




E. Khayyat, *Istanbul 1940 and Global Modernity: The World According to Auerbach, Tanpınar, and Edib*, London: Lexington Books, 2019, 296 p.


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In the auspicious year of 1940, Halide Edib Adivar, Erich Auerbach, and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar were all teaching literature at Istanbul University. These are names that mean many things to many people, so it is only natural that literary historians have been trying to figure out whether this triumvirate was ever seen together in the same room. Alas, archives reveal nothing. And so it is with an archaeologist's fervor that one approaches Efe Khayyat's *Istanbul 1940 and Global Modernity: The World According to Auerbach, Tanpınar, and Edib*. Khayyat is a merciful guide, and he ends the suspense by revealing early on that he too hasn't come across any evidence of them meeting at all. No world literature MLA panel-on-the-Bosphorus to haunt us from the 40's. In that sense, Khayyat is a good example of how we come to terms with gaps in the branches of the world literature tree when the archives fail us.

Teaching students to write a comparative paper or a thesis is the boon of many a university lecturer. Khayyat, himself a professor at Rutgers University Middle Eastern Languages and Literatures, is a scholar who sets out to excavate the roots of comparatism, comparing the comparatist approaches of three involved literary figures, figures who never seem to have sat down together to compare notes. Upon opening the volume, however, one's heart sinks to see the book divided into three sections. So once again, one will have to read through three expositions about three authors and make the comparisons one's self. This aspect is hardly helped by the rather ornate and repetitive introductions and conclusions of each part, setting these parts as separate studies on these authors. The parts are promisingly entitled "How to Turn Turk," "The Boat," and "Wandering Jewess," but the mental imagery

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conjured up by these titles are referenced in only very brief moments of the narrative, which reminds you fleetingly that you are reading a comparative work on comparatists. Yet, these moments leave room to long passages of deconstruction that I for one found very difficult to make heads or tails of.

“Let this be the end of our brief survey, which would have been impossible to complete in a whole book, and which I have organized around some of the figures whose works I address in this book,” Khayyat states in the introductory introduction (there will be three more introductions to follow, regurgitating themes from this first one). The reason this book frustrated me so much is the constant about-to-be-fulfilled promise of comparison that seems to recede further and further into the distance. One can argue that in creating this sensation, Khayyat is giving us the bitter medicine that he and his subjects had to swallow. I found his research on Auerbach, Halide Edib, and Tanpınar very engaging and have furiously taken notes of all the texts that I have to read to patch up my own gaps in reading world literature.

I must confess here that, although Khayyat gives quite some gravitas to Istanbul being the capital of world literature, I am an Auerbach sceptic and find his language too dense. Khayyat provides a very good overview of the *Mimesis*, and having read *Istanbul 1940 and Global Modernity*, now I have a very good idea about what I can and cannot find in Auerbach for my own comparative studies. Reading Khayyat reminded me of the questions I have qwabout Auerbach’s time in Istanbul, most importantly what language he delivered his lectures in. For a couple of days I asked around and consulted my own digital archive to finally relocate a piece of information that had lodged in my brain somewhat apocryphally: that Leo Spitzer, Auerbach’s predecessor had “lectured to his classes – through an interpreter- in French and used a multitude of other languages to communicate with his teaching staff.” This detail is in Emily Apter’s *Global Translation: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933*.

In the introduction of *Istanbul 1940*, where most of the comparative work of this volume is done, Khayyat posits Turkey as avant-garde in erasing the past to make space for the fascist future. Auerbach is portrayed as trying to salvage a European cultural past that is somewhat inclusive and as recognizing the ties to Eastern traditions. The idea of Turks turning Turk, which is where the book gets the name for its section on Auerbach, is a very clever one, emphasizing that the insistence on Turkic elements in creating a nation state was in many ways a betrayal of the Ottoman way of life. Khayyat gives us many instances of how Turks wanted to be recognized for ‘what they really were’, not least by inserting the Arabic

letter *Waw* in the word Turk as written in the Ottoman script. This was a revelation for me, reminding me once again that the cultural and linguistic revolution that is mostly attributed to the nation state had already started in the late Ottoman period. In Khayyat, the chimera-like nature of the word Turk finds it double in *Frenk*, an umbrella term that the Turks used for non-Muslims and that could open up interesting semantic avenues in the annals of Occidentalism. Khayyat raises the specter of the *Frenk*, and just as I start to wonder about how that could relate to gentiles or Jews – as within the premise of the book- he steers his narrative boat elsewhere, leaving me wondering about what could have been.

Auerbach's famous letter to Spitzer about the Turkish craze to create a new Turkish culture and about using the university and translations as a vehicle is also quoted, to remind the reader that Tanpınar, Halide Edib, and Auerbach were recruited by the state to do a specific job at a specific time in the history of Turkish modernization. It seems a pity that their contract with the university doesn't seem to have involved weekly meetings. By the end of the Auerbach section we have little sense of how this will connect to Tanpınar and Edib, except for a nebulous sense of the German Jewish scholar's astonishment and disappointment that the Turks have abandoned being 'the Turk' and are enacting the fascist end of European culture in an avant-garde manner.

Anyone who has read Tanpınar and Halide Edib's work can attest to the fact that they were comparatists by nature. This line of argumentation can lead to a claim that Turkish literary scholars of the early 20th century were essentially comparatists, whatever their field of expertise might be. Tanpınar, as Khayyat explores at length, was writing a history of the Turkish Literature at the Turkish Literature Department. Khayyat points out twice (as he does many things) that Halide Edib's world was larger than Auerbach and Tanpınar's put together. I agree with this wholeheartedly as it corroborates my understanding of Halide Edib's work as being from someone who co-habited the world with her international contemporaries and had no sense of belatedness, a belatedness that is a theme much harped on by Tanpınar. This theme is so present in Tanpınar's work that they asked Pankaj Mishra to write the introduction when *Time Regulation Institute* was translated to Turkish. Not dwelling on belatedness more than necessary, Khayyat rather settles on the word *buhran* in capturing the crisis mood/mode of late Ottoman and early Republican eras.

Like *Mimesis*, *Time Regulation Institute* gets a long, exegetical treatment by Khayyat, and in that sense *Istanbul 1940 and Global Modernity* works as a good

primer for the three authors mentioned in the subtitle. What I was not prepared for was getting a summary of Orhan Pamuk's *Black Book* in the final conclusion of the volume. However, Khayyat mercifully keeps it short, bringing a book on Istanbul modernity to a close with the city's most-well known literary son. At the end, I feel like Khayyat has given me a lot of homework to do, having brought it several threads of global modern literature together.

On the whole, *Istanbul 1940* is a book that requires quite a bit of patience to read. In any case, it is a volume that caters to a specific audience interested in the beginnings of world literature. The book contains material whose importance or relevance to the disciplines of world literature or omparative literature may have escaped many, such as the doppelgängers for the Turk and the Frenk. Thus, the book opens up many avenues of research for the discerning reader. Often the concepts and analytical tools it offers get lost in the background exposition, which Khayyat must have felt was needed in a book with such a large scope. In that sense *Istanbul 1940 and Global Modernity* reads more like the harbinger of a comparative book to come, and readers of the history of Turkish literature and modernity will ignore it at their own peril.