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An Implausible Juncture? Locating the Turkish Novel in an American Frame, from Neocolonial Anxiety to the 'Threshold Novel'[1]

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Abstract

My study investigates the possibility of a "juncture" between the Turkish and the American in a body of texts that do not simply represent another instance of national literature gone international, but a successful case of bi-cultural literature. The following paper will strengthen the 'American' frame around Turkish American literature by presenting three areas in which the "juncture" is particularly evident: first, the work of Halide Edip as the origin of the juncture and of Turkish American literature at large; second, the perception of Americanization in Turkey in the work of Alev Lytle Croutier; third, the issue of hybrid authorship in Elif Shafak´s 2010 novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. These three fields of analysis aim to show how Turkish American novels engage in a constant dialogue with the American literary and cultural tradition. This tripartite approach attempts to delineate a trajectory of Turkish American literature from an initial stage, where the view of the relationship with the United States is dominated by neocolonial anxieties, to more recent aesthetics of reconciliation. Through this discussion I hope to portray, perhaps provocatively, that Turkish American literature, as Rebecca Walkowitz has argued depends "more on a book's future than on a writer's past."

Keywords

Hybridity, Turkish experience abroad, Adıvar, Croutier, Shafak

Özet

Bu çalışma, Türk ve Amerikan edebiyatında bir "kesişme" olasılığını, ulusal edebiyatın uluslararasılaşması olarak değil, çift-kültürlü metinleri inceleyerek araştırmaktadır. Makalede, Türk Amerikan edebiyatındaki "Amerikan" çerçevesi özellikle bu kesişmenin açıkça belli olduğu üç yazar ile ele alınacaktır: ilki büyük ölçüde Türk Amerikan edebiyatının birleşiminin başlangıcı olarak kabul edilen Halide Edip'in yapıtı; ikincisi Alev Lytle Croutier'in yapıtında Türkiye'deki Amerikalılaşma algısı; üçüncüsü de Elif Şafak'ın 2010'da yayınlanan *Aşk* romanındaki melez yazarlık sorunudur. Üç metin incelemesi, Türk Amerikan romanlarının Amerikan edebiyat ve kültür gelenekleriyle nasıl sürekli bir diyalog içinde olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu üçlü yaklaşım, Türk Amerikan edebiyatını Birleşik Devletlerle olan ilişkinin yeni sömürge endişeleri tarafından biçimlendirildiği başlangıç aşamasından, daha yakın zamanda görülen uzlaşı estetiğine kadar tartışmaya çalışacaktır. Böylece, Türk Amerikan edebiyatının, Rebecca Walkowitz'in savunduğu gibi "yazarın geçmişinden çok kitabın geleceğine" bağlı olduğunun altı çizilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Melezlik, Yurdışındaki Türk deneyimi, Adıvar, Croutier, Şafak

In her article "Ethnic Fatigue: Başçıllar's Poetry as a Metaphor for the Other 'Other Literature'," Gönül Pultar invites us to problematize the concept of Turkish American literature. Pultar begins by indicating that the number of Turkish immigrants in the United States is small, and even smaller is the number of its members who are active in the literary arena. On the one hand, works in Turkish by Turkish American writers do not interpellate the American mainstream or multicultural America, nor do they refer to the experience of the Turkish individual on American soil (Pultar 125); on the other hand, those few novels written in English "adopt the attitude of the consensual American" (126). In other words, Pultar envisions Turkish American literature as either too Turkish to be American, or too American to be Turkish. Furthermore, Turkish American individuals seem to be caught in the paradoxically unproductive situation of not being discriminated against enough to take action. Yet, they remain isolated from the "predominantly different"

American society which would be "too positioned in the ontological space of the Other" to allow productive contaminations (Pultar 124).

I find myself in agreement with Jale Parla as she calls for new critical approaches to Turkish literature that may open up to hybrid formations, or, in her own term, to "novels of hybridity" (Parla 124),[2] but the problem highlighted by Pultar and others seems to be that the Turkish and the American spheres hardly ever intersect. For this reason, the "putative juncture" (126) between these two dialectic selves, sparking the possibility of an ethnic literature in English, appears implausible. Her argument recalls Ahmet Evin's assessment of the early Turkish novel, which hybridized Western form with local contents. "Due both to the incompatibility of [Eastern and Western] themes" Evin claims, discussing Namık Kemal's 1876 novel *Intibah*, "the unity of the novel is blemished" (Evin, quoted in Moretti, 62), as its structural defects are indicative of the unbridgeable distance between Turkish and European "methodologies and concerns" (ibid.). Jale Parla's analysis of Turkish fiction in the late 19th century – a century that had been marked by intensive Westernization reforms – develops along similar lines. For Parla, late Ottoman literature reflected the inevitable "crack" provoked by "different epistemologies that rested on irreconcilable axioms" (Parla, qtd in Moretti, 62). The quoted examples show that critics of Turkish literature have been extremely cautious in canonizing hybrid configurations coalescing Turkish and Western forms, pointing at their irreconcilability.

The same suspicion of mixed literary configurations that, to put it with Franco Moretti, "compromise between foreign form and local materials" (Moretti 60) seems to extend into the 20th and 21st century and undermine the possibility to talk about Turkish American literature. Yet, in his study of world literature, Moretti concedes that everywhere the modern novel arises "as a compromise between West European patterns and local reality," and notes that the historical forces which regulated the relationships between the West and the "local reality" kept changing, and so did the result of their interaction (Moretti 64). Hence, if Turkish American literature was an unthinkable phenomenon in the past decades, it does not mean it must stay forever unthinkable. Recently, two events made Turkish novelists visible on the international arena, and sparked an ever growing interest for Turkish culture in the West. First, the publication of Elif Shafak's first novel in English, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, in 2005; second, Orhan Pamuk's Nobel Prize

in literature in 2006. My contention is that, after these two events, the position of the Turkish American novel calls for urgent reconsideration. In fact, these two dates determined Turkey's parallel entrance not only in the world literary arena, but more specifically in the Anglophone literary market. Due to the sudden visibility and success of the Turkish novel, leading to an ever growing amount of similar publications, it is now possible to talk about the Turkish American novel as an independent province of world literature that can be retrospectively extended to sporadic, less visible works produced in the 20th century. Novels in English by Turkish authors that feature American characters, plots, forms, or locations, like those by Elif Shafak, Güneli Gün, and Alev Lytle Croutier, and in a different way, Halide Edip, refuse to be encapsulated in the space of national literature and address broader, international readerships.

In a later study, Pultar defines Güneli Gün's novel in English *On the Road to Baghdad* as "bi-cultural": "an amalgam of the representation of two cultures (Pultar 47, 48). I argue that Pultar's definition does not exclusively apply to Gün's novel, but can be expanded to the whole literary field of Turkish American literature, of which Gün is doubtlessly one representative. What is more, forms of hybrid or bi-cultural novels that interpellate the Turkish and the American cultures simultaneously appear as early as the first decades of the 20th centuries with Halide Edip's work, find a late 20th-century agent in Güneli Gün, and are all the more prominent in the early twenty-first century, if one considers Elif Shafak's and Alev Lytle Croutier's writing. Even though Turkish literature nowadays is attracting increasingly international readerships thanks to numerous translations, the aim of my study is to demonstrate the existence of a prolific branch of Turkish literature in a specifically American frame, written in English, negotiating the American influence on Turkey's modern identity, and addressing a double readership[3].

My study investigates the possibility of a "juncture" between the Turkish and the American in a body of texts that do not simply represent another instance of national literature gone international, but a successful case of bi-cultural literature. The following paper will strengthen the 'American' frame around Turkish American literature by presenting three areas in which the "juncture" is particularly evident: first, the work of Halide Edip as the origin of the juncture and of Turkish American literature at large; second, the perception of Americanization in Turkey in the work of Alev Lytle Croutier; third, the issue of hybrid

authorship in Elif Shafak´s 2010 novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. These three fields of analysis aim to show how Turkish American novels engage in a constant dialogue with the American literary and cultural tradition. This tripartite approach attempts to delineate a trajectory of Turkish American literature from an initial stage, where the view of the relationship with the United States is dominated by neocolonial anxieties, to more recent aesthetics of reconciliation.

With the selection of texts I present as contributions to the emerging Turkish American tradition, I hope to portray, perhaps provocatively, Turkish American literature as depending "more on a book's future than on a writer's past," as Rebecca Walkowitz puts it (Walkowitz 534). I embrace Walkowitz's definition of transnational literature as produced by writers who forged a new affiliation with a nation or national literary market different from the one where they were born, raised, and first published. Shafak studied and taught in Arizona but eventually went back to Istanbul, never renouncing her affiliation with its urban culture; Halide Edip travelled to New York frequently but never failed to go back to Istanbul; Güneli Gün and Alev Lytle Croutier left Turkey in their formative years. Their inclusion in the notion of Turkish American literature will not only attest the outlook on 'ethnic literature' I have been following in tandem with Walkowitz, but also anticipate my concluding remarks on how Turkish American literature demands methodological approaches that are different from those required by the study of immigrant literatures.

In fact, none of the writers I included in this paper are the sons and daughters of Turkish immigrants in the U.S. Yet, their novels participate in both the American and the Turkish traditions, developing an effective dialogue between the two. If these authors' highly mobile biographies do not fully qualify for inclusion in the Turkish American migrant community, the nature of their literary production clearly traverses the Turkish national borders and embraces a transatlantic dimension, making their contribution to the Turkish American literary tradition hardly debatable. As anticipated, I will conclude by explaining why Turkish American literature appears far removed from other 'ethnic' literatures in the United States and may appear elusive if read through the lenses of migrant literature. A different model which I deem successful and I am inclined to use is Ramón Saldívar's "borderlands novel," which appears compatible with Elif Shafak's own notion of cultures and literatures existing in a "threshold."

1. A Turkish American Beginning: Halide Edip Adıvar's *Turkey Faces West*

Halide Edip Adıvar (1919-1923) was an acclaimed Turkish writer and intellectual. She is the author of political novels and a leading activist of the national cause, which earned her the nickname "Mother of the Turks." Besides her activity as an intellectual, Edip also fought with the Nationalist Army in the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), which ended with the birth of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Edip and her husband fled on a voluntary exile in 1925, after the Progressive Republican Party, which they helped found, was closed, not to return until 1939. During that period abroad, Edip published four works in English: two books of memoirs, *Memoirs of Halide Edip* (1926) and *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928), a historical essay, *Turkey Faces West* (1930), and a novel, *The Clown and his Daughter* (1935). In fact, in his preface to *Turkey Faces West*, Edward Mead Earle stresses that "Madame Halide Edib is not new to American readers" (Edip xiii). Regarding Edip's special affiliation to the United States, it is important to note that, at the end of World War One, Edip resented the perspective of the Ottoman Empire being parceled out to the Allied powers, and advocated for an American protectorate over the Ottoman territories. This solution would have allowed the Ottoman empire to stay intact, and the rising American power, which Edip perceived as more influential than Europe, would have protected Europe from the Allies' imperialist venture (Adak 510). Her exilic experience, her publications in English, her sympathies for the United States (where she sent her own sons in order to protect them from the horrors of the war), and her own frequent travels beyond the Atlantic, where she delivered lectures and taught at American universities, would suffice to justify the possibility to locate Edip and her work in an world perspective.

Turkey Faces West is a historical text presenting Turkey, its empire, and its struggle for independence to international audiences, and it best expresses Edip's attempt to reach out for an American readership.[4] It is my contention that the book is not simply aimed at international literary markets, but it engages in a specific dialogue with the United States. In fact, Mead Earle's preface describes *Turkey Faces West* as a work that "views modern Turkey in a world perspective" (xiii), and specifies that Edip is a "voice to which Americans can listen with sympathy and confidence" (x).

The rationale behind Mead Earle's last statement is to highlight Edip's as a partial and yet supposedly unbiased work on Turkish history and culture, delivered by "a prophet not without honor in her country" (x), but nevertheless revealing unpleasant truths about the relationship between Turkey and the West (xii). Yet, I will argue that Edip's implied reader in *Turkey Faces West* is American, as the entire work is permeated with the research of common ground between the Turkish and the American cultural imageries. Edip's construction of Turkey's cultural background, religious orientation, and struggle for independence is implicitly and yet unambiguously paralleled with the American experience. From its Middle Eastern location and in spite of the distance, Edip's Turkey seems to participate in certain American narratives, especially those that underline the basic cultural differences between America and Europe. Edip's American readers will identify with the principles on which the Turkish Republic has been established, and notice an affinity between Turkey's struggle against European imperialism and their own. I will further argue that Europe plays a central role in the success of Edip's ideal Turkish-American conjunction. Mead Earle admits that Edip is "sharply critical of the West and its relations with the Turks," and "one feels that she speaks the truth, however unpleasant" (xii). Nevertheless, in spite of the *mea culpa* articulated by the American intellectual Mead Earle in his preface, this study will demonstrate that in Edip's cartography, the 'West' coincides with Europe, rather than the United States. Europe emerges as the ultimate common ground between Edip and her American readers: if not a common enemy, Europe is the surface through which or against which both Turkey and the United States have defined their national identity.

A passage that clearly showcases the paralleling of Turkish and American nationalist struggles is one where Edip describes nationalism as a phenomenon most likely to take root in Western European countries than Turkey, due to the different composition of their respective national communities.

> The ideal Western nationalist state is composed of people all speaking the same language and more or less of the same race. Such an ideal was comparatively easily realized in Western Europe, where languages and races are segregated

> in large territorial areas; but it became less simple when applied to a country where languages, races, and religions are so geographically intermixed that in some parts it looks like a human mosaic. (Edip 75)

The achievement of the nationalist model seems to Edip rather unproblematic in Western Europe, where national borders divide allegedly homogeneous, monocultural communities, while the same model would not necessarily be successful in Turkey, where "languages, races, and religions are … geographically intermixed" (75). Edip's definition of Turkey's landscape as rich with different religions, languages, and ethnic groups brings to mind discourses of American multiculturalism and tangential narratives such as the 'melting pot,' especially Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's understanding of it as "that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country" (Crèvecoeur 283).

It is my impression that, in spite of the factual tone of the passage, Edip is passing judgment on the two different models of cultural distribution: the Turkish/American and the European. This is due to the use of words such as "segregated" and "mosaic" (Edip 75). The image of a mosaic, employed to portray the cultural variety of the Turkish population, creates the association with a work of art, and implicitly manifests appreciation for systems where different races and religions coexist, such as Turkey and the United States. The reader, who is familiar with the beauty of mosaics, cannot fail to see a connection with the beauty of cultural diversity. Even though the term 'mosaic' in reference to a North American context as an alternative to the debatable concept of 'melting pot' dates back to 1938,[5] a few years after the publication of *Turkey Faces West*, the reader is confronted with a very powerful connection between the Turkish and the American systems on the basis of multiculturalism.

The image of homogeneous communities being "segregated" within national borders, instead, carries a completely different connotation and ties in with another myth of American nationalism, namely, the 'frontier.' Edip's political militancy for the nationalist cause in Turkey excludes anti-nationalistic biases. Thus, the force of a term like "segregation" suggests that the narrator might disapprove of the European system as a succession of uncommunicative monocultural

entities, preferring a more heterogeneous model. This evokes Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, especially with regards to the difference between European and American frontiers. For Turner, "the American frontier is sharply distinguished from the European frontier – a fortified boundary line running through dense populations" (Turner 5).

A word of caution is needed here: there is no such thing as a myth of a westward expansion as in Turner in Edip's Turkey. Yet, Edip's implicit references to discourses of multiculturalism in America and the frontier highlight a key factor that is intrinsic to American and Turkish nationalist discourses, and essential to bring Turkey closer to the United States, namely, the shared attempt to seek national definition against European paradigms of thought. The cultural narratives of the melting pot and the frontier communicate, to say it with Turner, "how America modified and developed [European] life and reacted on Europe" (ibid.). Edip's Turkey seems invested in the same attempt, which becomes evident when Edip wonders if Turkey, having absorbed the germs of European culture over decades of Westernizing reforms, may not "develop it and become its keeper and sole representative" (Edip 196). Similar to early American nationalist discourses, Edip has ceased to believe in Europe's potential to be a role model for the young Republic of Turkey: Europe is the "Old West" whose days are numbered, while Turkey represents "something new struggling to be born, [a] new state of things … already attacking the fabric of the Old" (189).

Before *Turkey Faces West*, Edip had tried to reconcile Islam and Christianity in her autobiography, *Memoirs of Halide Edip* (1926). There, Edip explains that her religious education was undertaken by both a family of observing Muslims and a Christian college, and how this contributed to making her perception of religion a mixed one, where elements from both creeds intertwined. Eventually, Edip proposes that both Islamic and Christian elements are to be found in Sufism, a doctrine she adhered to with great enthusiasm.[6] A similar blending of Islam and Christianity can be found in *Turkey Faces West*, with quite disparate implications. While it can be argued that Edip's book of memoirs offer a domesticated version of Islam for Christian readers in general, given, for instance, the prominent and affectionate references to the divinity of Mary, in *Turkey Faces West* the author projects Christian doctrinal divisions onto Islam, unambiguously addressing Christian Protestant readers.

> As in the Catholic and Protestant division of the Christians, one with the Pope at the head and the others recognizing only their national and communal religious organizations, there also would be Catholic and protestant Moslems recognizing the Caliph (a kind of Moslem Pope) and the Protestant refusing to recognize him and separating their religion from their worldly affairs entirely. (208)

With this passage, Edip begins to argue that the division between Protestant and Catholic Christianity may find a correspondence in Islam. The focus of this opening paragraph is the institution of the Caliphate and its connection to the figure of the Catholic Pope. As Edip explains in the previous paragraphs, the Caliph holds both temporal and spiritual power, which is also true Pope, ruling over the Vatican state, and, one may add, the King of England. As both institutions were strongly resented by early American nationalism – one remembers Thomas Paine's combined rejection of both as "monarchy is in every instance the popery of the government" (Paine 56) – the American reader cannot but sympathize with Protestant Muslims. Yet, Edip takes the association much further.

Not only do Protestant Christians and Muslims, as well as Catholic Christians and Muslims, share a similar approach to doctrine, but reveal a certain "likeness in racial temperament" (Edip 209). Therefore, similar doctrinal inclinations are to Edip a direct consequence of a similar mentality shared by Protestants in the West and the East. In this imaginary schism within the Muslim world, Turks unsurprisingly position themselves on the side of the Protestants: "Turks, already the Protestant Moslems of the world, are more like the Christian Protestants" (ibid.). Edip proceeds by listing a series of character traits that supposedly apply to Protestant Muslims, and by large, to world Protestants. First of all, Muslim Protestants "have a clear objective in mind and … shine in practical achievements," they are "simple in nature," they "keep their religion out of their worldly concerns," and are most interested in "man and the nature which surrounds him" (ibid.). A cluster of American narratives and concepts seem to inform the 'temperament' of Muslim Protestants. Emerson's practical, "active soul" (Emerson 3) is reflected in their pragmatism and simplicity, while the division between worldly concerns and spirituality is emphasized once more. Ultimately, the

curiosity of Muslim Protestants for the relationship between man and nature is reminiscent of the overwhelming unity between these two elements which figured prominently in American romanticism.

Besides, Edip puts a strong emphasis on the lack of religious persecution in Turkish history.

> In all history Turkish cruelty has had no religious basis. In the religious quarrels of the Arabs among themselves there are features which resemble the Inquisition of the Catholic Church. There is no such thing in Turkish life, in its religious aspect. From the religious point of view the Turk has been most tolerant. (Edip 209)

By distancing Turkey from the persecutions that have stained European history, Edip establishes another powerful connection to the American imagination. Since the fundaments of colonial America had been laid by fugitive Protestants escaping religious persecution by the Anglican Church, Edip's American readers cannot but sympathize with a country that presents itself as alien to religious intolerance, as they probably did not fail to see the parallels with a nation keen on cultural pluralism. By introducing Turkey in such terms, Edip's achievement is twofold. On the one hand she succeeds in undermining Gladstone's infamous writings about the Turks' cruel handling of empire territories, which Mead Earle mentions as influential and yet most unreliable literature on Turkey. On the other hand, she confirms Turkey's non-involvement in episodes and behaviors in European history America itself has struggled to exclude from its self-projection, such as religious persecution or the coalescence of temporal and spiritual power.

1.1 Whither West?

Turkey Faces West ends with a chapter entitled "Whither Turkey?" The scope of this conclusive analysis is to expose what Edip calls "the conflict between the Eastern and the Western ideal" (191): a reference to Turkey's dual position, perched between two allegedly competing systems of though, eluding unambiguous associations with the former or the latter. It is the moment for Turkey to choose a successful national model that may imprint the future of the newly founded Turkish Republic. Edip does not hesitate to inform her readers of the "hatred"

Turkey felt for the "West" (190) as a consequence of the Treaty of Sèvres, which she describes as a joint act of treachery of the Allied powers and the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire against the Turks. Being the United States formally associated with the Allied powers, this might very well be one of the unpleasant truths Mead Earle refers to in his preface (xii) and would suffice to undermine the premises on which my reading of Edip and her American connection is based. Additionally, in her article of the evolution of the concept of 'West' in Edip's work, Duygu Köksal argues that "[Edip's] sympathy for America" faded after 1920 – when the Treaty of Sèvres was signed (Köksal 84).

Yet, it is my contention that the American publication of *Turkey Faces West* in 1930 calls for a new assessment of Edip's 'West,' one in which a sympathetic outlook on the United States is far from being dismissed. I argue that Edip's America is hardly included in Edip's notion of West, and therefore not the primary target of Turkish hatred. In fact, the United States preferred not to be involved in the partition of the former Ottoman territories decided at Sevres, of which France, Great Britain and Italy were the main beneficiaries. Edip explains that what sparked the Turks' "hatred" against the West were not "war and defeat" (Edip 188), but first and foremost an acute distaste for Western imperialism, to which America was supposedly alien. Moreover, there is enough evidence in the text to claim that Turkey's hated enemy is not the West, but Europe, or in any case the West minus America. To Edip, even the simplest among Turkish citizens knew who was responsible for their misery: "The Turkish villagers … hardly knew whether Europe was a man or a country. But they knew that it was the cause of this endless bloody misery in Turkey" (196); the disillusionment felt by the Turk is with "the civilization of Europe" (254) and his "dominant emotion … at the time was his hatred of Europe, the force that had destined him to an ignominious death" (ibid.).

When the moment comes for Turkey to choose a model among the accomplished national communities, and between the East and the West, Edip's Turkey lingers on the possibility to adopt communist Russia, but then reassuringly settles for a cluster of values which is strongly reminiscent of American foundational ideologies such as capitalism, progress, the preservation of the rights of men and private property:

> "Turkey is bound to stand on the side of capitalism. … The necessary capital and expert technical assistance needed in order to realize [a minimum standard of civilization] … can be obtained only from Europe and America. … Because of their Islamic training the Turks will be the last people to accept communism as an economic system … Islam, in its recognition of the rights of man, emphasizes the right of property as its fundamental principle (Edip 259, 260)

Edip's Turkey will ultimately stay loyal to the quotation by Turkish nationalist ideologist Ziya Gökalp, opening *Turkey Faces West*: "We come from the East, we go toward the West." The inevitable question readers ask themselves is 'Whither West?'

Up to this point, my study has demonstrated that Edip's account on the emergence of the Turkish Republic is embedded with topoi of North American imagination, evocatively drawn from the decades in which American writers and intellectuals sought to articulate their own national identity, relinquishing exhausted European paradigms. I showed that *Turkey Faces West* seeks to establish a privileged connection between Turkey and the Unites States, and it is in this attempt that I aim to identify a possible beginning for a current of Turkish literature in English that poses important questions regarding Turkish identity in a globalized age. In spite of Edip's nationalist background, the only possible answer to her concluding question "Whither Turkey?" is 'both Turkeys' – the one pointing towards the West, and the one striving to fully acknowledge its Eastern heritage. To put it in another way, from the perspective of writers like Halide Edip, Turkey's identity cannot but distance itself from Atatürk's monocultural aspirations to embrace cultural diversity. In fact, the manner in which the question is phrased does not leave alternatives. Edip negotiates Turkish identity in English, in a book that engages in a privileged dialogue with the United States, and, above all, her questions and approach will have a following in younger writers who will phrase similar question in a comparable context. Interrogatives concerning the positioning of Turkey in a globalized world, or its threshold status between East and (a markedly Anglophone) West also inform the writing of Turkish diasporic authors such as Alev Lytle Croutier, Güneli Gün, and Elif Shafak in the late

20th and early 21st centuries. The following sections will investigate the evolving nature of this privileged relationship between Turkey and the United States, which this article analyzes in its literary manifestations, ranging from colonial anxiety to eagerness for reconciliation, in search of the "juncture" between the Turkish and the American poles.

2. American Cultural Imperialism and Neocolonial Anxiety

Pultar hesitates to label Turkish American literature as "hybrid," since the notion of hybridity implies "a hierarchy between a colonized and a colonizer culture" (Pultar 50). Such limitation could indeed be applied to the concept of hybridity as well as to world literature in general, which bears the marks of a "struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world" and of an asymmetry between the cultures involved (Moretti 64). Yet, the perception of Western hegemony over the local culture is very much present in Turkish history. Erdağ Göknar notes, "as the late Ottoman state fell into the position of being semi-colonized, the legacy of this semi-colonization, or colonial encounter with Europe, informed the breadth, scope, and legacy of severity of the Kemalist cultural revolution that gave shape to the Republic of Turkey. And though it is a commonplace to hear modern Turks boast that Turkey – meaning the Ottoman state and the Republic – was never colonized, history presents us with a quite different account" (Göknar 37). As Göknar clarifies, Turkey suffered from a variety of forms of "semi-colonial" occupation. On the one hand, the Treaty of Sèvres instilled the perception of being at the mercy of the Western democracies, plotting to "disperse and destroy" the Turkish state (Akçam 230). On the other hand, from the last decades of the Ottoman Empire until the 1990s[7], Turkey has been exposed to the necessity to "Westernize," [8] and cherished continuous contamination with Western sets of values and aesthetics.[9]

A predominant feature of Turkish American novels is the relentless effort to negotiate and come to terms with the Western "semi-colonial" presence in Turkey, vehemently critiqued by Edip in a lifetime's work. If the works of Halide Edip mostly target Europe, especially England, as a colonial agent in Turkey, referring to its troops as armies of occupation and persecution (Edip, *Ordeal* 4, 61), "determined to exterminate Turkish rule in Asia Minor and replace it by a vast Greek empire" (Edip, *Ordeal* 162), more recent novels envision the oppressor

as markedly American, and complicate Edip's American sympathies. An understudied example for this is Alev Lytle Croutier's *Seven Houses* (2002). *Seven Houses* is a family saga articulated in seven chapters, each of which is narrated by one of the seven houses the İpekçi family lived in; every chapter is preceded by a picture of the 'narrating house,' and by the dates indicating the years during which the family had lived there. The novel, traversing the lives of four women, offers an exploration of Turkish identity and history in the passage from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic.

In her novel Croutier seems to share the critique towards Hollywood films as responsible for contaminating local aesthetics as articulated, for instance, in Pamuk's novel *The Black Book*. Both texts identify cinema as the most powerful agent of American cultural imperialism. Yet, if characters in *The Black Book* describe this phenomenon as an irreversible and disheartening process, *Seven Houses* seems to treasure it. This becomes evident as the book draws constant parallels between the Turkish matriarch Camilla to Hollywood actress Dolores del Rio.

> Amber seemed fascinated by the pictures of a woman who had an uncanny resemblance to Camilla.
>
> "Oh yes, that's Dolores del Rio, your father's favorite." "She looks just like you."
>
> "That's probably why your father married me." (Croutier 126)

This passage, like many others in the novel, betrays a quasi-erotic desire for American commodities and aesthetics, which is seldom accompanied by irony or frustration, even less by subversive attitudes. Del Rio's Mexican origins are all the more significant in the context of Turkey's admiration for America, and, more precisely, for the İpekçis' American fantasies. Del Rio's dark hair and complexion provide evidence of the possibility for the 'exotic' Other to be quietly incorporated in American aesthetics and art – to the point of becoming a Hollywood icon. Del Rio is Camilla's flattering American *doppelgänger*, projecting Camilla's own plausibility as desirable Other in America.

Croutier's Turks may "lov[e] anything American because it

[is] American" (Croutier 207) and oppose little resistance to house appliances, comic books, Hollywood musicals, Bermuda shorts, and that "exclusively hideous American bad taste" (123, 207), yet, the relationship between Turkey and the West, in a specifically American guise, is expressed by the narrator through a distinctly imperial terminology. "America," as one of the narrators in *Seven Houses* affirms, "insinuated further into their lives, *seducing the women* with Frigidaire and Hoover. Also brought along the *virus* of Time and virus of time, the imagery" (123, emphasis mine). The lighthearted commentary on the the diffusion of electric appliances and American aesthetics coexists side by side with a metaphorical use of the colonial topoi of seduction and contamination with foreign diseases, threatening the biological and, above all, the cultural balance of the invaded territory. On the same note, Turkey's adoption of Western commodities and sets of values figures as a metaphorical "invasion" (Croutier 209): a term recalling the Ottoman policies of territorial expansion as well as Kemalist Turkey's attraction towards Western ethics and aesthetics. The following passage presents Turkey's "obsession" (Croutier 210) with all things Western as reminiscent the siege of Vienna.

> Their invasion stopped here – the farthest stretch to the West. The indestructible doors closed and they would forever be pounding on them, begging to be allowed in, desperately yearning to become part of the West while trying to destroy it. But in their obsession they found themselves *conquered* by the need for sameness, imitating forms they did not understand …. Their confidence gone, they became unfathomable. … They had lost their soul" (Croutier 210, emphasis mine).

Different waves of Ottoman and Western expansionisms conflate in Croutier's prose, where a vision of Ottoman troops being stopped at the doors of Europe merges with the psychological consequences of forced Americanization in Turkey, and with the recent negotiations on Turkey's entrance in the European Union. The double-edged imperial terminology employed to depict the encounter between Turkey and the West emerges as a clash of imperial ventures, ultimately indicating the Turks as the complying victims of Americanization.

Building on Göknar's point, I would problematize the portrayal

of Turkish culture as immune from the (perception of) Western cultural hegemony, which, in postcolonial countries, resulted into a hybrid literature whose purpose is questioning and challenging Western supremacy. The novels presented in this section do interrogate the "complicated problems" (Mukherjee, qtd in Moretti, 58) arising from the encounter of local reality and Western cultural products, as they struggle to make sense of how "the world goes in a strange direction dictated by an outside power" (Moretti 65). Croutier's stupor at the foreign becoming familiar does in fact betray a certain anxiety about American interference. What I claim differentiates works by Turkish authors written in English from those written in Turkish (such as Pamuk's *The Black Book* and *The New Life,* among many others which are invested in critiquing American cultural imperialism in Turkey), is a different view of how America has influenced the formation of Turkey's national identity, as texts in English develop a perspective of reconciliation between the Turkish and the American element, while those in Turkish persistently resist the latter. Croutier's writing seems to agree with Pamuk's recurring assumption that truth, self, and national identity can no longer be retrieved from the havoc of historical mystification and cultural contamination. Yet, Croutier leaves her novel open-ended, suggesting that the identity of the Turkish nation lies in the hands of a generation of individuals both ethnically and culturally hybrid, like Camilla's daughter, Amber, who lives and works in the United States. When Amber asks Camilla about her own favorite movie star, she answers her idol was the Hungarian American actor Cornell Wilde, adding "You know, I named you 'Amber' because of the book *Forever Amber*. It was made into a wonderful movie with Cordell" (127). Camilla speaks of her daughter as a "gavour," with no drop of Turkishness left (219). Yet, it was Camilla who first made her daughter a cultural hybrid, starting by naming her after a 1944 British novel which sold over three million copies worldwide and became a Hollywood film. Thus, while Pamuk's melancholic Istanbulites lament the loss of Turkey's soul to the economic and cultural centers of North America and Europe, Croutier and Shafak devise hybrid narratives whose strength lies in the integration of the American element in Turkey's globalized identity, and which operate in order to "yok[e] together unlikely traditions of thought" (Bhabha, qtd in Rutherford 212).

3. Hybridity and Sufism: Towards the 'Threshold Novel'

Figures of writers living in between two worlds are also central to Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2010), where the United States and Turkey are brought together through the experience of Sufism. In the novel, the fictionalized biography of 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi intertwines with the awakening of a middle-aged housewife from Massachusetts to the Sufi discipline. The American fascination with Rumi – announced as America's bestselling poet in 1994 (El-Zein 72) – is not new. In the 19th century, Emerson's translations and essays on Rumi and other Sufi poets awakened an interest in mystic poetry that ran across Transcendentalism, influenced Whitman's poetry (Clinton 152), and established an undercurrent in American literature that re-emerged in the last decades through new translations of Rumi, assuring the 13th century mystic poet an incredible posthumous success.

Massud Farzan had already established a connection between a collective 'I' in Rumi and Whitman, basing himself on a line in "Song of Myself" which showed remarkable similarity with a passage of Rumi's *Mathnawi*. Besides containing another interpretation of this line, *The Forty Rules of Love* is clearly devoted to the construction of figures of Rumi-esque characters (e.g., the present-day dervish Aziz, or Rumi's legendary companion Shams of Tabriz) who live and operate in a space in-between nations, mediating between the American and the Turkish context. Shafak's characters can therefore be seen as the latest addition to this genealogical line of poets devoted to blurring the borders of the Self, linking Rumi to Whitman and culminating with Shafak. The following citations document Whitman's and Shafak's appropriation/reinterpretation of Rumi's line, and its declension in an American perspective at large.

> For I do not recognize myself
>
> I am neither Christian nor Jew nor Gabr nor Muslim
>
> I'm not of the East nor of the West
> nor of the land nor of the sea
>
> (Rumi, *Mathnawi*. Qtd in Farzan, 579)

> One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the

> largest the same,
> A Southerner soon as a Northerner, […]
>
> Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion.
>
> (Whitman, "Song of Myself.")
>
> No Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion or cultural system, I am not of the East, nor of the West. … My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless.
>
> (Shafak, *Rules* 183)

It can be argued that Shafak makes use of an already established American fascination with Sufism to create a bridge between the United States and Turkey, as Rumi spent most of his life in Konya (Turkey) and can be counted among the most prominent religious figures of Turkey's religious tradition. Shafak's *Forty Rules*, Croutier's *Seven Houses*, and certainly Edip's autobiographical writing are united by the effort to produce figures of artists, authors and poets who fully embody the "juncture" between the Turkish and the American cultural traditions. Through hybrid characters who are active in the field of literary and artistic production, the Turkish American novel proposes culturally hybrid models of art and historiography. The aforementioned "juncture" between the Turkish and the American selves, generating the possibility of a hybrid literature, is convincingly articulated in Turkish American novels through figures and characters who, as Freely puts it in her novel *Enlightenment*, are "conversant with more than one system of thought, … able to travel between and draw from cultures that pretend to be in opposition to each other" (Freely 58).

4. Conclusions: The 'Marginality' of America in Turkish American Novels

Pultar points out that there is no such thing as Turkish American literature in the sense Greek American, Asian American or other "ethnic" literatures in the United States are interpreted and understood, namely, as mostly concerned with first- or second-generation immigrants struggling to combine their culture of origins with their new American everyday life and set of values. This concern appears sporadically in Turkish American novels: Shafak's *The Saint*

of Incipient Insanities (2010) and *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) deal with the condition of young Turkish expatriates in the United States and second-generation Armenian Americans, but the American thread is in a marginal position in comparison with the attention devoted to Turkish characters and narratives. In short, these are not "immigrant success stories," qualifying their authors as Americans who deal with their non-American heritage (Pultar 2005). A tentative explanation for the predominance of Turkish settings and characters in the Turkish American novel might be that the writers who fall into this category – although they all live or have lived in the United States – are mostly first-generation expatriates, coming from privileged families who, for generations, have lead a Westernized lifestyle. Moreover, they can afford to commute frequently between Turkey and the United States, thus maintaining a very strong bond with the culture of origins, which they observe from the perspective of expatriates.

This lends weight to the argument that the study of Turkish American literature needs to develop as a new province of transnational literature that distances itself from the immigrant success story. I define Turkish American literature in the same way Pultar defines Güneli Gün's novel *On the Road to Baghdad*: an "amalgam" (Pultar 47) where "elements of the two cultures are so enmeshed to be inseparable" (Pultar 52). There is enough evidence to prove the existence of a Turkish literature in an American frame, transcending the denomination of world literature to define itself as substantially bi-cultural. In fact, the examined novels conduct a parallel analysis of the Turkish and the American realities, connecting them successfully by the use of bi-cultural narratives and hybrid characters mediating between national realities and literary traditions.

The novels examined in the first part of this study are spent in the effort to integrate diverse cultural traditions – the imperial and the national, the local and the foreign – in a hybrid literary work, giving prominence to the perception of American and Western cultural imperialism in the Turkish Republic. Shafak's novels, instead, overcome the preoccupation with neocolonialism and move away from a notion of hybridity as Bhabha intended it: a "third space" where "unlikely traditions of thought" are yoked together (Bhabha 212). Shafak's aesthetics of reconciliation and placelessness rather recall Ramón Saldívar's concept of hybridity as "the answer to the dispersal of identity" (Saldívar 586). Shams of Tabriz's words, "No Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,

Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion or cultural system, I am not of the East, nor of the West. … my place is placeless, a trace of the traceless" (Shafak 183), reveal the aspiration to make placelessness a place, the untraceable traceable, the dispersion of identity a legitimate space of identity. This condition is expressed by Shafak herself in one of her journalistic articles, in which she wonders if it is possible "to take one's abode in a threshold" (Shafak 2006), a question that seems to echo Saldívar's dilemma, when he asks whether one can imagine "a transnational state of mind" (Saldívar 1036). In other words, Shafak's 'threshold novels' do not simply ask their characters to "cross symbolic borders and inhabit the transnational imagery" (Saldívar 578), but to inhabit symbolic borders.

Moreover, what I have termed threshold novel bears a number of similarities with Saldívar's "American Borderlands novel." Like the Borderlands novel, on the one hand, the threshold novel is one in which national and individual identities are created dialogically, one that strives to create a literary as well as a societal model that may accommodate "multiple layers of difference" and cultural cross-pollination (Saldívar 1033). On the other hand, Shafak's idealized vision of the space in between cultures clashes with Saldivar's awareness of the potentially unsettling implications of a borderland state of mind. While Shafak's concept of identity dispersal appears as reassuring and comforting, and her evocations of the Ottoman empire at times fully Utopian, Saldívar's Borderland novel is well aware of the "anxiety resulting from the clash between history and the utopian imaginary" (Saldívar 1036). In spite of her idealism, Shafak certainly represents a decisive step in the narrative in becoming of Turkish American literature. In these terms, the "implausible juncture" between the Turkish and the American selves theorized by Gönül Pultar might indeed have become a very tangible one.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank the editors of this issue of JAST and my reviewers for their insightful reading of my manuscript.

[2] For a discussion of hybridity and creativity, see also Moran, *Turk Romani*: 377. I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[3] A clarification of the concept of "double readership" needs to be provided here, as the understanding of "double readership" by Turkish American authors who write in English differs greatly from the one theorized by Pultar in "Ethnic Fatigue." Pultar mentions how Turkish American authors such as Shirin Devrim seek a double readership (or "double audience," in Pultar's text) by producing two versions of the same novel: one in English and one in Turkish, sometimes changing the content significantly, domesticating or exoticizing the United States and Turkey in order to meet different expectations. By contrast, Turkish American novels in English are designed to relate to both the American and the Turkish readership simultaneously. This paper is far from being an exhaustive survey of the Turkish American literature scene: many authors have been excluded from my analysis for reasons of space. The chosen examples rather aim to complicate the notion of Turkish American literature as hyphenated, migrant literature. It would have been useful to reference authors such as Orhan Pamuk and Maureen Freely, an American novelist better known as Pamuk's translator for the Anglophone market. Albeit Pamuk writes in Turkish and Freely is an American writer who spent her childhood and early adolescence in Istanbul, they doubtlessly participate in shaping the definition of Turkish American literature. Their novels effectively tackle Turkish-American relationships and are therefore offer crucial points of comparison with novels in English by Turkish writers which cover the same issues. Additionally, their international readerships make the reference to their work necessary when discussing the Turkish novel in a global framework.

[4] My analysis takes little account of Edip's claim to scientific, anthropological, and sociological accuracy in *Turkey Faces West*; due to the author's quasi-autobiographical treatment of Turkish history, her explicit political agenda, and her numerous biases that will partly be analyzed in the following pages, *Turkey Faces West* will be approached as a work of fiction, or, perhaps more appropriately, a hybrid in its own right between a historical/political commentary and a memoir. I am also aware of the fact that *Turkey*

Faces West and *Memoirs* are very different texts in terms of genre, and their combined analysis may pose problems. While the former presents itself as an academic essay, the second is an autobiography. I am nevertheless inclined to address both as fictional texts.

[5] See John Murray Gibbon's *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation*. Gibbon, J. 1938. *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

[6] A complete analysis of the theme of Sufism in Edip's work is beyond the scope of this essay. It is nevertheless important to recognize the importance of Sufism for Edip's life and writing, and for Turkish American literature at large. In Edip's *Memoirs*, the narrator voices her fascination for Sufism and presents it as an ideal middle way between the teachings of Islam and the dimension of love and compassion she used to associate with Christianity. Viewed in such terms, Sufism qualifies as a powerful means to establish a narrative of cultural proximity between Muslim Turkey and Christian America, which is so central to my definition of Turkish American literature. For a more extensive analysis of Sufism as an agent of cultural reconciliation in a post 9/11 scenario and Turkish American frame, see, by this author, "The Rumi Phenomenon between Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism. The Case of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*," *European Journal of English Studies* 17.2 (October 2013): 201-213.

[7] Birth of Neo-Ottomanism under the leadership of Prime Minister Halil Turgut Özal (1983). Özal's Neo-Ottomanism represented the first powerful attempt to challenge the legacy of Kemalism by proposing a re-evaluation of the Ottoman and Islamic legacies.

[8] With the term "Westernization," I refer to a set of reforms introduced by the Kemalist government from the 1920s on, aiming to modernize the newly-founded Republic of Turkey and adapt it to the European model. Originally, such reforms implied the abolition of the Arabic letters, Islamic education, and Sufi brotherhoods, the implementation of secular and anticlerical discourses, and the dismissal of the Ottoman cultural heritage as primitive and backward. From the Fifties on, "Westernization" assumes a markedly American character and has to be understood as primarily "Americanization," implying, in the Turkish case, mass consumption of American products and aesthetics. With the exception of Alev Lytle Croutier, Turkish American authors almost exclusively envision Kemal's Westernizing reforms in terms of an obsession with a Western trajectory and as blind imitation of Western values and aesthetics. Attitudes towards

the Americanization of Turkish culture and American cultural imperialism are instead less univocal.

[9] The 1980s and 1990s are remembered as a time of immense cultural westernization due to Ozal's liberalization of the economy in line with Reaganomics. (See Nurdan Gurbilek, *Vitrinde Yasamak: 1980'lerin Kulturel Iklimi)*. I would like to thank my anonymous peer reviewers for making me aware of this crucial historical reference.

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