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GENDER ANXIETIES AND THE FORMATION OF A LITERARY GENRE

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Abstract: Having emerged in the late nineteenth century, the novel is a relatively new genre in Turkish literature. However, this belatedly-introduced genre offers rich material to explore patterns of gender identity construction. This paper proposes to discuss the understudied role of gender representations in the formation of the Turkish novelistic canon. My argument is centred around a basic question: Does our understanding of a text change if we focus on the male characters, instead of the heroine, in one of the most widely-analyzed Turkish novels? By examining Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil’s (1866-1945) *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*The Illicit Love*, 1900), the founding text of modern Turkish fiction, I address how conceptualizations of masculinity shaped early Turkish novels. I depart from the mainstream view that considers *Aşk-ı Memnu* a work that primarily relates to the issue of women’s emancipation. This new reading of *Aşk-ı Memnu* offers an opportunity to revisit the novel’s central status in the Turkish literary canon.

Keywords: gender, masculinity, literary canon, Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, Turkish novel

The interaction of gender studies and literary criticism is a relatively recent topic in Turkish studies. After the feminist turn in the 1980s, numerous scholars produced works exploring the link between gender and literary formation. The new research, mostly focused on female identities, offered a better understanding of Turkish literary

history, including ignored or marginalized works, through the lens of feminist theory.¹ However, representations of manhood have not received widespread scholarly attention.² In the male-centric Turkish literary criticism manhood has rarely been a subject of literary scholarship.

This paper proposes to discuss how representations and conceptualizations of masculinity played a central role in the formation of the Turkish novelistic canon. By examining Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil's (1866-1945) *Aşk-ı Memnu* (The Illicit Love, 1900), the founding text of modern Turkish fiction, I aim to explore an overlooked aspect of the novel. Halid Ziya transformed the sexual symbolism of early Turkish novels where the female is always evil, and the male is the victim. *Aşk-ı Memnu* is the first novel in Turkish literature that represents gender relationships as far from being one-dimensional. The present paper further explores the triangulation in *Aşk-ı Memnu* with reference to René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and reads the relationship between male characters as a contestation of masculinities. I argue that *Aşk-ı Memnu* is a landmark work with regard to not only its literary technique and style but also gender representations.

The Emergence of the Novel in Turkish

The Turkish novel emerged in the late nineteenth century, overlapping with social change and the Westernization process in the Ottoman Empire. Since it coincided with a larger modernization project, the emergence of the genre cannot be regarded as a separate incident. That is why the novel in Turkish has been traditionally examined as a part of the Westernization debate. Berna Moran observes that from the 1870s to the 1950s, Westernization dominated Turkish novels as a major topic (14). There were exceptions but the works that made the novelistic canon primarily deal with the anxiety of Western influence. All canonical novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century somehow correspond to the East-West discourse.

¹ For feminist inquiries in Turkish literary criticism, among others, see Aksoy, Çeri, Durakbaşa, Kandiyoti, Sönmez, and Parla and Irzık.

² For literary criticism engaging with conceptualizations of masculinity, see Parla; Gürbilek; Andrews and Kalpaklı; Saraçgil; and Günay-Erkol.

Between 1872 and 1900, approximately thirty-five novels appeared in the Turkish language (Finn 4). The first Turkish novel³, Şemsettin Sami's *Taaşuk-u Talat ve Fitnat* (*The Romance of Talat and Fitnat*, 1872) is a story of love at first sight that criticizes the tradition of marriages arranged without seeing the partner before the wedding. A key scene in Sami's novel gives a hint about the reasons for the belatedness of the novel as a genre in Turkish: the young protagonist disguises himself as a woman to see his lover at a store, after falling in love at first sight. As the scene indicates, in the nineteenth-century Ottoman social life it was difficult for lovers to interact in public because of gender segregation. To some critics, such as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, this restriction is a primary reason behind the belatedness of the novel in Turkish literature. Tanpınar notes that the modern novel requires observing interactions between men and women but the early Turkish/Muslim novelists lacked that experience (60-61). Therefore, they struggled to create plots around male-female relationships. *Kaçgöç*, the practice whereby Muslim women veil their faces and avoid contact with men who are not related to them was a foundational problem in the development of the Turkish novel⁴. The common solution to this problem was the excessive visibility of female slaves and non-Muslim minority or Western women in fiction works to eliminate the obstacle created by gender segregation. Female slaves and non-Muslim women, who could interact with men in public, were the best available agencies to create romantic plots, to address topics that were regarded as taboo in a Muslim society, and to convey the author's moral and ideological message.⁵

The hegemonic relationship between the male protagonist (who is always superior) and the slave or non-Muslim female (who needs to be saved) inevitably created a masculine tone in early Turkish prose fiction. Further social limitations such as censorship, the anxiety of belatedness to modernity, imperial decline, and emerging nationalism were also major factors that set male writers' tone and narrative strategies

³ For a challenging view arguing that the first Turkish novel is *Akabi Hikayesi*, see Vartan Paşa.

⁴ Regarding gender relations, Halid Ziya sees the late nineteenth century in a critical light: "It was a time when you could take a look at young women only as the blinds permitted. Or through the doors ajar..." (*Kırk Yıl* 258).

⁵ For example, in his 1881 novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında* (*Just Seventeen*), pioneering novelist Ahmet Mithat Efendi tells the story of a girl who works at a brothel. The author names the girl Kalyopi, a Greek name. Apparently, Ahmet Mithat Efendi was aware of the fact that giving the heroine a Muslim/Turkish name would have been regarded as offensive.

in pioneering novels. Reaction to Westernization, the awareness of the empire's decline, and the fact that traditional male privileges were now in danger; these three intersecting notions helped to create a dominantly masculinized pattern in the developing Turkish fiction. The literary response to growing Western superiority and the anxiety of belatedness merged with changing gender perceptions. In this process, leading Ottoman writers adopted an essentialist attitude: whereas the Orientalist discourse depicts the East as feminine, exotic, and sexually corrupt, early Turkish novels reversed this discourse and equated Westernization with feminization and corruption.⁶ That is why focusing on the representations of masculinity in early works can broaden our perspective regarding the formation of the novel as a genre and the literary canon in Turkish which has largely been discussed through female-centred readings. In this context, Halid Ziya's *Aşk-ı Memnu* marks a turning point.

Halid Ziya was perhaps the first Turkish novelist who considered the East-West controversy as a sophisticated problem.⁷ He created multilayered characters: the first genuine heroes and heroines of Turkish fiction appeared in the works of Halid Ziya. His richly textured fictional characters offer a fertile ground for gender analysis. Departing from the mainstream critical approach, I argue that the male characters in Halid Ziya's landmark novel are as significant as the female characters for observing gender representations and anxieties. Halid Ziya, after all, was part of a generation that was in search of the true masculine identity.

New Generation, New Masculinity

Halid Ziya belongs to the generation of late Ottoman intellectuals that were fully involved in a major cultural transformation. They experienced a change in gender-related social norms as an outgrowth of the Westernization debate. Their precursors, leading figures of Turkish literary modernization, were the first generation trained in

⁶ The Orientalist approach tends to see the "Oriental mentality" as a mindset that considers women as objects that exist only to sexually satisfy men. Some monographs of Ottoman/Turkish notables reflect this tendency. See, for example, Armstrong 11.

⁷ It should be noted that Halid Ziya's approach is more local and far from cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, the author portrays himself as a "Western" man. "The future is the West's," he says (*Kırk Yıl* 437), and argues that the first intentional Westernization attempt in Turkish literature began with his generation (412). In a rare interview, the novelist describes European civilization as a "bright sun" that illuminates the world (*Ünaydın* 52).

the Translation Office (Tercüme Odası) which was designed to create a new educated class to prevent the empire's collapse. This first generation of Western-educated literati experienced being torn between tradition and modernity; ambitious yet anxious and confused, they felt insecure facing cultural transformation. In their writings, anti-Westernism is blended with nascent nationalist and Islamist ideas. Since their nationalist stance had to be proved, they relied on a masculine discourse. They equated preserving the traditional male identity with preserving the empire. Successors of Halid Ziya's generation, on the other hand, who would be the founding figures of the new republic in 1923, would fully embrace Western values. Halid Ziya's generation, witnessing the fall of an imperial order and the birth of a new regime, was a bridge between the two generations.

That generation was aware they were living in a declining empire. Emerging nationalism and a quest for heroism during turbulent times shaped their understanding of manhood. The 1877-78 War⁸ was a watershed experience in the awakening of these ideas. Halid Ziya links his generation's early-bloomed manhood to the notorious war: "We had totally lost the joy of childhood." (Kırk Yıl 52) He recalls when the Ottoman army recaptured the Balkan city Pleven, where they held up the main Russian advance southwards into Bulgaria, the elderly used to say: "At least the honour is saved"⁹ (63). Drawing an analogy between national defense and sexual purity later became a pattern where agony of national loss is manifested through sexually loaded terms.¹⁰

When gender norms profoundly changed in the late-nineteenth-century Ottoman society, the most visible signifier of this transformation was the dress code. Western-style clothing was being widely regarded as a sign of corruption and effeminacy in that period. As Halid Ziya recounts with an anecdote, this perception was nurtured by nationalism: as a teenager, the writer once wore an Albanian-style dress, a gift from a family friend. When an imam saw him near the mosque, he yelled at young Halid:

⁸ The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 was a battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Orthodox coalition led by the Russian Empire. Also known as "93 Harbi" (the 93 War) in Turkish, the war was fought in the Balkans and the Caucasus. The result was a heavy defeat for the Ottoman Empire.

⁹ "Hiç olmazsa namus kurtarıldı." [My translation]

¹⁰ Halid Ziya's generation is not the only one that was shaped by the war. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889-1974), a novelist from the next generation, reminisces how the Balkan War (1912-13) influenced their circle of young writers (61).

“Shame on you! How dare you, in a time like that...” (31). Apparently, dressing in the enemy’s clothes was an unforgivable sin in the eyes of the imam. Halid Ziya recalls that taking off one’s fez was almost a sin for many Muslims.¹¹ It is significant that in the 1870s the fez, which had been introduced to Ottoman society only a few decades earlier, was now being seen as a marker of Muslim identity. The author also recalls how anxious he felt on one occasion when he went out without a fez (121). He further notes the bewilderment of fellow Muslims when they saw him fezless at dance parties (142). The symbolic value of the fez for Turkish men would become more important during the occupation years (1918-1923) when it turned into a sign of national resistance. The symbolism of the male headgear was a part of the manhood ideal during the shift from empire to nation-state¹².

Imported gender models create reaction and anxiety in any culture since they do not function as they do in their culture of origin (Jusdanis xiii).¹³ At the turn of the twentieth century, manhood styles and modes based on European culture were received by the Ottoman society with such anxiety and reaction. Westernized males are largely denounced as effeminate in early Ottoman novels but, when the cultural definition of masculinity changed in the republican period, being Westernized was equated with being an ideal man. The birth of the new nation-state provided a ground for the birth of a new gender model: the New Man. It was a modern and Westernized male figure distancing himself from the Ottoman heritage. While in the Ottoman period Turkish manhood was seen as a repudiation of Western masculinity, in the republican period it became a repudiation of conventional Ottoman masculinity.

In early Turkish prose fiction, what it means to be a man largely depends on the male protagonist’s relationship with Western culture. Tanzimat¹⁴ novelists projected their fear of losing national sovereignty onto male characters that, out of anxiety,

¹¹ Literary scholar Zeynep Kerman notes that Halid Ziya is the first Turkish novelist to pay close attention to the clothes of fictional characters and meticulously describe them in his works (145).

¹² For a detailed account of the male headgear in the republican period, see Jana.

¹³ In many cultures, importation of manhood models has been a heated topic. Michael S. Kimmel notes that early-American literature had a similar experience: in the eighteenth-century American literature, patriotic works parodied dandy pretensions as English import (11). As in the Turkish case, in early-American literature foreign gender models were seen as a threat to national independence.

¹⁴ The Tanzimat (Reorganization) period of 1839-1876 was an era of progressive reforms that deeply changed the track of the Ottoman Empire. “Tanzimat literature” usually refers to literary works produced between 1860 and 1896.

establish domination over Western or Westernized heroines. It is sobering to remember that the authors of these novels were in the process of adopting a new literary genre. The search for authenticity, which was a prominent topic in the making of the Turkish novel, created anxiety and gave direction to the male author to find mediums for a synthesis between their authentic culture and the West. In a culture that *kaçgöç* was a dominant practice, male novelists had little opportunity to observe intergender relationships in social context. However, the environment in which Halid Ziya grew up was different. The author spent his blooming years in non-Muslim minority communities where young men and women were able to interact in the social sphere. Halid Ziya was aware of this privilege and considered it as an opportunity to observe male-female relationships (Kırk Yıl 127). Living beyond traditional restrictions would help him to create his masterpiece, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, in which he addresses gender issues in a new way.

A Groundbreaking Work

The turn of the twentieth century marks the publication of Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil's groundbreaking work *Aşk-ı Memnu*. Literary critics widely agree that *Aşk-ı Memnu* is the first Turkish novel catching up with Western literary standards. According to Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, the novel as a genre in Turkish is established by Halid Ziya (Ünaydın 91). For decades, Halid Ziya's work enjoyed high esteem regardless of political or ideological differences.¹⁵ The phrase "Turkish novel begins with Halid Ziya" has been a sort of motto in the mainstream literary scholarship, and for more than a century, the novel's reputation has barely been tarnished.

Aşk-ı Memnu is a story of an affair between a young woman and her husband's young nephew.¹⁶ Behind the conventional love triangle plot, there are several layers of the narrative: the fall of an upper-class family, dangers of excessive Westernization, imperial decline, class problem, social transformation, and changing gender norms. A

¹⁵ Left-wing, socialist literary critic Fethi Naci and right-wing, conservative literary scholar Mehmet Kaplan agree that *Aşk-ı Memnu* is the most important work in the formation of the Turkish novelistic canon. This kind of consensus is not very common in twentieth-century literary criticism. Naci considers the book the first real novel in Turkish: "*Taaşuk-u Talat ve Fitnat* is the first Turkish novel only in the historical sense. *Aşk-ı Memnu* is the first novel that is still alive. Not historically, but literarily it is the first Turkish novel." (9) Kaplan considers Halid Ziya's work a foundational text and argues that "Halid Ziya created the Western novel in the Turkish language" (172).

¹⁶ The word "memnu" (illicit, forbidden) in the title is an obvious reference to the original sin.

brief outline will be helpful to track certain issues in the novel: Adnan Bey is a rich, widowed man who lives in a *yah*¹⁷ with his daughter and son. One day, during a cruise¹⁸, he comes across Firdevs Hanım, who is also a widow, and her daughters, Bihter and Peyker. Upon his obvious interest in the family, Firdevs expects a proposal from Adnan Bey, but the man asks for beautiful Bihter's hand. Disappointed, Firdevs eventually consents to her daughter's marriage, hoping to benefit from Adnan Bey's social and economic status. After a while, newlywed Bihter realizes that marrying a man twenty-eight years her senior (at the time of the marriage Bihter is 22, Adnan Bey is 50) was a mistake. Unhappy and despairing, she eventually falls for Adnan Bey's young and coquettish nephew Behlül. As a philanderer, Behlül enjoys seducing Bihter and sees an affair with her as a fun adventure. However, after getting what he wanted, he quickly gets tired of Bihter. Now fed-up, Behlül begins to lust after Adnan Bey's teenage daughter, Nihal. In a short time, the relationship between Behlül and Nihal grows serious, and they get engaged. While the couple is at the threshold of marriage, the "illicit" affair between Bihter and Behlül gets revealed. Bihter, crestfallen and ashamed, commits suicide¹⁹; Behlül lukewarmly disappears; Adnan Bey and Nihal, both wounded and abandoned, seek consolation in each other as father and daughter.

Like its predecessors, in *Aşk-ı Memnu* the Westernization discourse occupies a central place, and it is explicitly gendered. Mainstream literary scholarship in Turkey recognizes this fact; however, gender-related discussions on the novel are mostly centred on the issue of women's emancipation. Without a doubt, the female protagonist's quest for happiness and a liberated life has a significant impact on this tendency. I argue that the republican-era approach of equating modernization with women's emancipation also plays a role in this interpretation, since critical inquiries were mostly linked to the state ideology during the twentieth century. Gender-specific readings of *Aşk-ı Memnu* have largely sought to explain representations of the female

¹⁷ *Yah* is a waterfront mansion or residence located in Istanbul's Bosphorus. Living in a *yah* was a sign of belonging to the upper class in the nineteenth-century Istanbul.

¹⁸ The cruise was a setting for socialization for middle and upper-class families in the Ottoman Istanbul. Ottoman Divan poets described and praised cruise affairs in their poems. In the twentieth century, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, a founding father of the modern Turkish poetry, maintained this tradition.

¹⁹ Bihter's suicide in the end, to some critics, is Western imitation (Moran 59-65).

characters.²⁰ Bihter and Nihal, and in part Firdevs, have been the focus of critical analyses. The question of manhood, on the other hand, has been largely ignored, and male characters are reduced to secondary figures. In critical studies, male-female relationships have been examined from the female's perspective, and intra-gender relationships have been overlooked. Representations of masculinity remain understudied in the vast scholarship of *Aşk-ı Memnu*. My analysis, based on the assumption that neglected representations of male characters in the novel are as important as representations of their female counterparts, departs from the mainstream approach.²¹

Contested Masculinities

Masculinity and femininity are “inherently relational concepts...in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition” (Connell 44). They may also be relational in themselves; as Bourdieu points out, manliness is “an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men” (53). In first acclaimed Turkish novels, this construction is evident where the level of manhood is always measured by other men. In this relational construction of masculinity, pioneer novelists assess manliness with respect to the features of other male characters. Presented in sharp dichotomies, manhood is a relational quality in early Turkish fiction; heroes, either manly or effeminate, are employed to convey the author's moral message and promote his social agenda. I argue that this diametrical approach exposes prevailing anxieties of the late Ottoman period writers. Promoting the ‘true’ manhood was a way of defence against Westernization in their works: the ideal man is always courageous, honest, loyal to his family and country; his diametrical opposite, on the other hand, is an excessively Westernized, effeminate, ridiculous, and corrupt male.

²⁰ For example, Mehmet Rauf's reading of *Aşk-ı Memnu* is centered on female characters. Finn's reading of the novel is centered on Bihter (135-157). In his “Introduction” to the 2011 edition of the novel, literary scholar Muharrem Kaya qualifies Bihter as the dominant subject of *Aşk-ı Memnu* (12).

²¹ Not only the gender aspect in his novels but Halid Ziya's work in general needs a more scholarly approach. Some of his novels remained unpublished until the past decade. His first novel *Sefile*'s original text appeared in Latin script in 2006, 120 years after its serialization in *Hizmet* newspaper. As of 2018, there is still no unified critical edition of Halid Ziya's oeuvre.

Aşk-ı Memnu is one of the first novels in the Turkish language that goes beyond the conventional manliness/effeminacy dichotomy, laying out multiple masculinities and portraying a generational change in manhood. Before Halid Ziya, in prominent fiction works, male characters were used in comparisons to justify the author's ideological message. *Aşk-ı Memnu* departs from this didactic approach by avoiding the imposition of an ideal male or female role, which makes the novel 'modern'²². In Halid Ziya's work, traditional masculinity is portrayed as a component of a vanishing generation. An invisible but important male figure in the novel, Melih Bey, is described as a major influence on the late-nineteenth-century Istanbul high society. In fact, a part of the high society takes its name from him: "the Melih Bey circle" (*Melih Bey takımı*). Although he exists only by his name and does not take part in the plot, Melih Bey, a rich man, is a symbol of the fading glory days of Bosphorus²³. Firdevs and her daughters are known as being from the Melih Bey circle. Melih Bey, enthusiastically Westernized yet still patriarchal, is an emblem of the empire-to-nation-state transition period masculinity. Another male figure from the older generation is Firdevs Hanım's deceased husband. At some point, the narrator tells that this insignificant man's name has been erased, and he is called just "the husband of Firdevs Hanım" (23). The couple's gender roles had been reversed in their marriage where Firdevs used to act like she was the husband. That is to say, from the beginning, *Aşk-ı Memnu* portrays men from the older generation as characters who are gradually losing their male privileges and masculine features.

Major male characters in *Aşk-ı Memnu* are Adnan Bey and Behlül. Although they are not explicitly polarizing figures, they contradict in essential ways. Adnan Bey, the man who is being cheated on by his wife, is the paternal figure. In an introductory depiction, he is portrayed as an elegant man, traditional yet Westernized, a model of upper-class Tanzimat manhood; he is an "heir of complete Tanzimat civilization" (Tanpınar 280). The first signifier of Adnan Bey's physical appearance is the beard:

²² For the ambiguous and impartial nature of the modern, see Felski.

²³ The novelist Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar portrays the era as "Bosphorus civilization" (*Boğaziçi medeniyeti*).

... from a distance hard to tell if grayish or auburn, his beard is parted with a slight line, combed towards each side; always finely dressed, always finely living; his fingers, imprisoned in thin gloves, quickly clean his golden-stringed glasses with a white, elegant handkerchief; at every coincidence [Adnan Bey] sees himself as an excuse; a beautiful man, despite his skillfully hidden fifty years, still beautiful...²⁴ (43).

Elegance and manliness were the two components of an ideal urban Tanzimat male. The beard was an integral, even required part of Ottoman manhood.²⁵ Speaking of Middle Eastern gender identities, Afsaneh Najmabadi notes that, in the nineteenth century, the full beard was the single most important visual marker of manhood (233). The growth of a beard marked adult manhood and the adolescent male's transition to a desiring subject. Adnan Bey's depiction with a full beard immediately locates him in the patriarchal realm. The beard is a symbol of both respect and desire. Nihal, who admires Adnan, wants to kiss "the bottom of her father's beard" when she feels like a child (92).

Adnan Bey, a symbol of imperial dignity and elegance, is associated with a declining culture. The decline is expressed through a sexually loaded vocabulary and the man's fear of male incompetence. The fate of the sexual relationship between Adnan and his young wife is determined by Bihter's dissatisfaction. In a key scene, a turning point in the plot, lustful and desirous Bihter scrutinizes her body in the mirror. A woman before a mirror is a common image in art and it is used to emphasize narcissism; Halid Ziya employs this image as the heroine's decisive moment. Bihter suddenly becomes aware of her sexual desires and her husband's incompetence. In this unusual scene, she looks at her image "with a manly desire" (214), implying her husband cannot satisfy her. Feeling the intense call of the flesh, Bihter goes astray towards an illicit affair. Adnan

²⁴ "...uzaktan kır mı kumral mı fark olunamayan sakalları çenesinde hafif bir hatla ayrılarak iki tarafına taranmış, daima güzel giyinen, daima güzel yaşayan, ince eldivenlere mahpus parmakları altın telli gözlüğünü seri bir hareketle beyaz zarif keten bir mendilin ucuyla sildikten sonra her tesadüfte kendisine bir rica nazarıyla bakan, güzel, o kadar maharetle saklanan elli yaşına rağmen hâlâ güzel..." [My translation]

²⁵ The beard was a marker of high status in Ottoman society, and at times it was a requirement in the public service. As a well-known example, Şinasi, a prominent writer and poet of the Tanzimat literature, was fired from public office because of shaving his beard (Ünaydın 12).

Bey's sexual incompetence becomes the signifier of his failure and defeat against a younger male opponent who emerges as the prototype of a new masculinity.

The new manhood, represented by Behlül²⁶, displays hypermasculinity. Behlül, in contrast to Adnan Bey, is excessively Westernized and a prototype of the new generation. With his beardless face, this reckless womanizer is very different from Adnan Bey. Whereas Adnan Bey, the pillar of the household, possesses responsibilities, Behlül lacks this essential manly feature; he is irresponsible and disobedient. The tension between Adnan and Behlül is created through their contrasting masculinities. Whereas dignity is the primary manly virtue for Adnan Bey, Behlül's criterion for manliness is sexual conquest²⁷. Adnan Bey considers fatherhood and responsibilities to his family as real manly qualities. For Behlül, on the other hand, sleeping with as many women as possible is a man's true virtue. While having an affair with Bihter, he does not stop profligacy and sleeps with a number of girls. Behlül's sexual adventures solidify his claim that hypermasculinity is the ideal way of achieving manhood. Meanwhile, all the girls he sleeps with are from non-Muslim minorities or Western countries; thus Halid Ziya's depiction of the New Man does not fall very far from the counter-Orientalist discourse where the feminine East/ masculine West scheme is reversed.

Behlül's licentiousness implies another feature of the new manhood model: being a misguided and aimless male. One of Halid Ziya's achievements is depicting the social transformation in gender roles by avoiding the didactic approach of his predecessors. For example, Behlül is a graduate of Galatasaray, a French high school, the leading Western-based educational institute in Istanbul. For decades, being a Galatasaray graduate had been equated with being Westernized. As the novelist Selim İleri notes, Halid Ziya appears to imply that Galatasaray could only produce a prototype like Behlül (152). This is an example of Halid Ziya's subtle social criticism.

²⁶ Halid Ziya notes that the characters of *Aşk-ı Memnu* are based on real people who lived in the nineteenth-century Istanbul, especially in the Bosphorus high society, and whom the author personally knew: "There are many characters in the novel. None of them are depictions of certain people, but as a whole, their existence consists of pieces from several people. The accuracy of their portraits comes from this fact. For example, one of the main characters, Behlül, takes his qualities from one or two, maybe three young men that I knew, he looks like so-and-so, but he is not necessarily identified with them." (cited in Kudret 165).

²⁷ Womanizing Western ladies is a pattern that was employed in twentieth-century Middle Eastern novels, as a way of "conquest." See, for example, Tayeb Salih's *Season of the Migration to the North* (1966) and Attila İlhan's *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* (Negroes Do Not Look Alike, 1957).

Before Halid Ziya, Turkish novelists openly picked a side in the cultural contestation to promote their ideal gender models. Several prominent writers proposed ‘modest female’ and ‘manly male’ models to portray an ideal society. However, in *Aşk-ı Memnu*, Halid Ziya avoids this kind of approach. While multiple masculinities are represented in his work, the author does not promote one model over others. It is safe to argue that Halid Ziya is the first major Turkish literary figure to address gender identities, torn between the East and the West, as a novelist, not an ideologue, and this should be taken into account while thinking about the novel’s canonical status.

Manhood in Triangulation

There are several love triangles in *Aşk-ı Memnu*.²⁸ The essential ground for triangulation is the family: Halid Ziya follows his predecessors by portraying an affair in a setting where men and women can easily interact without breaking the social rules or violating the *kaçgöç* tradition. The easiest way to create a love plot in the early Turkish fiction was, besides slaves and non-Muslim minorities, was by using female relatives (Tanpınar 61). The setup in which Bihter is the wife of Behlül’s uncle and they live in the same house makes it a lot easier to develop the plot. Halid Ziya’s choice of putting an unhappy marriage at the center of the narrative is also not unconventional. Marriage has been a central theme in early Turkish novels and was employed as a pretext to discuss modernity, Westernization, and women’s issues.²⁹ While the family was regarded as sacred, men’s ties to their families were a signifier of the level of their relationship with the nation and with traditional values. Pioneer novelists widely used marriage as a metaphor of Westernization; in that marriage scheme, the male (Muslim/Turkish) side is always dominant (Parla 17). That is why foremost novelists, who also had political agendas, wrote a considerable amount on the family. The importance of a functional family was a dominant message in their fiction and non-fiction writings.

²⁸ The main relationships in the novel are formed according to the triangulation scheme: Bihter-Adnan-Firdevs, Bihter-Adnan-Nihal, Nihal-Adnan-Behlül, and Nihal-Adnan-Bihter.

²⁹ Some early Turkish novels put emphasis on this social issue. For example, see Ahmet Mithat Efendi’s *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek (An Angel on Earth, 1879)* and Samipaşazade Sezai’s *Sergüzeşt (Adventure, 1887)*. Also Şinasi’s *Şair Evlenmesi (The Poet’s Marriage, 1860)*, the first Western-style play of Turkish literature is a satire on arranged marriages.

Bihter's marrying Adnan Bey is an attempt to belong to a higher social class. Both Bihter and her mother Firdevs are Westoxicated³⁰ women, seeing marriage as the only way for social climbing. At the end, when the marriage does not work out, the author's message implies that the notable Ottoman bureaucrat Adnan Bey is not an appropriate husband for Bihter³¹. As Hoda Elsadda asserts in the context of the Middle Eastern masculinities, a turn-of-the-century man is "miserable in his marriage and feels totally isolated because of the cultural and emotional gap between himself and his wife" (37). Adnan Bey, as an exemplary character showing the conflicts in changing gender roles, fits into this model.

In first Turkish novels, the danger to a happy family always comes from outside and as a woman³². These femme fatales are either Western or Westernized females. This pattern was a moral basis of feminizing the West and maintaining a masculinized tone in the Westernization debate in the early Turkish fiction. In *Aşk-ı Memnu*, however, danger comes as a young male: Behlül. When Adnan Bey marries Bihter, the young woman gradually becomes aware of her sensuous desires, and the "other" one enters the scene. When fantasizing about secretly going to Behlül's room at night, Bihter thinks: "To there! To the room of the *other*..." [emphasis added] (275). As Jay Clayton notes, desire is intrinsic to both representation and social reality (34). Bihter's position as a desiring and desired object illuminates the triangular scheme of the novel.

In his 1965 work *Deceit, Desire, and The Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, René Girard theorizes the notion of desire in erotic triangles. In the Girardian theory of triangulation, desire is not autonomous; in a relationship between the subject who desires and the object that is desired, there is always a mediator. When the subject and the mediator are rivals, and they desire the same object; in Girard's theory, it is an internal mediation, and this is the basis of an erotic triangle. When a subject desires an object, his/her desire is formed or stimulated by the presence of a rival. Although the object changes, the triangle survives in each adventure.

³⁰ I borrow this term from Afsaneh Najmabadi to address excessive and random Westernization.

³¹ Literary scholar Ayşe Saraçgil asserts that in Halid Ziya's novel the longing for a fully-functioning family is openly displayed (161). I argue that this is a reductionist reading of *Aşk-ı Memnu* because Halid Ziya does not intend to show the importance of a functional family. Such a reading would be degrading the richly textured novel to a didactic text.

³² See, among others, Namık Kemal's *İntibah* (*Awakening*, 1876).

In Girard's reading, the triangle involves bonds of rivalry over a woman. Adnan Bey's and Behlül's desire for the same woman makes *Aşk-ı Memnu* a typical sample of a Girardian triangle. Contested masculinities of male characters, however, reflect a sophisticated conflict, not a one-dimensional polarization. For Girard, "a *vaniteux* will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires" (7). Behlül's vanity and pretentiousness imply not only his desire for Bihter but also his aim to challenge Adnan Bey³³.

In *Aşk-ı Memnu*, the dichotomy of patriarchal/dandified masculinity becomes visible through the quest for the heroine. Bihter's existence is a site for a clash of male desire, which is staged upon the female body.³⁴ Behlül's quest for manhood is largely an attempt at achieving his masculinity. The way to achieve manhood is to win over the woman at stake. Behlül is motivated by the ambition to challenge his uncle, and his desire thrives on crossing his uncle's domain. First, he wants to get Bihter; after gaining what he wanted, he desires Nihal. Obviously, to whom the women *belong* is more important to Behlül than who *they are*. That way he challenges traditional masculinity.

Behlül is portrayed as a young man who is a threat to the established male domination and to the paternal authority; he is eager to prove his competency against the father figure.³⁵ Since the psychical value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy and an obstacle is required to heighten libido (Freud 256), Behlül's desire is thriving on obstacles. The women in the novel are excuses for him to prove his masculinity. In other words, the heroines function as a ground for the masculinity contest between two men. Thus, I depart from the mainstream view that considers *Aşk-ı Memnu*, like *Madame Bovary*³⁶, as a work that primarily relates to the issue of women's emancipation. On the contrary, both Bihter and Nihal function as

³³ Behlül, a new male seducer figure in the Turkish novel, recalls the Western image of Don Juan. However, Behlül, a non-romantic interpretation of the myth, is different from the classical Don Juan image. As Girard points out, this interpretation can be found in the twentieth century abundantly (51).

³⁴ For an opposite view, see Saraçgil 160. Ayşe Saraçgil argues that Adnan Bey and Behlül are a site of a female clash between Firdevs, Bihter, and Nihal.

³⁵ One should not ignore the fact that there was a power struggle between Halid Ziya's generation and the founding fathers of Turkish prose fiction. For this debate, see Gökçek. Parla and Finn point out that the plots of the first five Turkish novels start with an orphaned male hero and this indicates the novelist's desire for breaking with the previous generation.

³⁶ When censorship committee did not approve *Sefile* to be published and the novel was censored, Halid Ziya recounts in his memoir *Kırk Yıl*, he thought about *Madame Bovary* and Flaubert's destiny (226).

agents for a rivalry of masculinities. They are not autonomous agents, but objects for men's "traffic in women"³⁷. The adulteress heroine, Bihter, is not a femme fatale like her predecessors but a victim of male contestation.

Conclusion

Having emerged in the late nineteenth century, the novel is a relatively new genre in the Turkish language. However, it offers rich material to detect and examine patterns of gender identity formation. It is within the literary genre of modernity where metaphors of masculinity and femininity are most evident. The novel's privilege as a ground for nation construction (Anderson) and the potential of gender as a category of analysis (Scott) render prose fiction ripe for observing cultural and social transformations where gender codes are at play. As Dror Ze'evi points out, fiction works are "as valid a source as any for cultural research" (7). In addition to the genre's availability for cultural analysis, early Turkish novels were written during a particularly tumultuous period, witnessing the shift from empire to nation-state, and are therefore suited to the examination of the change in social structures.³⁸

Gender is a "product of the social relations of sexuality" (Rubin 179). Manhood and womanhood are relationally constructed through social relations. Reading masculinity as constructed in relation to other masculinities produces a different result than reading it as constructed in relation to femininity (Henriksson and Häyrén 20). This fact indicates that instead of one type of masculinity, a variety of masculinities actually exist. This paper is centred around a basic question: Does our understanding of a text change if we focus on the male characters, instead of the female characters, in one of the most widely-examined Turkish novels?

³⁷ In her account of the origins of female oppression, Gayle Rubin uses the term "traffic in women." I refer to this phrase in a slightly different context, to explain Adnan and Behlül's power struggle through Bihter. Using women for men's favor is far from being confined to the "primitive" world, argues Rubin; it only becomes more pronounced in more civilized societies (175).

³⁸ Some prominent novelists, such as Kemal Tahir (1910-1973), famously make a parallel observation by arguing that the best way to understand the transformation of Turkish society is reading novels, not scholarly research. This approach gained popularity in the twentieth-century literary criticism. According to the critic Fethi Naci, the history of the modern Turkey can only be really understood through novels. Naci argues that an observation by a master novelist, for example on female fashion, is more enlightening than a sociological account, because only a novelist can catch the vivid details of the daily life (11).

Whereas in didactic Ottoman novels heroes always face a choice between manliness and effeminacy, in *Aşk-ı Memnu* the choices male characters have to make are more sophisticated. The manhood ideal of the first prominent Turkish novels is stereotypical: the manly hero is unfailingly perfect, and the dandy is corrupt and ridiculous. Bearing in mind the assumption that masculinity cannot be conceptualized as a fixed category and is rather a complex subject, one can detect a more realistic construction of manhood in *Aşk-ı Memnu*. Even in Halid Ziya's acclaimed realist novel, *Mai ve Siyah* (*Blue and Black*, 1897) the protagonist is romantic. *Aşk-ı Memnu* is the first Turkish novel to portray different kinds of genuine masculinities. While early Turkish novelists were nostalgic for the secure and stable manhood of the past, *Aşk-ı Memnu* departs from them by representing multiple masculinities. Halid Ziya treats the generational change from the "old" to the "new" manhood neither as a corruption, like his precursors, nor as progress, like his successors. This new reading of *Aşk-ı Memnu* offers us an opportunity to revisit the novel's central status in the Turkish literary canon.

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