

## TURKIC LITERATURE – 19th Century

Prof. Talat S Halman

### *Part i : OVERVIEW : Occidental Orientation*

#### *Reforms*

EUROPE STOOD IN AWE OF THE OTTOMANS, who crushed many states and conquered vast territories, going, as patriotic Turks will proudly point out "all the way to the Gates of Vienna "

The Ottoman Turks, proud of their faith and conquests, felt superior to the West until decline set in. From the seventeenth century onward, there were defeats at the hands of European powers, deterioration of morale and official institutions, and eventually the armed rebellions of the empire's non-Muslim minority. The Ottoman ruling class gradually became impressed with Europe's growing strength and technological achievements. The Renaissance had wielded no influence on the Turks. The printing press was not introduced to Turkey until the third decade of the eighteenth century, nearly 275 years behind Europe, and the first newspaper in Turkish came out in 1831. The political and ideological impact of the French Revolution was felt decades later, and the Industrial Revolution and its effects eluded the Turks for an even longer time.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the shrinking Ottoman Empire had started to turn to the West for ideas and institutions. After a series of limited innovations in the military, administrative, educational, and technical fields from the eighteenth century on, the Ottoman elite plunged into an extensive transformation usually referred to as "Westernization". In 1839, the Tanzimat (Reforms) Period was ushered in: legal, administrative, and cultural changes were introduced in quick succession. Literature was both a concomitant to and a major catalyst of these changes. The conservative religious establishment waged all-out war against Westernization, however. Cautious reformers recommended a synthesis of Eastern culture and Western technology: *ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente frux*. But progressive intellectuals pressed for extensive changes patterned after European models. The decline of the Ottoman Empire reached a critical point by the middle of the nineteenth century. Younger Turkish intellectuals started seeking the empire's salvation in technological development, political reform, and cultural progress fashioned after European prototypes.

New genres, adopted from Europe, gained ascendancy: fiction, drama for the legitimate stage, journalistic writing, the critical essay, and others. Translations and adaptations accelerated the Europeanization of Turkish literature. Young poets came into contact with European aesthetic theories and values. Although *aruz* was not abandoned, Turkish poets experimented with forms, rhythms, and styles. A reaction began to set in against excessive use of words of Arabic and Persian origin.

## *PART II : Poetry*

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poets were the principal champions of fundamental rights and freedoms—the conveyors of the concepts of nationalism, modernization, social and political reform.

Poetry acquired a social awareness and a political function in the hands of some poets who endeavored to gain independence from external political domination. Ziya Paşa (1829-80), Şinasi (1826-71), and Namık Kemal (1840-88); emerged as literary advocates of nationalism. Recaizade Ekrem (1847-1914) and Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan (1852-1937) echoed the French romantics. The latter, a prolific poet and author of numerous verse dramas, gained stature as a ceaseless innovator. His poetry covered a wide range of topics and had a philosophic bent as well as a dramatic impact.

The nineteenth-century men of letters inherited the classical and the folk traditions, but they turned their attention to the literary tastes and movements of the West—in particular those of France and, to a lesser extent, England.

The poetry of the Tanzimat Period and its aftermath had the imperative of revamping its forms, style, and content. It also assumed the task of giving voice to civil disobedience. Its practitioners, despite censorship, often acted as provocateurs and agitators for reform and social innovation and as propagators of rebellion against tyranny.

Poetry became a standard-bearer for such concepts as justice, nation, reform, sovereignty, modernization, freedom, progress, and rights. Şinasi challenged the sultan's absolutism by recognizing Grand Vizier Reşid Paşa as a kind of constitutional authority. Praising Reşid Paşa as a new type of leader, he asked "Is it any wonder that you are called the apostle of civilization?" and referred to the grand vizier as "the president of the virtuous people." Şinasi assigned a new kind of legislative authority to him: "Your law admonishes the sultan about his limits." Tanzimat poetry also introduced critical views of the Islamic world, as in an excerpt from Ziya Paşa's famous lament:

In the land of the infidel, I have seen cities and mansions,

In the dominions of Islam, ruin and devastation.

I have seen countless fools condescend to Plato

Within the Sublime Porte, that home of divagation.

A traveler on this earth to which we're all condemned,

I have seen governments and their houses of assassination.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

Ziya Paşa produced a long satiric poem, many parts of which his contemporaries committed to memory and Turks still widely quote:

Those who embezzle millions are ensconced in glory

Those who filch pennies are condemned to hard labor.

How could a uniform make a base fellow noble?

Put a gold-lined saddle on him, the ass is still an ass.

Pardon is the privilege of the holders of high office ;

Is the penal code used only against the meek?

The fiction, drama, and journalistic writing of these literary figures were less a substitute for poetry than an extension of it. Their articles and novels were read with greater interest, and their plays had a stronger impact because these writers were, first and foremost, famous poets.

The socially engaged poets of the era launched a consciously utilitarian view of poetry. They fulminated against some of the entrenched Oriental traditions and the repressive Ottoman society. Because of poems of protest or criticism, many poets were penalized and sent into exile.

Tanzimat brought into Turkish poetry a brave new substance—an explicitly formulated political content. Patriotic poets, in particular Namık Kemal lashed out against the sultan and his oppressive regime. His poems were richly rhetorical pleas for freedom and justice—as in the kaside(ode) "To the Fatherland":

We saw the rules of the age, their edicts of futility,  
And we retired from office, with honor and with dignity.

From service to their fellow men, true men will never rest,  
The brave of heart will not withhold their help from the oppressed.

A nation may be humbled, and yet not lose its worth,  
A jewel is still precious, though trampled in the earth

There is a core of fortitude, the jewel of the heart,  
Which tyranny cannot crush, might cannot tear apart.

How you bewitch us, liberty, for whom so long we strove,  
We who are freed from slavery are prisoners of your love.

Beloved hope of days to come, how warm your presence is,  
And how it frees our troubled world from all its miseries!

Yours is the era that begins, impose your mastery,  
And may God bring fulfillment to all that you decree.

The stealthy dogs of despotism across your homelands creep,  
Awake, o wounded lion, from your nefarious sleep!

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

The idea of sacrifice, valued highly by the Divan poets when done for the loved one, now assumed the form of sacrifice pro patria:

Let fate heap upon me all its torture and pain  
I'm a coward if ever I flinch from serving my nation.

The preceding and following lines by Namık Kemal are typical of the new sense of mission that emerged at the time:

Let the cannons burst forth and fire and brimstone spread  
May Heaven's gates fling open to each dying comrade  
What is there in life that we should shun falling dead?

Our greatest joy is to become martyrs in strife  
Ottomans find glory in sacrificing life.

In another poem, Namık Kemal reiterates these themes:

A soldier's proudest medal is his wound  
And death the highest rank a man can find  
It's all the same beneath or on the ground  
March heroes march and fight to save this land.

Namık Kemal, having established his fearlessness, also gave vent to his fury against the oppressors:

Who cares if the despot holds an exalted place  
We shall still root out cruelty and injustice.

The great debate in Turkish poetry from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present has centered around the poet's freedom to follow the dictates of his heart and art, as contrasted with his duty to serve his society.

Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha, who often collaborated in introducing new political and aesthetic concepts, sometimes came into conflict, especially over the extent of the literary changes to be effected. Their friend Şinasi observed: "Ziya and Kemal were both in accord and opposition-like two forces present in the flash of lightning."

**Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan**, often characterized as "the greatest poet of the Tanzimat era," expanded the horizons of Turkish poetry thanks to his erudition in universal culture. He had an excellent private education, formal schooling at the American college (Robert College) in Istanbul, lived for a while in Tehran, where his father was the Ottoman ambassador; then became a career diplomat and served in diverse posts—Paris, Poti (Caucasus), Golos (Greece), Bombay, The Hague, Brussels, and London. His poetry deals with themes of love and nature, death and metaphysics. His verses display mastery of lyric formulation and philosophical learning of both the East and the West. In his oeuvre, the principle of "art for art's sake" triumphed.

**Tevfik Fikret** (1867–1915), a prominent poet in later decades, combined in his poetry both the concept of "art for art's sake" and the function of spokesman for protest and civil disobedience. He propagated a novel view of man and society. Standing squarely against the traditional orthodox and mystic conception of man as a vassal to God, he regarded man as a vassal to God, he regarded man as having an existence independent of God. Tevfik Fikret placed his faith in reason over dogma, in inquiry over unquestioning acquiescence, in science and technology. He oscillated between romantic agony dominated by despair and an acute social conscience.

He defended the proposition that right is far stronger than might and that the people's rights will ultimately prevail:

If tyranny has artillery, cannonballs and fortresses  
Right has an unyielding arm and an unflinching face.

In poems that Turks often memorized and circulated clandestinely, Tevfik Fikret lambasted the oppressors:

One day they will chop off the heads that do injustice . . .  
We have seen all sorts of injustice . . . Is this the law?  
We founder in the worst misery . . . Is this the state?  
The state or the law, we have had more than enough,  
Enough of this diabolical oppression and ignorance.

His assaults on malfeasance and profiteering were equally vehement:

Eat, gentlemen, eat, this feast of greed is yours,  
Eat till you are fed and stuffed and burst inside out.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when an assassination attempt on the life of Sultan Abdülhamid failed because the sultan's carriage arrived on the spot a minute or two after the planted bomb exploded, Tevfik Fikret in his poem "A Moment's Delay" referred to the would-be assassin as "the glorious hunter" and bemoaned the brief delay:

The villain who takes pleasure in trampling a nation  
Owes to a moment of delay all his jubilation.

Fikret was a foe not only of the sultan and his henchmen, but also of religious faith and of senseless combat and strife:

Faith craves martyrs, heaven wants victims  
Blood, blood everywhere, all the time.

Tevfik Fikret bemoaned the sad plight of the declining Ottoman state. In a famous poem entitled "Farewell to Haluk" he reminded his son (Haluk), who was about to depart for university study in Scotland, of the empire's erstwhile glory as well as its ailments:

Remember when we walked past Topkapı,  
And in a square somewhere along our path  
We saw a plane tree . . . A giant, lifting high  
And wide its branches, its trunk magnificent,  
Proud and unbowed. Perhaps six hundred years,  
Or longer, it had lived its carefree life:  
Spreading its boughs so far, rising so high,  
That all around the city roofs, the domes  
Seemed to prostrate themselves in frozen awe.  
It is the story that our legends tell,

We see it in the distance, wherever we look.  
But this majestic tree, measuring itself  
Against the sky, is now completely bare—  
Not one green leaf or new bud on its branches.  
It is withering! That deep wound across its trunk,  
Was it the blow of a treacherous ax that fell there,  
The poison of an angry bolt of lightning?  
Proud plane tree, what fire is burning in your heart?  
What somber worms are gnawing at your roots?  
What hands will reach to bind your wound and heal it?  
Who will provide the remedy you need?  
Does the black venom that corrodes your strength  
Drip from the ravens circling at your head?  
Unhappy motherland, tell us, we ask you,  
What evil deeds have caused your suffering?  
Drip from the ravens circling at your head?  
Unhappy motherland, tell us, we ask you,  
What evil deeds have caused your suffering?

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

In the so-called Constitutional Period, which started after 1876 when the first Ottoman constitution went into effect ( although it was abrogated within a few months), Eşref (1847–1912), the most biting and exciting satirist of the time, struck hard at the sultan and his entourage:

O my sultan, this country nowadays is a tree  
Its branches get the ax sooner or later.  
What do you care if our homeland is lost,  
But at this rate you may have no people left to torture.

In a different poem, Eşref states in no uncertain terms:

You are the most vicious of the world's sultans.

Elsewhere he satirized the Sublime Porte, the seat of Ottoman power:

Everyone's honor and honesty belong to you, my sultan,  
So there is no need for either one in your court.

Anatolian poets also bemoaned the current social and economic conditions and leveled strong criticisms at the government. In the nineteenth century, Serdari wrote;

The tax collector rips through the village,

His whip in his hand, he tramples on the poor.

Serdari's contemporary Ruhsatî complained:

There is no justice left, cruelty is all.

Seyrani raised his voice against the merchants' exploitation of the poor people:

Alas, poor people's backs are bent,

We are left to the merey of commerce.

But, occasional outbursts of the rebellious spirit in folk poetry aside, it was during the Tanzimat and Constitutional Period that, for the first time, dissent and outright criticism in poetry for the sake of social and political change became systematic. Unlike in the eras before the mid-nineteenth century, the poet not only lamented social conditions but also advocated revolutionary or evolutionary change to remove them. It is small wonder that the leading poet-rebels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who asked for nationhood, constitutional government, basic freedoms, and fundamental rights were persecuted or banished.

Under Sultan Abdülhamid's suppression, most Turkish poets retreated into a fantasy world of innocent, picturesque beauty where, in a mood of meek sentimentality and lackadaisical affection, they attempted to forge the aesthetics of the simple, the pure, and the delectable. Their lyric transformation of reality abounded in new rhythms and imaginative metaphors expressed by dint of a predominantly Arabic-Persian vocabulary and an appreciably relaxed *aruz*. A French-oriented group of poets referred to as *Servet-i Fünun*, after the literary magazine they published, became prominent on the literary scene.

The **Servet-i Fünun** members, enamored of the romantic spirit, represented new directions for the formal and the conceptual process of Turkish poetry. They introduced numerous innovations yet failed to reach a wide audience because of their use of arcane vocabulary studded with words derived from Persian and Arabic.

During the same period, a few minor poets continued Divan poetry. Folk poetry, however, maintained much of its vigor and exerted considerable influence on many younger poets striving to create a pervasive national consciousness and purify the Turkish language by eliminating Arabic and Persian loanwords. Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), social philosopher and poet, wrote poems expounding the ideals and aspirations of Turkish nationalism. Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944) and Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı (1869–1949) used folk meters and forms as well as an unadorned colloquial language in their poems.

The short-lived **Fecr-i Ati** (Dawn of Freedom) movement, which stressed both individualistic aesthetics and literature for society's sake, contributed in some measure to the creation of a poetry that Turks could claim as their own.

It is interesting to note that in the first two decades of the twentieth century—a critical phase when the Ottoman state was in its death throes—three rival and occasionally embattled **ideologies** were publicized by and publicly contested among poets. Tevfik Fikret championed social and governmental reforms, including secularism and Westernization; Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (1873–1936) propagated the Islamic faith as a panacea for the decline of the Ottoman Empire; Ziya Gökalp and Mehmet Emin Yurdakul called for national unity based on the mystique of Turkism and a homogeneous *terra firma*, a movement that held sway from the early 1910s to around the time the republic was established in 1923 and beyond. The ideology of this so-called *Milli Edebiyat* (National Literature) benefited from the prodigious talent of Ömer Seyfettin (1884–1920), who produced well-crafted short stories steeped in a patriotic spirit—some of them poignant, and many remarkable for their satiric streak. If he had not died at age thirty-six, he would probably have achieved world-class virtuosity in the genre of short fiction.

**Mehmet Âkif Ersoy**, a master of heroic diction, devoted much of his verse to the dogma, passion, and summum bonum of Islam. His nationalism has a strong Islamic content, evident in the lyrics he wrote for the Turkish national anthem still sung today. Âkif's elegy "For the Fallen at Gallipoli" is a celebrated expression of the values he upheld:

Soldier, for these hallowed lands, now on this land you lie dead.

Your forebears may well lean from Heaven to kiss your forehead.

How mighty you are, you safeguard our True Faith with your blood;  
Your glory is shared by the braves of the Prophet of God.  
Who could dig the grave that will not be too narrow for you?  
If we should bury you in history, you would break through.  
That book cannot hold your epochs with all their rampages:  
You could only be contained by everlasting ages.  
If I could set up the Kaaba at the head of your pit  
And carve on it the inspiration that stirs my spirit;  
If I could seize the firmament with all the stars within,  
And then lay it as a pall over your still bleeding coffin;  
If I could hitch spring clouds as ceiling for your open tomb,  
Hang the Pleiades' seven lamps in your mausoleum,  
As you lie drenched in your own blood under the chandelier;  
If I could drag the moonlight out of night into your bier  
To stand guard by you as custodian until Doomsday;  
If I could fill your chandelier with dawn's eternal ray,  
And wrap your wound at dusk with the sunset's silken glory—  
I still cannot say I have done something for your memory.

This pious poet advocated the revival of Islam and had the vision of uniting all Muslims in an Islamic superstate. Yet he made a critical assessment of the backwardness of the Islamic world and proposed a conscientious type of Westernization:

I have spent years wandering in the East,  
And I've seen much—not merely idled past!  
Arabs, Persians and Tartars, I have seen  
All the components of the Muslim world.  
I've looked into the souls of little men,  
And scrutinized great men's philosophies.  
Then, too, what caused the Japanese ascent?  
What was their secret? This I wished to learn.  
These many journeys, this far-reaching search  
Led to a single article of faith.  
It's this—  
Do not go far for such a quest,



The secret of your progress lies in you.  
A nation's rise comes from within itself,  
To imitate does not ensure success.  
Absorb the art, the science of the West,  
And speed your efforts to achieve those ends,  
For without them one can no longer live,  
For art and science have no native land.  
But bear in mind the warning that I give:  
When reaching through the eras of reform,  
Let your essential nature be your guide—  
There's no hope of salvation otherwise.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

Servet-i Fünun poets—with the singular exception of Tevfik Fikret, who occasionally embraced social causes—preferred subjectivity to such an extent that they were criticized for taking refuge in an ivory tower. Many of them seemed unable to eschew exaggerated emotions, bloated imagery, and overblown language. On the whole, they succeeded in capturing a rather pleasing melodiousness and rhythmic effect even if some of their onomatopoeia seemed strained or superficial. Cenap Şahabettin (1871–1934) was a romantic poet who reveled in lyricism. Committed to formal flexibilities, these poets overcame the rigid styles of most of their predecessors by frequent use of enjambment. Having perfected their use of the sonnet and terza rima, they paved the way for many twentieth-century poets to feel more comfortable about freedom from time-honored stanzaic forms.

### *PART III : Fiction*

The Turkish venture into the realm of European-type **fiction** started in the 1870s. In the early decades, there was lack of clarity about the basic terms—short story or novella or novel? The pioneering works of fiction came from Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844–1912), Emin Nihat (d. ca. 1875), and Şemsettin Sami (1850–1904). Of these writers, Ahmet Mithat Efendi, remarkably prolific with scores of novels and collections of short stories he wrote or translated, popularized fiction. Emin Nihat, who died young, produced a single work, *Müsameretname*, a *mélange* of Boccaccio-like stories, mainly about love and adventure. Şemsettin Sami is generally credited as the author of the first Turkish novel; it deals with the need of schooling for girls and with the problems of arranged marriages.

The prominent poet Namık Kemal produced two novels: *İntibah* (Vigilance), which cautions virtuous people about dissolute living and wicked deeds perpetrated against them, and *Cezmi*, which shows better writing skill and was the first Turkish historical novel. In his only novel, *Mizancı Murat* (1854–1917), a respected intellectual and historian, gave voice to his critical views of sociopolitical problems and offered the idea of Islamic unity as a panacea. Promising short stories came from Samipaşazade Sezai (1859–1936) whose novel *Sergüzeşt* (1888), about human bondage introduced the techniques of realism in a firm manner. From Nabizade Nâzım (1862–1893) came the first novella of a Turkish village that heralded naturalism. He also wrote perhaps the earliest specimen of psychological fiction, *Zehra* (published posthumously in 1894), depicting a case of pathological jealousy.

Recaizade Ekrem, a leading poet and *littérateur*, who also emerged as an important theoretician of aesthetics and a major critic, produced late in his career a satirical novel entitled *Araba Sevdası* (Love for Surrey, 1896), introducing as its protagonist an Ottoman dandy caught in the web of family troubles. This novel successfully caricatured the excesses of Europeanization.

The Ottoman East–West syndrome in the search for European type of reform was perhaps best delineated by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, who assumed for himself the mission of educating the public by dint of literary works. His fiction and essays strove to preserve the best of Islamic values in the Westernizing endeavor of the Ottomans. His 1876 novel with a Europeanized protagonist, *Felâhât Bey*, and the virtuous traditionalist, *Rakım Efendi*, cautioned modernizers regarding the risk of losing their authentic identity.

Ahmet Mithat and most of the late-nineteenth-century novelists maintained a utilitarian stance about the function of fiction—mainly to educate readers, to sensitize them concerning the status and rights of women, to create a better social system.

When the ideal of “art for art’s sake” gained strength with the establishment of the *Servet-i Fünun* group, the turn of the century witnessed the appearance of the first truly refined Turkish novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) by Halit Ziya (Uşaklıgil) (1866–1945). This well-constructed novel depicts the life and the tribulations of a prosperous Istanbul family. Its narrative technique is gripping, its story line strong, with characters well delineated and dialogue vivid. First serialized in a daily newspaper, it was published in book form in 1900. *Aşk-ı Memnu* can arguably vie with some of Europe’s best novels of the time. Halit Ziya authored several other major works, *Mai ve Siyah* (The Blue and the Black, 1897), and *Kırık Hayatlar* (Broken Lives, 1924), mostly about human suffering.

A year after *Aşk-ı Memnu* appeared on the literary scene, another major talent, Mehmet Rauf (1874–1931), published a psychological tour de force entitled *Eylül* (September, 1901).

Thus, the start of the twentieth century augured well for the Turkish novel, which was destined to take strides toward impressive diversity and workmanship in the ensuing era, eventually culminating in the Nobel Prize.

Attaching themselves to the rising star of fiction, numerous late Ottoman authors—principally Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864–1944), Refik Halit Karay (1888–1965), Halide Edib Adıvar (1884–1964), Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974), and Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889–1956) produced easily readable works whose characters are identifiable and whose dialogues in the simple vernacular. Güntekin’s *Çalıkuşu* (1922; The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl, 1949), about a young woman who works in the rural areas as a schoolteacher, became a sensation and remained a best-seller for many decades. Güntekin and the others dominated the fiction of the early decades of the republic as well.

#### *PART IV : Drama*

The period from 1859 to 1923 marked the emergence and vigorous evolution of dramatic writing in Turkish. İbrahim Şinasi, poet, author, and translator, wrote the first Turkish play, *Şair Evlenmesi* (The Wedding of a Poet; 1860). A few earlier texts by others are probably not original plays, but translations or adaptations from the French. A play that is possibly an original, *Vakaayi-i Acibe ve Havadis-i Kefşger Ahmed* (The Strange Adventures of Ahmed the Cobbler), presumably written in the first half of the nineteenth century by an unidentified author, lacks unassailable authenticity. Şinasi's play, *Şair Evlenmesi*, which was commissioned by the imperial court, is thoroughly Turkish in style, characterizations, dialogue, and dramatic devices. Nüvit Özdoğru, a well-known man of the theater and translator, summarized the play's basic features:

A one-act farce, it ridicules the custom of arranged marriages. This was a very advanced

idea for the Turkey of that period. The play also reveals the corruption of some Muslim priests who did business by accepting bribes and suggests that people should not blindly follow the priests' teachings. The characters, more types than real persons, spoke in the vernacular of the day. With its broad humor and swift development of theme, the play is not altogether removed from *Karagöz or Ortaoyunu*. The form, diction, and the satirical content of the play set the pattern for other playwrights to follow.

With his six plays, Namık Kemal spurred interest in the legitimate stage and dramatic writing. His *Vatan yahut Silistre* (Fatherland or Silistria) is a patriotic play based on an actual event. When it was premiered on April 1, 1873, it aroused enthusiasm and nationalistic excitement. His other plays range in topic from an episode of early Turkic history, to the suffering caused by forced marriages to rebellion against tyranny to tragedy in an Indian palace to moral turpitude.

After İbrahim Şinasi's pioneering work, Ahmet Vefik Pasha (1828-91) and Âli Bey (1844-99) offered Molière adaptations; Ali Haydar (1836-1914) and Şemseddin Sami dramatized myths and legends; and Ahmet Mithat Efendi, following in Şinasi's footsteps, turned out many plays exposing the folly of antiquated social mores. These playwrights were acutely aware of their functions to educate the public, introduce progressive ideas, criticize social and political institutions, and satirize the types who were responsible for backwardness—for example, the religious fanatic, the bureaucrat, and the rabid conservative.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, were marked by censorship and suppression of works considered dangerous to the sultan and his regime. Plays dealing with revolutionary topics such as strikes, overthrow of government, and uprisings, were banned. The mere use of such terms as freedom, anarchy, dynamite, constitution, and equality could lead to the prosecution of authors and directors.

Under this censorship, innocuous light comedies flourished. Popular taste, too, was a major factor. Molière dominated the scene in nineteenth-century Turkey. Most of his plays were translated or adapted and served as models for scores of new plays by Turkish writers. Molière's principal characters found their counterparts in authentic Ottoman types. The misers, the misanthropes, and the hypochondriacs—Molière's anti-heroes—became the butt of Turkish satire. The comedy of manners and satirical plays exposing foibles and frailties reached popularity that was to become pervasive and perennial. Light comedies were characterized by slapstick, clowning, mal entendu, horseplay, practical jokes, sight gags, fleeing, infidelity, dialects and accents.

The earliest specimens of European-style tragedy written by Turkish playwrights made their appearance in the 1860s. The evolution of the genre was to remain under the influence of Racine, Corneille, Shakespeare, and others. Greek tragedy seems to have wielded very little, if any, influence during the last decades of the Ottoman state. But Elizabethan and French tragedy offered nineteenth-century Ottoman playwrights effective models that were assiduously studied and, in some cases, partially plagiarized.

Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan, one of the dominant figures of Turkish poetry and literary Europeanization, owes much of his fame to the plays he wrote between 1872 and 1918. His early plays were melodramas steeped in sentimentality. Of his twelve tragedies, ten are in classical or syllabic verse either in full or in part. Rhymes and the metric structure give the diction of these plays a forced and contrived quality. The plots are based on intrigue, impossible loves, heroism—all depicted in romantic terms and often set in cultures and periods unrelated to the Turkish experience: Assyrian, Arab, Mongolian, Greek, Macedonian, and so on.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were action packed for Ottoman Turkey—domestic strife, independence struggles, limited wars, emergence of a new constitutional

regime, party politics, World War I, the Dardanelles campaign, occupations, national liberation. In culture, the period was one of quest, ideological discords, Europeanization versus Islamic traditions. Literature served as the voice of conflicting ideas and ventures.

The Second Constitutional Period, inaugurated in 1908, ushered in freedoms that nurtured literary explorations. While the Servet-i Fünun movement stood on its laurels, the Fecr-i Ati group introduced new aesthetic principles based mainly on individualism and introspection. The members revealed Parnassian, symbolist, and Impressionist influences.

Other notable groups included the Nev Yunaniler (Neo-Graecians) poets and novelists, principally Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884-1958) and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who incorporated into their work many themes and aesthetic values from the Greek and, to a lesser extent, Roman traditions. Emerging as an alternative and in opposition to the Nev Yunaniler, another group embraced the heritage of the entire Mediterranean basin and sought to create a synthesis of the West and the East. They called themselves Nayiler, literally “Reed-Flute Players,” but figuratively “Virtuosos of Music.” Making melodiousness a prime creative asset, they stressed the ideal of “inner harmony” through Yahya Kemal Beyatlı’s influence.

The closing decades of the Ottoman state witnessed an abundance of translations and adaptations from Europe. This period was also the heyday of polemics and criticism. With great energy, the stage was set for the revolutions that the young Republic of Turkey would launch.