described as the ‘experience which has poisoned my existence,’ and this experience is first of all his association with the ethereal girl as embodiment of the Ideal. (...) In the hope of restoring her, he pours down her throat that ambiguous wine from the closet shelf—only to find later, to his horror, that she has died. (...) The poisoning of the ethereal girl is a way of showing what inevitably happens to the Ideal when brought into profane contact with the ‘poisonous’ physicality, baseness, and time-boundness of the actually experienced present.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Michael Beard suggests that the novel’s main narrative strategy is “concretion, materialization of the abstract,” and the chief example of “such relation is between the two parts of *The Blind Owl*, a relation summed up by the term *mojassam*

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<sup>133</sup> Deirdre Lashgari, "Absurdity and Creation in the Work of Sadeq Hedayat." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1-4, 1982, pp. 31-52; 46.

(embodiment, incarnation),” which is “visible not just on the level individual stories but between them as well.”<sup>134</sup> Accordingly, when the Ideal of purity or idealized love depicted in the first part is exposed to the concreteness of the narrator’s immediate experiences and baseness of the characters surrounding him, it is lost forever and even seen in a light that reveals the fact that it is only a fantasy. I maintain that this Ideal is destroyed at the very moment when one tries to keep it alive precisely because writing it testifies to the fact that it is now nonexistent. The object of this Ideal can be revived and preserved only as an image just like the image of the ethereal girl’s eyes and expression that the narrator can draw before she loses life permanently. The living counterpart of the ethereal girl, on the other hand, is the bitch, that is the narrator’s wife.

The figure that mediates the ethereal girl and the bitch is Bugam Dasi, the narrator’s mother, as these three characters share the same appearance as the one found in the description of the woman the narrator draws on pen-cases—they are, in this sense, three different yet interrelated representations of the same being which must be Iran itself. During one of the hallucinatory sequences in the second part triggered by his illness, the narrator imagines his mother:

At this moment I can picture Bugam Dasi, my mother, wearing a gold-embroidered sari of coloured silk and around her head a fillet of brocade, her bosom bare, her heavy tresses, black as the dark night of eternity, gathered in a knot behind her head, bracelets on her wrists and ankles and a gold ring in her nostril, with great, dark, languid, slanting eyes and brilliantly white teeth, dancing with slow, measured movements to the music of the setar, the drum, the lute, the cymbal and the horn, a soft, monotonous music played by bare-bodied men in turbans, a music of mysterious significance, concentrating in itself all the secrets of wizardry, the legends, the passion and the sorrow of the men of India; and, as

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<sup>134</sup> Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel*; 29.

she performs her rhythmic evolutions, her voluptuous gestures, the consecrated movements of the temple-dance, Bugam Dasi unfolds like the petals of a flower. A tremor passes across her shoulders and arms, she bends forward and again shrinks back. Each movement has its own precise meaning and speaks a language that is not of words.<sup>135</sup>

In his article on various forms of art that exist in *The Blind Owl*, Beard compares the narrator's pencil-drawing and writing with Bugam Dasi's temple-dancing, and suggests that whereas painting and writing, dominant arts in part one and two respectively, are individual and solitary arts, music and dancing, "are social arts, a ceremonial communion with natural forces (e.g., the lingam) and with the past of the community."<sup>136</sup> The organic, living community one with its rituals and nature that Bugam Dasi represents stands in contrast to the frozenness of the Ideal and the ethereal girl as well as the fallen community of the dead in which the second part is set. Through the sequence quoted above, Beard asserts, Hedayat not only emphasizes that "Bugam Dasi's erotic intensity is impersonal, consecrated, public,"<sup>137</sup> but also "constructs a sexualized geography [that illustrates] his anti-Islamic reading of history"<sup>138</sup> and, one may add, his anti-imperialist sentiments as well. Islamic culture, except for some of the Sufi orders, does not espouse the vitality and organicity conveyed by the pre-Islamic culture of Iran, and Bugam Dasi is

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<sup>135</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 55-56.

<sup>136</sup> Michael Beard, "The Hierarchy of Arts in Bu-F-E Kur." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1-4, 1982, pp. 53-67; 59.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

“conquered” by the narrator’s father/uncle who is a fraud and role-player that cunningly adapts himself to the local culture only to infiltrate and subvert it.<sup>139</sup>

The mother’s figuration as a sensualized/sexualized geography, ultimately, refers us to another register that constitutes one of the central threads of the reading of *The Blind Owl* as an allegory of its national situation. Afsaneh Najmabadi demonstrates that the modernization efforts in Iran were discursively shaped by the redefinition, among others, of important concepts such as nation (*millat*), politics (*siasat*), and homeland (*vatan*); however, she notes, the gendered character of the crafting of these concepts has not been examined carefully enough. Within the Iranian nationalist discourse, Najmabadi observes, there emerged a slippage between the idea of purity of woman and Iran’s integrity, and through the concept of *namus* (honor), sexual honor was intimately linked to national honor, and vice versa. Whereas in premodern Iran *vatan* signified one’s birthplace, town or larger province, in its modern definition and precisely by being imagined as a female beloved, it came to refer to a “geo-body,” a bounded territory the integrity of which had to be defended.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, the patriotic discourse complemented the image of *vatan* as a female beloved with the notion of *vatan* as mother<sup>141</sup>:

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<sup>139</sup> As Beard remarks, “The fallen counterpart of the music which animates Bugam Dasi's world is the Koran recitation of the odds and ends man, which is described immediately before the Bugam Dasi story.” *Ibid.*, 59. I suggest that the roleplaying of the father/uncle too can be regarded as a corrupt version of the authentic, communitarian performance of Bugam Dasi.

<sup>140</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, “The Erotic *Vatan* [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and to Protect.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1997, pp. 442-467; 444.

<sup>141</sup> For an examination of how Iran was imagined and visualized in the first decades of the twentieth century as a sick and abandoned mother to be embraced and rejuvenated by the Iranian patriots and Reza Khan, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men*

The discursive production of *vatan* as a female body was achieved through the rearticulation of the classical literature of love into patriotic poetics. This made possible notions of *vatanparasti* [adoration of *vatan*, often translated as patriotism] and *vatandusti* [love of the homeland]. It also made the whole discourse of protection of woman—a body that needs protection against alien designs, intrusion, and penetration—and defense of honor available to nationalism. Iranian men, as a brotherhood of patriots, were concerned over the penetrability of the porous borders of Iran's geo-body, much as they displayed anxiety over who penetrated the orifices of the bodies of their female possessions.<sup>142</sup>

On the other hand, the threat was not only alien designs and penetration; *vatan* as the body of pure and honorable beloved was also threatened by the designs and avarice of Iranians themselves. In this regard, particularly the anti-Qajar discourse of prostitution and whoremongering, selling the country and its people to imperialists or collaborators who leave Iran wide open to foreign powers, gains a greater significance.<sup>143</sup> Just like the bastinadoing of Tehran merchants in the city bazaar in 1905, one incident played a crucially symbolic role in the rise and eventual, temporary success of the Constitutionalist movement by demonstrating how the loss of familial and national *namus* (honor) could also result from the Shah's non-patriotic despotism:

The most famous example of such multiple loss is the tale of the “daughters of Quchan,” in which the sale of young daughters by destitute peasants to Turkaman tribes in order to pay taxes to Asif al-Dawlah, the aristocratic governor of Khurasan, became a narrative of outrage and condemnation of the old regime and of political mobilization against it. In this one tale, multiple transgressions across many politically explosive boundaries were transcribed into a remarkable story.

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*without Beards. Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, University of California Press, 2005; 97-131.

<sup>142</sup> Najmabadi, “The Erotic *Vatan*”; 445.

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion of the jargon of “prostitution” and “whoremongering” used by the Iranian patriots before and after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, see Katouzian. “Private Parts and Public Discourses in Modern Iran.”

This featured class tension between peasants and aristocrats, ethnic, sociological, and sectarian boundaries dividing Turkish Sunni raiding tribes from Persian Shi'i settled peasants, and the selling of young virgin girls/daughters (*dukhtar*) (or the sexual honor of the family) to outsiders who were said to have taken them across the Russo-Iranian border—thus betraying national honor—and sold them to Armenians of 'Ishqabad—thereby transgressing religious honor. Through its narration in a variety of genres of revolutionary literature, this single act signified a multiplicity of national, sexual, and religious losses. The dissemination of this tale acted as such a powerful focus of national imagination (...).<sup>144</sup>

In *The Blind Owl*, the narrator's wife is presented as one of those daughters; although she was not "sold" to outsiders, she has been prostituting herself to the rabble-men who worship and reproduce that culture which Hedayat (and the narrator) despised for being corrupt, avaricious, and carnivorous. Members of the rabble, thus, are just the everyday representatives of Asif al-Dawlah; in fact, to the extent that they live by the same principles, the rabble-men together constitute Asif al-Dawlah and all that he stands for. As the narrator says, at the time he married his wife,

She was not a virgin, but I was unaware of the fact, and indeed was in no position to know of it; I only learnt it later from people's gossip. (...) I found out later that she had lovers right and left. (...) And what people she chose! A tripe-pedlar, an interpreter of the Law, a cooked-meat vendor, the police superintendent, a shady mufti, a philosopher—their names and titles varied, but none of them was fit to be anything better than assistant to the man who sells boiled sheep's heads. And she preferred all of them to me. No one would believe me if I were to describe the abject self-abasement with which I cringed and grovelled to her and them.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zanha-yi Millat: Women or Wives of the Nation?" *Iranian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1/2, 1993, pp. 51-71; 59.

<sup>145</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; 61-64.

This list of titles, together with the butcher and the odds-and-ends man, is almost the entire contemporary Iranian society; yet, the narrator's wife regularly sleeps with the latter two, the Koran-reciting odds-and-ends man being her favorite. And, as M.R. Ghanoonparvar observes, "while he did not wish to have any physical contact with the ethereal girl, [the narrator] is sexually obsessed with a wife who feels nothing but contempt for him and has always refused any relationship with him."<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, until the very end of the novel, the narrator does not impose himself on his wife because he is afraid that she might abandon him. At this point, let us consider two things: The narrator of *The Blind Owl* is an artist-intellectual and a writer-antihero, and the "bitch" is the corrupt counterpart in reality of the Ideal-ethereal girl, both of whom are ultimately two versions of Bugam Dasi, the symbol of the organic, pre-Islamic Iranian community. Then, the fact that the "bitch" submits herself to this utterly worthless group called the rabble should be referring to how anti-traditionalist and -establishment intellectuals, no matter how desperately they try to feel at home, find themselves perpetually ostracized in Iran. And from another angle, under the circumstances where the Ideal is forever doomed to remain as a reified image of purity and the longed-for organic community was lost long ago, all one is left with is the "actually existing Iran" (to use an old expression) which is dominated by the rabble morality, culture, and politics.

Najmabadi mentions that while she was once researching the late-nineteenth-century Iranian texts that redefined gender and engaged in constructing a new notion of

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<sup>146</sup> Ghanoonparvar, "*The Blind Owl*"; 796.

love relationship between men and women, she came across a curious piece written on this subject: “As I read a serialized essay in the form of a dialogue between two men about the travails of love, I was struck by the physicality of the descriptions of the beloved. Only in the third installment did I realize that the beloved was Iran, the homeland. I had been looking for a woman as the beloved; instead, I found the country as a woman.”<sup>147</sup> In that essay, the narrator speaks as a committed patriot passionately praising the chastity and purity of *vatan* and strongly arguing that its integrity must be respected and protected by genuine patriots like himself. His friend, however, insists that the homeland is just a faithless woman sleeping with whomever she fancies:

Stop admiring this cunning old woman, who changes her heart and does not keep her word. Now she sleeps painlessly next to an Arab, now in the arms of a Tatar ... now she is in the company of a Mongol, like a bunch of flowers that is passed around. How could any wise man and perfect person love a flower that is every minute with a different nightingale? ... Her beauty is worth nothing. Like everyone else, one should embrace her, bite her lips, suck her neck, taste her sugar, fulfill one's desire and then take leave from her. If a beloved is the ocean of light, the child of a *hur* [heavenly female beauty], the candle of camphor, if she takes a lover every minute and a different companion every hour, she does not deserve our attention and affection. So long as she is with us we take our pleasures; tomorrow she will be sleeping with someone else. ... This hag does not know loyalty. ... She is not worth a thing.<sup>148</sup>

If in this passage Iran is portrayed as a woman that gives herself frivolously to the historical conquerors and corruptors of the country, in *The Blind Owl*, the dimension of national classes and groups are added to that verdict—Iran is equally licentious when it comes to those who want to “bite her lips, suck her neck, taste her sugar,” sleep with her,

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<sup>147</sup> Najmabadi, "The Erotic *Vatan*"; 451.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 453-454.

and eventually leave her in an even more degraded condition once their interests have been served. The passage above instantly brings to mind the episodes in *The Blind Owl* where the butcher's assessment of the sheep meat is depicted in highly sensual and physical terms, and where the narrator recognizes the signs of sexual intercourse between his wife and the odds-and-ends man: "Two or three days ago when I shrieked out and my wife came and stood in the doorway, I saw, I saw with my own eyes, that her lips bore the imprint of the old man's dirty yellow, decayed teeth, between which he used to recite the Arabic verses of the Koran."<sup>149</sup> And one night, the narrator observes the butcher from his room and sees that "he carried two [carcasses] across and hung them from the hook at the entrance to the shop. I saw him pat their legs. I have no doubt that when he stroked his wife's body at night he would think of the sheep and reflect how much he could make if he were to kill his wife."<sup>150</sup> Needless to say, the butcher could easily think the same for the narrative's wife, too. As the narrator continues, we learn about his grave decision inspired by the sensual gratification that the butcher seemed to enjoy:

When the tidying-up was finished I went back to my room and made a resolution, a frightful resolution. I went into the little closet off my room and took out a bone-handled knife which I kept in a box there. I wiped the blade on the skirt of my caftan and hid it under the pillow. I had made this resolution a long time before but there had been something just now in the movements of the butcher as he cut up the legs of the sheep, weighed out the meat and then looked around with an expression of self-satisfaction which somehow made me want to imitate him. This was a pleasure that I too must experience.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*; p.107.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

And thus, one night the narrator sets out to fulfill his obsessive desire by disguising himself as the odds-and-ends man to get into his wife's bed. That night he both sleeps with her and kills her, and this dual act causes him to literally transform into the odds-and-ends man, thereby becoming one of them, one of the rabble-men that he has despised all along. The artist-writer narrator, in order to possess and enjoy the love of the beloved-*vatan*, has had to be possessed by its demonic spirit: "My eyes were without lashes, a clump of white hairs sprouted from my chest and a new spirit had taken possession of my body. My mind and my senses were operating in a completely different way from before. A demon had awoken to life within me and I was unable to escape from him. Still holding my hands before my face, I involuntarily burst into laughter."<sup>152</sup>

Ghanoonparvar suggests with reference to the original Persian text that the disease that overdetermines *The Blind Owl* "is not merely of the mind, but of the *ruh*, a word rich with connotations in Persian, encompassing the psyche, the mind, the soul, and the spirit. Thus, the disease is not simply mental or psychological, but spiritual, even metaphysical."<sup>153</sup> In this chapter, I have argued that this all-encompassing disease with connotations of transcendence is the Iranian situation itself and that Hedayat attempts to represent it with a totalizing narrative by using both a continuous, non-oriented narrative form and allegorical writing. This Möbius-like national space is disease-generating; it is populated by cannibalistic, self-serving crooks looting the beloved-*vatan*; and in this milieu where the country embraces the ways of the rabble, delirium, opium, or writing

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>153</sup> Ghanoonparvar, "*The Blind Owl*"; 799.

appear to be the only remedies available to the moral author. Or as Hedayat writes in a letter: “The point is not for me to rebuild my life. When one has lived the life of animals which are constantly being chased, what is there to rebuild? I have taken my decision. One must struggle in this cataract of shit until disgust with living suffocates us. In *Paradise Lost*, Reverend Father Gabriel tells Adam ‘Despair and die’, or words to that effect. I am too disgusted with everything to make any effort; one must remain in the shit until the end.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Quoted by Katouzian in his introduction to *Three Drops of Blood*; vii.

## Conclusion: A Semi-Peripheral Modernism?

My dissertation started with Orhan Pamuk's argument that there has never been a "genuine" modernism in Turkey. Reserving the authentic modernist literary production for the West, Pamuk based his observation on Tanpınar's commitment to a communitarian ethos and a writing style that resembled various kinds of realist novels of the nineteenth century. Tanpınar was a preacher of social values and a teacher of collective aspirations, and his main concern was the creation of a community that did not suffer from the identity crisis caused by modernization. Nevertheless, Pamuk claims that his diagnosis pertains to a much broader geography that, as it appears, is essentially characterized by being non-Western. He writes that

When a creator from a country or a cultural climate like ours encounters the main texts of modernism, he finds himself under its influence or—I'll go even further—decides to become a modernist; that is to say, when he wants to step slightly out of communitarian spirit and take advantage of the creative freedom that getting rid of it could afford him, he faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he is determined to exploit the possibilities that being demonic and detached from the spirit of society gives him. On the other hand, when he returns to the material that has shaped him and to the cultural climate from which he has emerged, he feels that there has remained no demonic light on his face. His face has turned into the radiant face of an instructor who wants to teach something to the ignorant. I mean that when we turn to our own culture the face that we have covered with a mask that has been learned or acquired from a different culture or climate, and that mask itself, almost always lose their demonic quality and our personality gains an instructive character. This has been the fundamental problem of Turkish modernism or of the modernisms of countries like ours (the Pakistani modernism or the Egyptian modernism, and sometimes in Latin American countries).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Orhan Pamuk, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar ve Türk Modernizmi." *Defter*, no. 23, 1995, pp. 31-45; 44. My translation.

I think that Pamuk's general description of the non-Western authors' position vis-à-vis their respective societies is not inaccurate as it seems to be a fair assessment that these authors have to reckon with the realities of collectivity more often than their Western counterparts do. What I do not agree with, though, is Pamuk's suggestion that the continuity between the private (demonic, existential or the psychological) and the public (the communitarian, pedagogical or the political) is experienced by semi-peripheral writers always as a crippling lack of separation between what must be dissociated in order for modernist literature to flourish. As it was proposed in the introduction of my study, the chasm between the public and the private cannot be regarded as a cultural virtue that underlies literary modernism. If this separation is detected as a characteristic of modernist works, instead of celebrating it as the source of a radical individualism or subjective freedom, one should rather read it as a symptom of a more universal phenomenon of fragmentation or differentiation inside various processes of social life which, in their former constellation and structure, could allow the social totality to be perceived and represented by literature.

My dissertation has suggested that this very trope of fragmentation could function as the conceptual framework within which different spaces of modernity and their literary works could communicate with each other. By examining different national literatures with respect to the crisis of representation that stems from fragmentation and its attendant mechanisms of reification and commodification, the altered perceptions of space and time including collectivity and history, and the autonomization of language or narration from its traditional referents and functions, literary scholarship can both singularize and make

comparable in a more fruitful way the differences between literatures that would otherwise continue to appear completely dissimilar or unrelated. The crisis in the representation of social totality and the discordance between subjective/collective experiences and the structural reality that conditions them are what make literary modernism possible, and when viewed from this perspective, the scope of modernism expands significantly without violating its historical specificity. Consequently, not only different geographies and peoples, but also a wider range of writing styles and sensibilities can have a place within an internationalist definition of modernism that rests on the universal yet uneven movement of capitalist modernity and its periodical and spatial variations.

Has my dissertation posited the existence of a uniquely semi-peripheral or semi-colonial modernist literature? In other words, has my discussion of Tanpınar and Hedayat foregrounded a more or less unified aesthetic style that belongs to non-colonial spaces such as Turkey and Iran? The fact that these societies occupied a transitional space within global modernity and experienced to varying degrees the economic and cultural realities of the metropolis and the colony could be singled out as a key factor in the creation of their literary modernisms. Both Tanpınar and Hedayat were highly knowledgeable about Western literature and the modernist narrative techniques and styles that were used in that part of the world. They were clearly influenced by some of their contemporaries; however, almost every idea or formal experiment they came across in Western philosophy and literature was repurposed in their works with the intention to create their own forms and styles. The abolition of the gap between the public and the private was

arguably the main motive of that revaluing or repurposing precisely because their semi-peripheral condition displayed a kind of coextensiveness between the subjective and the collective. In this regard, I would venture to say that, given the circumstances in which these authors produced, not writing in the mode described by Pamuk might even be a matter of intellectual honesty. As it is clear from Chapters 3 and 4, the individual aesthetics of Tanpınar and Hedayat have very little in common in terms of the styles or devices they employ in *A Mind at Peace* and *The Blind Owl*. Nevertheless, when Tanpınar takes Freudian psychoanalysis or Bergsonian theory of temporality, for instance, he immediately turns these thoughts into political and cultural ideas to be integrated into his dream aesthetics that addresses the problem of the representation of social life, historical consciousness, and collective culture. Likewise, Hedayat uses the techniques of European surrealism or expressionism in order to create a totalizing narrative that ultimately allegorizes the national situation of the early twentieth-century Iran. Both Tanpınar and Hedayat, hence, achieves to reveal the suppressed truth of the so-called inward turn in Western modernisms, namely that that turn was not an aesthetic value in and of itself but was effected by the growing fragmentation and irrepresentability of social totality, national and imperial spaces, the wholeness of phenomenological experience, and so forth. When the definition of modernism I have outlined is taken into consideration, it becomes possible to assert that national allegory and prophetic or quasi-metaphysical writing, to name just two forms or styles, are as “legitimate” components of modernist literature as the celebrated stream-of-consciousness, multiple points of view, or discontinuous narration.

One such well-known components of Western modernist literature, and of poetry in particular, is the image—a device that conventional accounts of modernism present as the indicator of a fondness for the fragment, the present, the sensuous, and the immediacy of perception. In his study on the emergence of the American scene of modernism, Frank Lentricchia comments on this very figuration of the image and contrasts it with the views of Harvard philosopher George Santayana who influenced the poetics of several prominent modernists including Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens:

(...) if it is the image which is the authoritative language of immediacy, the image which destroys the bridges of conventional action by making us “halt at the sensation” (...) if it is the image which restores the intimacy of idea and emotion, thereby unifying a sundered sensibility and reactivating (Coleridge’s great hope) the whole soul of man; if the image can do all of this, not engage, not revise, nor in any way transform the horrors of business to which it is a response, but rather take us outside, give us new consciousness without disturbing the world of the old (...) then there is something fundamentally empty about the social goals of literary modernism.<sup>2</sup>

This passage critically demystifies the core narrative of the academic ideology of modernism which proposes that it was only aesthetic liberation or withdrawal from the world of capitalism that literary modernism strived to realize, and it did not try to address this world in its totality with an eye to transforming and transcending it. This characterization may have become a program for literary production once the high modernist poetics had been reified into a schema of writing or a gesture of modernist bravura. However, Lentricchia notes, for Santayana, a poetry (and presumably any literary work) that limits itself to the function of the image described above—the

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartet*, Cambridge University Press, 1994; 11-12.

restoration of the integrity of perception, the aesthetic freedom derived from the immediacy of the senses—would only yield gratifications that are “random, disconnected, bound by private self-delight. Part of no world of others, it is merely isolated and a sin against community.”<sup>3</sup>

Lentricchia explains that Santayana, one of the theorists of early modernism, envisioned an aesthetics that could depart from “the phenomenological fullness and particularity of image and character”<sup>4</sup> but would not turn these into the absolute subject-matter or goal of literature. Against the danger of the glorification of fragments, disconnected images, stories, and characters as well as moments with no past or future, “Santayana’s antidote is what he calls the philosophical poem, the kind of poem (...) that not only contemplates ‘all things in their order and worth’ and every single thing ‘in light of the whole,’ but in so contemplating would *speak for* the totality envisioned—in order, as it were, to urge it into being. (...) Sensuous lyric presence in modernism becomes, or would become, a mechanism or rhetoric on behalf of totality and the larger narrative vision (...).”<sup>5</sup> It seems possible to suggest that Western modernist literature, to generalize Lentricchia’s remarks, aimed at registering the various levels of fragmentation witnessed in capitalist society, and that the techniques or devices it employed such as stream of consciousness or the image were the means by which it addressed that fragmentation. However, Western modernism did also intend to use those registering

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13-14. Original emphasis.

devices as part of a totalizing vision that would restore the relationship between the individual and the collective, the sense perception and the structure of the external world, the moment of subjective experience and the history or much broader temporality in which it is inserted. Santayana knew, Lentricchia observes, that the isolated desire for aesthetic satisfaction and autonomy projected onto modernist literature would remain shallow and inconsequential without that arguably communitarian and political vision.

Tanpınar and Hedayat too were aware of this danger; furthermore, in their situation, remaining on the level of the fragment would mean little more than following an artistic whim. Hence, Mümtaz's thoughts about existence or beauty in *A Mind at Peace*, for instance, eventually connect to the problem of collective history and culture to test their value, authenticity, and reliability. Similarly, the narrator of *The Blind Owl*, unlike those of "Three Drops of Blood" and "Buried Alive," can finally know himself and write his story precisely by narrating the whole that has fatally infected him. In a comparison he makes between Western and Eastern metaphysics, Mümtaz remarks that "the East did discover one secret of significance. (...) The secret of being able to see oneself and all existence as comprising a single totality."<sup>6</sup> The reference here is certainly to Sufism which, quite in tune with the Diotima of Plato's *Symposium*, sees love as a means of ascending to truth; in the case of Sufism, however, that truth is the unity of being—an experience which can only be represented, or rather intuited, in allegories such as *The Conference of the Birds* by the twelfth-century Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, trans. Erdağ Gökner, Archipelago Books, 2011; 196-197.

who attributes pure silence to the endpoint of the Sufi quest for unity with the divine. As we have seen before, for Mümtaz, Sufism is not important as a mysticist way of caring for the self; instead, what can only be allegorized (unity of being) itself becomes an allegory of what Tanpınar endeavors to achieve with his dream aesthetics, and that is the narrative unification of all the fragmented feelings, perceptions, history, and culture in modern Turkish society. And a similar desire to subsume different generations and social classes of Iran into a total narrative that revolves around the quest for self-knowledge becomes visible when the narrator of *The Blind Owl* says:

All of these grimacing faces existed inside me and formed part of me: horrible, criminal, ludicrous masks which changed at a single movement of my finger-tip. The old Koran-reader, the butcher, my wife—I saw all of them within me. They were reflected in me as in a mirror; the forms of all of them existed inside me but none of them belonged to me. Were not the substance and the expressions of my face the result of a mysterious sequence of impulsions, of my ancestors' temptations, lusts and despairs? And I who was the custodian of the heritage, did I not, through some mad, ludicrous feeling, consider it my duty, whether I liked it or not, to preserve this stock of facial expressions?<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, it seems justified to suggest that the ignored underside of “good literature” prescribed by the traditional accounts of Western modernism is clearly embraced by semi-peripheral authors; namely, truth is the totality.

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<sup>7</sup> Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello, Grove Press, 1989; 114.

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## **Biography**

Serhat Uyurkulak was born in 1979 in Izmir, Turkey. He received his BA degree from the English Language and Literature Department at Istanbul University. He holds an MA degree from the English Language and Department at Bogazici University. In 2007, he received the Duke Graduate School Summer Fellowship, and in 2008-2009, he was awarded the Seminar Fellowship by the Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University. He is the author of a collection of poems in Turkish titled *Sesini Aramayan Şiir*.