

# The Primary Sources of Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's Fictional World, or Was Hüseyin Rahmi Able to Embrace Naturalism?

## Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar'ın Kurmaca Dünyasının İlk Kaynakları yahut Hüseyin Rahmi Natüralizmi Benimseyebildi mi?

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### ABSTRACT

Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864–1944) stands as one of the most prominent figures of the early Turkish novel. The late 1880s, when he began his literary career, marked a period of intense literary debates in Turkish literature, driven by the clash between traditional and modern approaches. These years also witnessed the decline of Romanticism, gradually giving way to the emergence of Realism and Naturalism. Among these debates, a significant exchange took place between Beşir Fuad (c. 1852–1887) and Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tahir Efendi (1862–1903) over the merits of Romanticism and Realism. Before penning his first novel, *Şık* (1889), Hüseyin Rahmi found himself involved in these debates under the influence of Beşir Fuad. Aligning himself with the principles of Realism and Naturalism, Hüseyin Rahmi actively supported Beşir Fuad's views. In this context, he harshly criticized Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tahir Efendi's Romantic novel *Bir Sergüzeşt* through a serialized play titled *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*. This work holds particular significance as the first text in which Hüseyin Rahmi elaborates on his realist-naturalist perspective. This article explores Hüseyin Rahmi's defense of Realism against Romanticism in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*. The 1890s, when he wrote his first novels, were dominated by the Servet-i Fünûn movement, which also adhered to the principles of Realism and Naturalism. However, Hüseyin Rahmi distinguished himself from the Servet-i Fünûn writers, choosing instead to follow his own unique literary path. This divergence raises important questions about the nature of his Realist and Naturalist vision, particularly his focus on depicting the lower strata of society. Unlike Servet-i Fünûn authors, who primarily addressed the concerns of the upper and educated classes, Hüseyin Rahmi aimed to portray the grim realities of various social layers with unflinching objectivity, in line with the principles of Realism and Naturalism. This approach led him to develop a distinct style within these literary movements. This study examines the earliest sources of Hüseyin Rahmi's fictional world and his understanding of Realism and Naturalism by drawing on both his novels and his instructional writings from different periods.

**Keywords:** Hüseyin Rahmi, Naturalism, Realism, Beşir Fuad, *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*

### ÖZ

Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864-1944), Türk romanının erken dönemine damgasını vuran isimden birisidir. Onun roman yazmaya başladığı 1880'lerin sonu, Türk

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edebiyatında eski-yeni karşıtlığında edebî tartışmaların alevlendiği ve romantizmin sönmeye başlayarak yerini realizm/natüralizm akımlarına bırakmaya başladığı senelerdir. Bu tartışmalardan birisi, Beşir Fuad (1852?-1887) ile Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi (1862-1903) arasında romantizm-realizm konusunda yaşanır. Hüseyin Rahmi, ilk romanı *Âyine/Şık'ı* (1889) daha kaleme almadan, Beşir Fuad'ın etkisiyle kendisini bu tartışmaların içinde bulur ve tercihini realizm/natüralizmden yana kullanır. Bu tercihi çerçevesinde, Beşir Fuad'ı ve dolayısıyla realizm/natüralizm ekollerini desteklemek maksadıyla, Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi'nin romantizm etkisinde kaleme aldığı *Bir Sergüzeşt* isimli romanını şiddetli bir biçimde eleştiren *İstiğrâk-ı Seheri* isimli bir piyes tefrika eder. İşte bu eser, Hüseyin Rahmi'nin bütün kurmaca eserlerindeki realist-natüralist anlayışını ilk defa detaylıca anlattığı eser olarak önemlidir. Bu yazıda, *İstiğrâk-ı Seheri*'de yazarın romantizme karşı realizmi nasıl savunduğu detaylıca ele alınmıştır. Onun ilk romanlarını yazdığı 1890'lar, Servet-i Fünûn topluluğunun edebiyatımızı yönlendirdiği ve realizm-natüralizm ekollerini eserlerinde savundukları dönemdir. Aynı ekolleri savunan Hüseyin Rahmi'nin onlardan nasıl ayrıştığını ve neden uzak durmayı tercih ederek kendi çizgisinde özgün edebî faaliyetini sürdürdüğü bu durumda incelenmesi gereken önemli bir konu olacaktır. Burada ulaşılan sonuç, Hüseyin Rahmi'nin Servet-i Fünûn yazarlarından farklı toplumsal tabakalara hitap ettiği gerçeğidir. Hüseyin Rahmi, toplum tabakalarının süflî manzaralarını realist/natüralist ekolün prensip edindiği şekilde, bütün gerçekliği ve objektifliği ile yansıtmayı hedeflemiştir. Böylece Hüseyin Rahmi, farklı bir realizm/natüralizm çizgisini takip etmiştir. Bu yazıda, Hüseyin Rahmi'nin kurmaca dünyasının en erken dönem kaynakları ve onun realizm/natüralizm anlayışı, gerek doğrudan romanları gerekse değişik dönemlerde kaleme alınan öğretici metinlerinde söylediklerine dayanarak incelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hüseyin Rahmi, Natüralizm, Realizm, Beşir Fuad, *İstiğrâk-ı Seheri*

## Introduction

Born during the Tanzimat era and active throughout the Westernization period of Turkish literature, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864-1944), through his unique literary approach, stands as one of the most prolific authors in Turkish literature who did not belong to any particular literary group. Having lost his mother at a very young age and with a father absent due to his military career, Hüseyin Rahmi was raised in a traditional Turkish-Islamic environment dominated by women—his grandmother and aunts—in an extended family setting. Consequently, his imaginative world was shaped, on the one hand, by the traditional life of the neighborhood, where the family, often joined by neighboring women, adhered strictly to customs and traditions, fostering familiarity with folk culture and traditional narratives. On the other hand, his imaginative world was enriched by factors that would open the doors to the Western world for him.<sup>1</sup> Hüseyin Rahmi began his literary career through journalism, writing his first articles—most of which were non-literary—for *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, a newspaper that served as a training ground for young writers of the time. Early in his career, he took inspiration from Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912), under whose patronage he developed his literary activity. Later, Hüseyin Rahmi began serializing his novels in newspapers before publishing them as books. He eventually made a living solely from writing and established himself as a professional writer. During this period, he also studied French with a private tutor and made translations, while reading the works of prominent French authors such as Paul Bourget (1852-1935), Emile Zola (1840-1902), Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Alfred de Musset (1810-1857), and Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897). Over time, he not only matched but also surpassed his mentor/patron.<sup>2</sup>

Despite his reclusive personality, Hüseyin Rahmi, who withdrew to Heybeliada with a misanthropic disposition, sought solutions to the deep-rooted problems of the society in which he lived through his fictional world. He made the troubled aspects of society the focal point of his literary work. In response to those who opposed him with the notion that “*literature is not for the masses*,” Hüseyin Rahmi offered a poignant reply: “*What nonsense! Should the masses drown in ignorance, should an entire nation be condemned to perish, and we just stand by and watch?*” He explained the primary motivation behind his literary production with the following words: “*In each of my works, I have tried to draw my readers, through*

1 In his youth, due to his keen interest in reading, Hüseyin Rahmi was gifted a library full of French books by Müşir [Field Marshal] Vidinli Tevfik Pasha. Ağâh Sırrı Levend, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1964), 22.

2 Pertev Naili Boratav (1907-1998) identifies the period before Hüseyin Rahmi wrote *Şık* and the decade following its publication as the time during which he was under the influence of Ahmed Midhat Efendi. During this phase, Hüseyin Rahmi’s excessively informal attitude towards both his readers and the characters in his works, as well as his frequent self-revelation—characteristics he himself would later describe as “childish simplicities”—reflect the traits found in the works of Ahmed Midhat, who represented the infancy of the Turkish novel. According to Boratav, the novel in which Hüseyin Rahmi surpasses Ahmed Midhat and begins to assert his own literary identity is his second work, *İffet*, which was published in 1897. Pertev Naili Boratav, “Hüseyin Rahmi’nin Romancılığı”, *Ankara Üniversitesi, Dil ve Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* III/2 (1945), 205-212.

*popular jesting, toward higher philosophy.*"<sup>3</sup> Hüseyin Rahmi aimed to reach a broad public, rather than an elitist minority, and to address the social issues that arose from the traumas of Ottoman-Turkish society's Westernization process in a language that could be understood by people from all social strata. In this context, he consistently adhered to a clear literary style throughout his career. As he remarked: "*With the exception of İffet [because I wrote it as an imitation of (Vecihî) based on a challenge], from Mürebbiye to Cadı, all my other works are practically identical in style. I have a unique, simple, and clear style that resembles neither the old nor the new. This unadorned, plain expression has brought me success. In my works, one will not encounter a single sentence that is difficult to understand, nor do I engage in matters beyond my comprehension. I do not interfere.*"<sup>4</sup> These words highlight Hüseyin Rahmi's distinct approach to language and style, highlighting his distinctive writing style. By maintaining his independent literary path, Hüseyin Rahmi became one of the cornerstones of the early period of Turkish fiction, sustained by his unwavering popularity. He was a novelist who was widely read and loved during his time, a fact underscored by Mecdi Sadreddin (1901-1980), who noted how popular Hüseyin Rahmi remained both during his lifetime and after his death.

*"From Yedikule and the damp houses of Saraçhanebaşı to the comfortable apartments of Şişli, and even to the adobe homes of Anatolia—what residence is there that does not contain, whether on a dusty shelf, in the corner of a broken-down bookcase, or in a decorated library, one or two works by the renowned novelist? Before the pages of this great Turkish writer, whose every page offers its reader a distinct pleasure, another kind of joy, and a nourishment for the soul that is difficult to describe—how many heads have bent in the early hours of the morning, illuminated by the dim light of a faulty oil lamp or a flickering candle?"*<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the period in which he produced his works, Hüseyin Rahmi witnessed some of the most tragic events in Turkish history, including the Greco-Turkish War (1897), the Turco-Italo War [Trablusgarp] (1911–1912), the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), World War I (1914–1918), the Gallipoli Campaign (1915–1916), and the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). In his fictional world, he placed the struggles of society during these turbulent times at the center of his narratives and sought to offer remedies for these issues. However, he believed that any solution must first begin by recognizing and focusing on the realities with which society was confronted. Hüseyin Rahmi, who aimed to diagnose the nation's problems and propose solutions, drew his primary intellectual influences from the West. Particularly influenced by Western philosophers, he continually brought the ingrained mistakes within society to light in his fictional works, using a humorous style to attract the attention of the broader public. At this point, Hüseyin Rahmi diverged from classical and romantic traditions, which typically emphasized only elite beauty and embellished fantasies. Instead, he highlighted

3 Hüseyin Rahmi, *Şekâvet-i Edebiyye* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriyye ve Şürekâsı, 1329), 68.

4 Hüseyin Rahmi, *Cadı Çarpıyor* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriyye ve Şürekâsı, 1329), 46- 47.

5 Mecdi Sadreddin, "Büyük Romancımız Hüseyin Rahmi Bey'de İki Saat", *Yeni Kitap* 3 (1927), 20.

the stark realities and fundamental aspects of society that the classicists and romantics often chose to overlook. He expressed these truths through works of fiction within the realist/naturalist school, which objectively conveyed such realities. From his first work to his last, Hüseyin Rahmi consistently addressed the issues stemming from the Westernization process that affected the entire spectrum of social classes. He wrote in a language and style that these classes could understand and enjoy, presenting the harsh realities that people preferred to ignore, with an accurate analysis of human nature. In doing so, Hüseyin Rahmi's keen observational skills became one of the most critical factors in his success. This was made possible by his adherence to the fundamental principles of realist-naturalist fiction. Önder Göçgün highlights the Western influence present in Hüseyin Rahmi's fictional world, emphasizing the trajectory from Romanticism to Naturalism. He expresses this with the statement: "...inspired by an influence that we consider to also originate from Émile Zola, he skillfully combines a form of Realism, which at times approaches Naturalism, with Romanticism. This approach, crafted in a manner befitting the Ahmed Midhat Efendi school to which he belongs, reflects the most remarkable aspect of the pens of our writers, who tirelessly produce for the public..."<sup>6</sup>

Within the framework of this article, we first sought to investigate the foundational source of the fictional world that enabled such a productive writer—one who was loved and widely read by large segments of society and who continues to be read today. Hüseyin Rahmi was a storyteller and novelist who, without aligning himself with any literary group, was able to sustain his livelihood throughout his life solely through his profession as a fiction writer. In this context, we observed that even before the publication of his first novel, *Âyine/Şık* [The Mirror/Foppish] (1305/1889), Hüseyin Rahmi's fictional world was significantly shaped by the influence of Beşir Fuad, a positivist intellectual of the time, particularly through Beşir Fuad's engagement with his *Victor Hugo* (1302/1886) work. In the latter half of the 1880s, Turkish literature witnessed debates over the "old" and the "new", within which Hüseyin Rahmi became involved, siding with Beşir Fuad in the Realism-Romanticism debate that Beşir Fuad initiated against Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi (1862-1903), particularly through Beşir Fuad's work *Victor Hugo*. Hüseyin Rahmi contributed to this debate in favor of Beşir Fuad by writing *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî* [Ecstasy of Dawn], a play in which he criticized the elements of Romanticism in Mehmed Tâhir Efendi's novel *Bir Sergüzeşt* [An Adventure]. This play, in which Hüseyin Rahmi critiques the Romanticism in *Bir Sergüzeşt*, forms the foundation of his understanding of fiction. Thus, we found it necessary to carefully examine Hüseyin Rahmi's *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî* within the context of his critique of Romanticism and his praise for Realism.

When considering Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's prefaces to his novels, his theoretical writings on fiction, his critical essays, and interviews, it becomes clear that he was an uncompromising advocate of Realism and Naturalism. He articulates the theoretical perspectives of the French

6 Önder Göçgün, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar'ın Romanları ve Romanlarında Şahıslar Kadrosu* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993), 602.

novelists, by whom he was significantly influenced, with remarkable clarity in these texts. However, upon closely examining his fictional works, it becomes evident that Hüseyin Rahmi, who initially laid the foundations of his realist-naturalist approach under the influence of Beşir Fuad and fervently defended it, was not entirely successful in implementing this understanding in practice. This gives the impression that he struggled to maintain consistency in this direction. In this study, we propose the hypothesis that Hüseyin Rahmi's idealized defense of a realist/naturalist approach to fiction remained largely theoretical and was not fully realized in his novels. Specifically, we suggest that there is a noticeable disconnect between his theoretical advocacy of Naturalism and its practical application, and we aim to explain the reasons behind this discrepancy.

### **Hüseyin Rahmi's Role in Debates Surrounding Beşir Fuad's Criticism of Victor Hugo**

The origins and influences of Hüseyin Rahmi's understanding of fiction trace back to the earliest debates in Turkish literature concerning Romanticism and Realism. To explore this, it is essential to carefully examine his early works. According to Refik Ahmet Sevengil (1903-1970), Hüseyin Rahmi's first published work was a fictional piece titled *İstanbul'da Bir Frenk* [A European in Istanbul], published in *Ceride-i Havâdis* [The Newsletter of Events] in 1887, and Beşir Fuad is said to have remarked, “*This child has a sense of comic wit, pay attention to him*”<sup>7</sup>, in response to this story. However, this information contains an error, as the *Ceride-i Havâdis* newspaper ceased publication in 1884, earlier than the date provided.<sup>8</sup> Hüseyin Rahmi's first published story, *Bir Genç Kızın Âvâze-i Şikâyeti* [The Lament of a Young Girl], appeared in *Ceride-i Havâdis* on November 24, 1884, nr. 5856, making it not only his first story but also his first published work. In an interview conducted by Mecdi Sadreddin, titled “*Büyük Romancımız Hüseyin Rahmi Bey'de İki Saat*,” [Two Hours with Our Great Novelist Hüseyin Rahmi Bey] which offers critical insights into the earliest period of his literary career, Hüseyin Rahmi provides further details on the matter: “*I wrote my first novel at the age of twelve. Unfortunately, the manuscript was destroyed during the Aksaray fire. Hulûsi Bey had not even seen it. My first work was also lost. It was a play called 'Gülbâhar Hânım', which I wrote while I was in the rüştiye [secondary school]. Afterwards, I wrote Şik.*”<sup>9</sup>

7 Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar* (İstanbul: Hilmi Kitabevi, 1944), 45.

8 In various biographical works about Hüseyin Rahmi, the story dated to 1887 and 1888 is reported to have been published in *Ceride-i Havâdis* in a serialized form over six issues from 29 November to 4 December 1884 (issues no. 5861-5866). Orhan Okay remarks on the cessation of *Ceride-i Havâdis* as follows: “The last issue, which led to its suspension, also bears the date 4 Kânunuevvel 1884. This issue was discontinued following a report, reprinted from another newspaper, regarding the construction of a shuttle train between the Yıldız and Dolmabahçe palaces.” Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad – İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti* (İstanbul: Hareket Yayınları, 1969), 54.

9 Mecdi Sadreddin, “*Büyük Romancımız Hüseyin Rahmi Bey'de İki Saat*”, 21.

Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar began his writing career with non-literary/scientific articles in *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, [The Articulator of Truth], encouraged by Beşir Fuad to pursue such topics. The event that opened the door for Hüseyin Rahmi to literary writing was the literary debates sparked by Beşir Fuad's monograph on *Victor Hugo*<sup>10</sup>. Shortly after the death of Victor Hugo on May 22, 1885, Beşir Fuad penned *Victor Hugo* on July 2, 1885, a work that Orhan Okay (1931-2017) identifies as “*the first critical biography written in Turkish literature, and the first work to introduce naturalism to Turkey by criticizing romanticism.*”<sup>11</sup> Beşir Fuad, known for his uncompromising Naturalism, understood Romanticism as a movement that brought freedom and innovation to literature by dismantling the old and overthrowing classical rules. The primary reason Beşir Fuad wrote a monograph on Victor Hugo, a key figure of Romanticism, was, in fact, to lend credibility to Emile Zola—who had yet to receive recognition in Turkish literature—through the figure of Victor Hugo. Beşir Fuad lamented that Victor Hugo had led literature away from the positive sciences and truth and toward fantasy. Through the lens of Victor Hugo and Emile Zola, Beşir Fuad created a significant theoretical text that engaged in the debate between the “hayâliyyûn” (romanticists) and the “hakîkiyyûn” (realists). In his analysis, Beşir Fuad carefully explained Victor Hugo's works and characters within the context of Romanticism, asserting that Hugo was the pinnacle figure of the movement. In a similar fashion, he establishes Emile Zola as the foremost figure of Realism, thus forming the backbone of his work, *Victor Hugo*.

It should be noted that the year in which Beşir Fuad wrote his *Victor Hugo* monograph coincided with a transitional period in Turkish literature, during which the debate between the old and the new was fiercely contested, and Romanticism—having reached its peak—was beginning to give way to Realism. Beşir Fuad seemed intent on conveying, through his *Victor Hugo* monograph, that just as Romanticism had dethroned classical literature and established itself as the dominant literary movement, Realism should now undergo a similar process and supplant Romanticism in the positivist era. Handan İnci encapsulates this process and Beşir Fuad's purpose in writing *Victor Hugo* by stating that his aim was “*to indirectly challenge the literary tastes of the Tanzimat [Reorganization] writers.*” She further summarized the situation by noting, “*In this way, he indirectly criticized the romantic tendencies that had reached their zenith in Turkish literature through figures such as Namık Kemal, Abdülhak Hâmid, and Recaizâde, by engaging with the Hugo-Zola debate.*”<sup>12</sup>

In the fourth chapter of Beşir Fuad's *Victor Hugo*, where Beşir Fuad discusses the emergence of Romanticism, he writes: “*Michelet and Augustin Thierry were the historians of the new style, while Lamartine, Musset, and Théophile Gautier were its poets, and Balzac its novelist. We classify Balzac as a Romantic only because he did not follow the classical tradition; in*

10 The bibliographic details of this book are as follows: Beşir Fuad, *Victor Hugo* (İstanbul: Mihran Matbaası, 1302).

11 M. Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad – İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti* (İstanbul: Hareket Yayınları, 1969), 138.

12 Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, ed. Handan İnci (İstanbul: YKY, 2019), 17-18.

fact, Balzac belongs to the Realists. The path of Realism is the one followed by Emile Zola, which consists of applying science to literature.”<sup>13</sup> Based on these statements, Orhan Okay makes a striking conclusion, though with a note of caution, regarding its significance in the history of Turkish literature:

“The honor of being the first to speak of Realism in Turkey, to equate it with the term *hakikiyyûn* [realists], and to provide its initial definition belongs to Beşir Fuad. This began with the sentence we quoted. This sentence—or, to avoid exaggeration, this Victor Hugo biography—would later pave the way for the debates between the *hayâliyyûn* [romanticists] and the *hakikiyyûn*, and ultimately, a few years after Beşir Fuad's death, would set a new direction for Turkish literature.”<sup>14</sup>

Beşir Fuad's *Victor Hugo* holds a special and important place in the history of Turkish literature, as it informed writers about the decline of Romanticism in the West and the rise of Realism, almost simultaneously with Naturalism, providing crucial insights into the principles and foundations of these movements. However, within the context of this article, it is especially noteworthy because it was perhaps the most important factor shaping Hüseyin Rahmi's fictional world during his earliest period.

### From *Victor Hugo* to the Birth of *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*: Hüseyin Rahmi's Turn Toward Realism

Beşir Fuad sent his *Victor Hugo* monograph to Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, whom he had known through *Hâver* [The East] and *Güneş* [The Sun] newspapers and had collaborated with in writing activities, for criticism. Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi published his views in a serialized form in the journal *Gayret* [The Effort]. In response, Beşir Fuad published his counterarguments in the journal *Saadet* [The Bliss]<sup>15</sup>. This series of exchanges ignited the debate between the *hayâliyyun* and *hakikiyyun* (Romanticists and Realists) in Turkish literature, sparking an intense discussion. Following this, the scope of the debate expanded significantly, with prominent figures such as Muallim Nâci (1849-

13 Okay, *Beşir Fuad – İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti*, 144.

14 Okay, *Beşir Fuad – İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti*, 144.

15 The discussion between the two literary figures progresses as follows:

Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, “Biraderim Fuad Beyefendi”, *Gayret*, 31 Kânun-ı sâni 1886/1301, 3-6, 17, 24.

“Beşir Fuad, “Gayret”in 3, 4, 5, 6 Numerolu Nüshalarında Münderic ‘Victor Hugo’ Ünvanlı Makale-i İntikadiyyeye Mukabele”, *Saadet*, 26, 28 Temmuz, 1-4 Ağustos 1886, 470, 472, 475-478.

Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, “Beşir Fuad Beyefendi'nin Victor Hugo Ünvanlı Eserlerine Dair Yazdığıım Makaleye Mukabil Saadet Gazetesiyile Neşreyledikleri Varakaya Cevaptır”, *Gayret*, 18 Temmuz, 22 Ağustos, 5, 19 Eylül 1886/1302, 29-31, 33.

Beşir Fuad, “Menemenlizâde Tâhir Beyefendi'nin Gayret”in 29, 30, 31, 33 Numerolu Nüshalarındaki Makale-i Cevâbiyyeye Cevap”, *Saadet*, 3, 11, 13, 15, 16, 20, 25, 30 Teşrin-i sâni, 7, 7, 13 Kânun-ı evvel 1886, 553, 560, 561, 563, 564, 567, 572, 576, 582, 584, 587.” Beşir Fuad, “I. Münazara”, 161-240.



1893), Nâmık Kemâl (1840-1888), and Rezaizâde Mahmud Ekrem (1847-1914), as well as pseudonymous authors, joining the fray. Hüseyin Rahmi, encouraged by Beşir Fuad, became involved in this debate and penned a one-act comedy titled *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*.<sup>16</sup> In this play, Hüseyin Rahmi expressed his support for Beşir Fuad and articulated his thoughts on Realism.

As a result of these debates, Hüseyin Rahmi wrote a play criticizing Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi's novel *Bir Sergüzeşt*<sup>17</sup>, which was serialized in issues 7, 8, 9, and 11 of *Güneş* journal. The novel depicted the love of a young poet for his neighbor's daughter, embellished with ornate elements of Romanticism. Hüseyin Rahmi's play was serialized in *Tercümân-ı Hakikat* newspaper, appearing in issues 2515–2518 from November 3–6, 1886. This play, titled *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, begins with Hüseyin Rahmi introducing the work with the following humorous remark: “*We have written a comedy under this name. While writing, we laughed at ourselves until we fainted. I don't know what will happen to the spectators if it were to be performed.*”<sup>18</sup> Drawing on the poet-hero of *Bir Sergüzeşt*, Hüseyin Rahmi's primary purpose in writing *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî* was to craft a parody, satirizing Romanticism through the exaggerated depiction of its elements.

Hüseyin Rahmi explained how he found himself involved in this debate and how, in his own words, the path to his “first fame” was opened, in the subheading titled “First Fame” during his interview with Mecdi Sadreddin. He described the event as follows:

*“If Süleyman Nazîf were alive, he would remember it perfectly. At one time, Beşir Fuad, Nadir, Hüseyin Efendi, Besim Ömer Pasha, and his brother Aziz Bey were publishing a journal called Güneş. What a beautiful and valuable magazine it was... In one of its issues, I do not recall an intellectual debate that began between Menemenlizâde Tâhir Bey and Beşir Fuad Bey.<sup>19</sup> Beşir Fuad, a ‘Realist’ and disciple of Zola, while Tâhir Bey was a ‘Romantic lyricist.’ The controversy grew. The writers weighed in, one after the other. Mustafa Reşid Bey and Beşir Fuad Bey asked my opinion on the matter. I shared my thoughts, and they said, ‘Write*

16 Orhan Okay, while discussing Beşir Fuad's writings on the positive sciences, notes that Hüseyin Rahmi was also involved in a debate in *Saadet* newspaper, as expressed in the following sentences: “In a letter signed with the ‘M.’ that appeared in *Saadet*, where Beşir Fuad managed the ‘Scientific Section,’ it was reported that there were illustrations of hailstones and inquiries were made about their cause. In the debate, it is noteworthy that some writers and readers had personal reflections contrary to Beşir Fuad's rational and positivist views. Meanwhile, we observe that Hüseyin Rahmi, who initially wrote on scientific topics under Beşir Fuad's influence, also participated in the discussion. (See *Saadet*, August and September 1886 issues).” According to Okay's observation, it can be inferred that Hüseyin Rahmi had contact with Beşir Fuad before writing *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*. (Okay, *Beşir Fuad – İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti*, 118.)

17 Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, “*Bir Sergüzeşt*”, *Güneş* 7 (1884), 291-303; 8 (1884), 337-349; 9 (1884), 387-390; 11 (1884), 483-491.

18 Hüseyin Rahmi, “*İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*”, *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, 3 Teşrînisâni 1886, 2.

19 Here, Hüseyin Rahmi misremembers the name of the magazine approximately 41 years later. Contrary to his statement in the interview, this debate was not initiated in *Güneş* but in the *Gayret* and *Saadet* newspapers. Refik Ahmet Sevensil, in his biographical work prepared shortly after the author's death, repeats this incorrect information by presenting the relevant portion of the interview in his own words. Sevensil, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar*, 49-50.

*it down. 'Therefore, I wrote a piece titled İstiğrâk-ı Seherî, a comedy, which was published in Tercümân. This was the work that led to my first fame.'*<sup>20</sup>

The foundational views expressed in Hüseyin Rahmi's work *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî* can be said to have guided and shaped the entirety of his fictional oeuvre. For this reason, it is beneficial to focus on the process behind the formation of this work and the messages it conveys. The play, composed of sections titled "Komedi I Perde," ["Comedy Act I"] "Bir Sergüzeşt," ["An Adventure"] "Hâtime," ["Epilogue"] "Birinci Tablo," ["First Scene"] "İkinci Tablo," ["Second Scene"] and "İstirhâm," ["Plea"] begins with the narrator explaining how the play came about in the section "Komedi I Perde" with the following words:

*"Recently, on a Friday, the weather was overcast. Unable to go outside, I was thinking of how to pass the time when, lo and behold, there was a knock on the door, and (M) Bey from among my companions honored me with his presence. It turned out that (M) Bey's visit to my home was with a particular intention. As soon as he arrived, he said to me:*

*'I had long wanted to write a comedy. However, since I wanted the subject matter to be rather peculiar, I had difficulty finding it. Yesterday, by chance, I came across an issue of the periodical Güneş. There was a novel starting under the title Sergüzeşt, written by none other than the famous poet Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Bey Efendi. I found the oddities I had been seeking in abundance in this novel. It was as if the esteemed poet had been aware of my desire and wielded his pen accordingly. The style is comic! The setting is comic! The dialogue is comic!*

*When I saw this novel, I was so elated that I felt like a man who had discovered hidden treasure. I put it in my pocket and ran straight to you. Since the weather is bad today, let us quickly transform this into a play together. What do you think?'*

*'No, brother, I do not find your idea quite fitting. If you intend to write a comedy, you should either find or invent the subject matter yourself. Frankly, I find the idea of stealing someone else's subject and concept to be rather disgraceful. Even if this comedy were to gain widespread popularity, its true intellectual merit would still belong to Tâhir Bey Efendi. What would you gain from that?'*

*'My aim is to produce a comedy that everyone will laugh at, and let the deserved applause go to Tâhir Bey Efendi. I have no envy of him.'*

*'Well, let it be so, but bear in mind that Tâhir Bey Efendi is a serious writer. Even if his novel were to be transformed into a play, it would turn out to be a fine drama, not a comedy. His work is laden with sorrow; it brings not joy but gloom to those who encounter it.'*<sup>21</sup>

20 Mecdi Sadreddin, "Büyük Romancımız Hüseyin Rahmi Bey'de İki Saat", 23.

21 Hüseyin Rahmi, "İstiğrâk-ı Seherî", 22 October, 3 Teşrînisâni 1886, 2-3.

Although the narrator tells (M) Bey that Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi is a “hissiyât-ı âlîyye musavviri” [portrayer of noble emotions], a serious figure, and that it would be impossible to create a comedy out of his work, he is unable to dissuade (M) Bey from writing the play. Consequently, a comedy is produced under the title “Bir Sergüzeşt” through excerpts from Mehmed Tâhir Efendi’s work. Thus, in the fictional *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, we encounter the underlying tones of the imaginary debate between Beşir Fuad and Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi concerning the philosophical conflict between the *hayâliyyûn* [romantics] and *hakikiyyûn* [realists]. (M) Bey expresses his primary intention in creating a comedic play from *Bir Sergüzeşt* with the following words:

*“My real purpose in this matter is as follows: Most of our Ottoman poetry, when translated into another language, yields all sorts of strange, nonsensical meanings. Many do not even attain this level of ‘honor’ and are left completely devoid of meaning. I wonder, if our poets’ peculiar imaginations were to be embodied on a stage for public viewing, what kind of result would emerge? This is what I was curious about.”*<sup>22</sup>

In *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, (M) Bey’s aim recalls the following lines from Beşir Fuad’s defense of the *hakikiyyûn* [realists] in the aforementioned debate with Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi:

*“As an example, the verse of a Persian poet that expresses, ‘If the Huma bird were to eat the bones of the lover who died out of grief from yearning for your ruby lips, ruby fragments would fall from its wings as it flies,’ is a hyperbole beyond the limits of comprehension. (...) If this verse, with its excessive Persian hyperbole, were translated into the languages of Western nations unfamiliar with such exaggeration and shown to their literati, it would achieve nothing beyond being labeled a ‘strange imagination.’ However, any literary work based on truth and containing natural metaphors will always be appreciated, regardless of the language into which it is translated.”*<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen, in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, Hüseyin Rahmi aligns himself with Beşir Fuad’s ideas in the debate that arose between Beşir Fuad and Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Bey over a work by Victor Hugo, which Beşir Fuad wrote about at the request of Tâhir Bey. Beşir Fuad argues that the excessively ornate and artificial expressions found in Persian poetry would find no place in the worldview of a Western literatus, who would regard them as nothing more than “acıb” [strange] imaginings. Beşir Fuad champions poetry that is grounded in reality and natural in its expression. He reinforces his argument with the following words: *“You state that poetry cannot be devoid of metaphors, allusions, allegories, and imaginations. However, no one has denied their necessity. The only point made was that these metaphors, allegories, and imaginations must be natural. For example, the verse:*

22 Hüseyin Rahmi, “İstiğrâk-ı Seherî”, 22 October, 3 Teşrinisâni 1886, 3.

23 Beşir Fuad, “Gayret” in 3, 4, 5, 6 Numarolu Nüşâlarında Münderic ‘Victor Hugo’ Ünvanlı Makale-i İntikadiyyeye Mukabele”, *Saadet* 26 Temmuz 1886/24 Şevval 1303, 3.

*'Could the difficulties of fate ever ensnare the minds of the brilliant?  
The more the wound deepens, the greater the sweetness of its assault'<sup>24</sup>  
not only conveys a truth but also contains a natural metaphor.'*<sup>25</sup>

Beşir Fuad does not object to the use of rhetorical devices, but rather to their artificiality and lack of connection to any underlying truth.

In the later sections of the play, several metaphors from the novel *Bir Sergüzeşt* are critiqued by (M) Bey. One such metaphor involves the poetically inclined character comparing the soft light of dawn to the drowsy eyes of a lovesick person during an early morning walk in the garden. (M) Bey, in a tone critical of the novel's romantic atmosphere, remarks that the metaphor is nonsensical:

*"– (M) Bey: Did you notice the oddity? The soft, gentle light of dawn is compared to the drowsy eyes of a lover who couldn't sleep until morning, yet there is no congruence in the metaphor. 'Drowsy' refers to the slight closure of eyelids, not, as the poets imagine, to eyes where the light has dimmed or faded. If such eyes were to be called 'drowsy,' then even the sheep heads that Albanians carry around on poles in the streets would be regarded as having drowsy gazes that harmoniously combine beauty and sorrow without appearing at all grotesque."*<sup>26</sup>

Later, (M) Bey points out another flawed metaphor to the now-convinced narrator (Hüseyin Rahmi). The poetic, romantic character of the novel, during a walk at dawn, sees a "dawn-faced, moon-haired girl" at the window of a neighboring house. (M) Bey attempts to demonstrate the inappropriateness of this metaphor by referencing Nâmık Kemâl's verse "*Fill the cup with pure wine/Mix it with dawn and moonlight.*" ["Doldur kadehe şarâb-ı nâbi/Mezc eyle şafakla mâhitâbı"]. According to (M) Bey's interpretation of the verse, Menemenlizâde's extraordinary

24 Turkish version:

*Müşkilât-ı dehr olur mu hiç pâbend-i dühât  
Zahme düş oldukça şirin savleti şiddetlenir.*

25 Beşir Fuad, "Gayret'in 3, 4, 5, 6 Numerolu Nüshâlarında Münderic 'Victor Hugo' Ünvanlı Makale-i İntikadiyyeye Mukabele", 4.

Beşir Fuad, in order to emphasize that he was not prejudiced against Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Bey, included the following couplet by Sümbülzâde Vehbi, which reflects his own understanding of poetry, in his article.

In his article, written in opposition to Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Bey's ideas, Beşir Fuad also articulated the necessity of grounding imagination in reality, particularly in the context of the novel, with the following sentences:

"The imagination to which the fiction writer seeks refuge for assistance must be natural. It can be said that both history and the novel are, in essence, maps of human nature and conditions. History is a map on a smaller scale; it shows the main points and the relationships between them. The novel, on the other hand, is a large-scale plan that presents the specific details of various points in a more detailed and defined manner. The historian records actual events; although the novelist's work is fictional, it is still based on a comprehensive principle derived from the investigation and application of many events. By this principle, the issues concerning the conditions of a particular class within human society are resolved. This, in my view, is the function of the novel." Beşir Fuad, "Gayret'in 3, 4, 5, 6 Numerolu Nüshâlarında Münderic 'Victor Hugo' Ünvanlı Makale-i İntikadiyyeye Mukabele", 4.

26 Hüseyin Rahmi, "İstiğrâk-ı Seherî", 4 Teşrînisâni 1886, 3.

beauty—“The matchless beauty of the daughter who nurtures grace.” [duhter-i letâfet-perverin cemâl-i bî-nazîri], who bewitched the observer at first glance—has a face the color of dawn and hair the color of moonlight, making her resemble a ninety-year-old drunkard (bekrî). However, (M) Bey also acknowledges the correct usage of this metaphor within our poetic tradition, stating, “*The column of light that results from the reflection of the moonlight on the surface of the sea has long been described and defined as the ‘silver cypress’ by poets. This expression has become so old and well-known that even those who are not poets have heard and read it many times. It is quite reasonable to be surprised that Zâde has not yet learned that the color of moonlight is silver. Otherwise, it seems that such feigned ignorance stems from their curiosity about strange imaginings.*”<sup>27</sup> Thus, (M) Bey critiques Menemenlizâde’s fascination with “grotesque imaginings” as indicative of a departure from the foundation of reality.

In the later lines of *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, it is stated that the fundamental flaw in the metaphorical errors stems from “grotesque imagination” [garâbet-i hayâlî], and as Beşir Fuad argues, the harmony between imagination and reality is absent in the novel *Bir Sergüzeşt*. Consequently, this disharmony in the novel provides material for ridicule, opening the door for its adaptation into a comedy.

In the third section of *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, the fact that the romantic poet’s metaphors fail to align with reality continues to be a subject of critique, now delivered in a harsher tone, with the level of satire further heightened. The melancholic poet-hero of *Bir Sergüzeşt* describes the scene: “since it was a moonlit night, the delicate light of the moon reflected through the windows.” (M) Bey, criticizing this description for being entirely beyond Realism’s bounds, responds with the following:

*“Did the poet not state, just the day before, that while he was walking in the garden at dawn, his eyes were always turned toward the heights and that the moon had not yet set in the sky? How is it, then, that the moon is already in the sky by the early evening? How is the moonlight present everywhere? They speak of the delicate moonlight in every line, yet why do they not see the need to understand how the moon rises and sets according to its cycle? Every time there is moonlight, they sit in front of it and indulge in a series of absurd and grotesque fantasies completely devoid of reality and grace, like a sick person whose brain has been affected by madness. Would it not be better if they at least took a closer look at the real loftiness of that poetic scene they are so obsessed with? Alas! Merely having refined taste and possessing a poetic sensibility is not enough. Science is necessary, science! If such nonsense comes from a person who graduated from a higher institution, then it is no surprise that some incompetent poets who grew up here and there come up with worse absurdities. Young poets who are still unaware of what four times four equals but drown themselves in the meters of aruz! Poetry is not simply arranging a few fâilâtün in a row. Trying to explain this truth to you is incomparable even to the impossible task of making a camel leap over a ditch. For many camels can leap over a ditch, but you will never escape the abyss of ignorance in which you remain stuck.”*<sup>28</sup>

27 Hüseyin Rahmi, “İstiğrâk-ı Seherî”, 4 Teşrînisâni 1886, 3.

28 Hüseyin Rahmi, “İstiğrâk-ı Seherî”, 5 Teşrînisâni 1886, 3.

As seen here, the inconsistency in the romantic poet-hero's descriptions reveals his ignorance regarding the rules of the moon's rise and set, despite his constant references to moonlight. (M) Bey attributes this to a lack of scientific knowledge, arguing that possessing refined taste is insufficient for cultivating a poetic sensibility. The critiques in *İstiğrāk-ı Seherî* emphasize that imagination must be in perfect harmony with the truth of reality, through the criticism of supernatural and exaggerated descriptions [tasavvurât ve hayâlât-ı fevk-at-tabîiyye]. In this context, Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi is severely criticized, with language bordering on insult, for making this mistake despite his strong education.

Throughout *İstiğrāk-ı Seherî*, *Bir Sergüzeşt* is criticized almost line by line. (M) Bey mocks the romantic poet-hero's contemplation of the night sky during a dark and silent evening, where he sees "nothingness" and a deep silence, in the following terms:

*"When the universe is engulfed in darkness, and there is neither sound to be heard nor anything to be seen, what is there to be observed in the heavens at midnight? Nothing! Only a dense darkness... A profound silence... Then, as the sun begins to rise, you hear the sorrowful laments of nightingales and the mournful sounds of shepherds' flutes... Did you see it? What did he observe in the heavens at midnight, when nothing could be seen? Nothing (?) That 'nothingness' is a reflection of Menemenlizâde Bey Efendi's own poetic inadequacies. If everything that lies beyond the poet's understanding were to be called 'nothing,' then it would be necessary to entirely destroy modern civilization and reduce human thought to the simplicity of the time of the prophet Adam. Take note of how an astronomer from the scientific community describes the same dark night that Tâhir Bey so casually calls 'nothing' in his work *Les merveilles célestes* [The Wonders of the Sky]."*<sup>29</sup>

As is evident, Hüseyin Rahmi points out that the issue lies in Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi's poetic perspective. He emphasized that Menemenlizâde's attitude contradicts both the advancement of humanity and the accumulated achievements of contemporary civilization. He highlights how a scholar from the field of astronomy [referred to as "hey'et-i ulemasından bir zât"]<sup>30</sup> eloquently describes the night that the romantic poet perceives as "nothingness":

*"O dark night, how lofty is the language of your silent expression to me.! How unfortunate are those who cannot comprehend the eloquence of a night adorned with stars!*

*How pitiable are the souls who have never gazed in wonder at the radiant celestial realms above their heads, who have never endeavored to appreciate the grandeur of the word of creation.*

29 Hüseyin Rahmi, "İstiğrāk-ı Seherî", 5 Teşrînisâni 1886, 3.

30 In *İstiğrāk-ı Seherî*, the individual referred to by Hüseyin Rahmi as "a member of the clergy" without mentioning his name is Camille Flammarion (1842–1925), from whom he borrowed ideas from the work *Les Merveilles Célestes* (1865). Flammarion was a French astronomer and author. His contributions include popular science works on astronomy, several significant early science fiction novels, and studies on psychic phenomena.

*Since we lack the capacity to engage in a spiritual connection with the melancholic and silent hours of the night, the most precious moments of our lives are lost to these very hours. The dark expanse of the night, which they mistakenly believe to obscure our vision with its gloomy veils, in fact, does not obscure the phenomena that the sun has spread across the air. Rather, it tears apart those veils, revealing the full majesty of the celestial dome to our gaze. The night serves as a harbinger, inviting us to behold the sublime and awe-inspiring panorama of the heavens.”<sup>31</sup>*

As seen in the sentences of Camille Flammarion, while the romantic poet gazes at a silent and dark sky and perceives “nothingness,” a scientist, in contrast, speaks of the grandeur of the night’s silent language. In a manner that seems to directly respond to the romantic poet, the scientist considers those who fail to comprehend the eloquent language of a star-studded night to be unfortunate. He further continues by deeming those who do not gaze in awe at the luminous and artfully constructed heavens, or appreciate the greatness of the art of creation, as pitiable. By quoting Camille Flammarion and critiquing Menemenlizâde’s romantic poet, Hüseyin Rahmi, in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, elevates Realism over Romanticism, which aligns with the very purpose of the text. Hüseyin Rahmi aims to underscore that, in the face of romantic attitudes, the empirical investigations of science provide a more effective means of perceiving and understanding life. Through this approach, Hüseyin Rahmi emphasized his preference for “true sublimity over mere imagination.

Just as Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi defends himself in his debate with Beşir Fuad by referencing the verses of Nâmık Kemâl and Sümbülzâde Vehbi (1718?-1809), Hüseyin Rahmi, as a participant in the same debate, also follows a similar path in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*. He defends his position by drawing attention to the harmony between imagination and reality in the poems of the same poets. In the play, the narrator (Hüseyin Rahmi) satirically devalues the protagonist’s “peculiarities” by mocking elements that deviate from reality, thus subtly glorifying Realism in the footsteps of Beşir Fuad.

After the publication of *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, feeling that he had been addressed in an undignified manner, responded to Hüseyin Rahmi’s critique by announcing that he would remain silent out of a sense of decorum. He withdrew from the debate with the following words:

*“Since last Wednesday, a so-called comedic piece titled İstiğrâk-ı Seherî, penned by Hüseyin Rahmi, has been published in Tercümân-ı Hakikat. Given that we have already expressed our specific opinion on such matters in our third issue, we have nothing more to say beyond what we have already stated. However, we publish the following fine response that we received from Mr. Tâhir Bey:*

31 Hüseyin Rahmi, “İstiğrâk-ı Seherî”, 5 Teşrînisâni 1886, 2.

*To the Editorial Board of Mîzan:*

*In regard to the things that have been published against me in Saâdet and Tercümân-ı Hakikat, in contradiction to all the principles of critique, I do not wish to say anything, as the nature of these writings will be judged by public opinion. Nevertheless, I cannot refrain from expressing my regret that such esteemed newspapers have served as a vehicle for publishing such content. It is especially lamentable to hear such words from the tongues of students of knowledge. Had they voiced their objections within the bounds of proper debate, I would have written my response. However, in the current situation, there can be no better answer than silence in response to such things.”<sup>32</sup>*

In *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, which was written primarily to support and advocate the ideas of Beşir Fuad—who, within the framework of his *Victor Hugo* monograph, criticized the elements of Romanticism and its artistic vision while promoting Naturalism—Hüseyin Rahmi's understanding of Realism/Naturalism, as discussed, aligns closely with that of Beşir Fuad, whom he followed. In this work, which attempts to discredit Romanticism for its discordance with reality, it is argued that even literary devices in poetry should align with reality, and that scientific objectivity and observation should form the basis of the fictional world. It can be argued that Hüseyin Rahmi's approach aligns directly with the ideas of Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1868-1945), who created works within the Western norms of fiction and would come to dominate the literary scene of the era. However, in his work titled *Hikâye* [Story], written in 1307 (1891/92) where he introduces Romanticism and Realism, Halit Ziya emphasizes the superiority of Realism over Romanticism through the following comparison:

*“We believe that even the ugliest reality holds superiority over the loftiest fantasy. What repels many thinkers about the realists is their portrayal of people exactly as they are. Romantics, however, prefer the artifice of presenting the characters they create according to their desires, showing them as admirable or repugnant based on the creator's intentions; even despicable characters are dressed up to fit into the highest circles of society.*

(...)

*Realists thrust numerous characters—good or bad—into the scene, allowing them to act while the writer remains silent. None of them are biased. The characters orbit around the main event, much like planets following their natural trajectories, without veering from their natural path. The writer does not instruct the reader to admire one character or dismiss another. They present reality, and it is up to you to judge.*

*Romantics are not like this. They become advocates, either defending or condemning a character.”<sup>33</sup>*

32 Menemenlizâde Mehmet Tâhir, “Fünûn ve Edebiyat Mebâhis-i Edebiyat”, *Mîzan* 4, 11 Teşrînisâni 1886, 4.

33 Uşşâki-zâde Hâlid Ziyâ, *Hikâye* (Kostantiniye: Sahib ve Nâşiri Vatan Kitâbhânesi Sâhibi Ohannes Ferid, 1307), 143-144.



Here, while enumerating the fundamental distinctions between Realism and Romanticism, Halit Ziya theoretically articulates nearly the same arguments that Hüseyin Rahmi expressed around the same period when criticizing *Bir Sergüzeşt* in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*. This serves as both a theoretical and practical illustration of how, after the mid-1880s, Realism began to eclipse Romanticism and establish itself as the dominant trend within the Turkish fictional world.

Hüseyin Rahmi, in his effort to undermine Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi's *Bir Sergüzeşt* by caricaturing and ridiculing its poet-hero, successfully applied this approach—which he discovered in the very early stages of his fictional writing—to the other works of fiction he would produce throughout his life. However, while Hüseyin Rahmi was attempting to reflect these ideas in his works during the early years of his fiction writing, and while the Servet-i Fünûn novelists, who were active in the second half of the 1890s, were also producing works within the realist tradition, Hüseyin Rahmi, for various reasons, did not associate himself with them.

### **Developing a Different Fictional Perspective by Distancing Himself from Servet-i Fünûn**

Although Hüseyin Rahmi produced works during the same period as the Servet-i Fünûn group, which operated under a structured literary formation between 1896 and 1900, he distanced himself from their literary understanding and refused to align with them. Despite the fact that the Servet-i Fünûn writers dominated Turkish literature after the second half of the 1890s, opened the pages of their magazine to numerous contemporary writers, and attracted many to be part of their movement, Hüseyin Rahmi resisted this allure. One reason for this may be attributed to Hüseyin Rahmi's adherence to the Ahmed Midhat Efendi school, which inherently led to a divergence in literary approach from that of the Servet-i Fünûn artists. The Ahmed Midhat Efendi school prioritized literature that appealed to the masses and aimed at engaging large segments of the public. However, reducing Hüseyin Rahmi's stance to this single explanation would be an oversimplification. Instead, the real reason for Hüseyin Rahmi's departure from the dominant literary currents of his time lies in his understanding of literature and his objectives in literary pursuits. It is an undeniable fact that the Servet-i Fünûn writers sought to create a kind of "parlor literature," ("salon edebiyatı") prioritizing a refined, intellectual literature that catered to the tastes of an elite readership. In contrast, as Hüseyin Rahmi himself openly stated, his goal was the exact opposite: "*In every one of my works, I endeavored to pull my readers from common pleasantries toward a higher philosophy,*" indicating that his aim was to reach the broader public. When the target is a large audience with lower levels of education and consciousness, it becomes necessary to communicate in a language that resonates with them. At this juncture, Hüseyin Rahmi not only advocated for, but also practiced, the simplification of language, as he declared in the epigraph at the beginning of *Cadı Çarpıyor* (1913/1329) [The Witch Strikes]: "*The day when the necessity and importance of simplicity in our language is genuinely understood will be the day literature begins.*"<sup>34</sup> This stance directly challenged to the major literary debate and contentious issue

34 "Hüseyin Rahmi made this statement in 1913, during the years when the National Literature and New Language movements were fervently defended. It is clear that Hüseyin Rahmi was quite influenced by the 'zeitgeist' of the time."

of the 1890s, which was language reform. Whereas the Servet-i Fünûn writers, with their stylistic concerns, addressed a refined and elitist readership (havas), pushing the language to its limits and rendering it nearly incomprehensible, Hüseyin Rahmi's approach to language stood in stark opposition. Given these differences, it was nearly impossible for Hüseyin Rahmi and the Servet-i Fünûn writers to converge on the same literary trajectory.

Halide Edip Adıvar (1884-1964), in an essay evaluating Hüseyin Rahmi following his death, remarked that he viewed life entirely through the lens of comedy, using the laughter and absurdities of this comedy to reveal genuine tragedies, all while pursuing a moral purpose. She expressed this perspective, emphasizing how she saw him as a reaction against Servet-i Fünûn, in the following words:

*"Hüseyin Rahmi not only could never belong to this school [Servet-i Fünûn], but he can also be seen as its adversary. One could even say that Hüseyin Rahmi is a reaction against Servet-i Fünûn. Initially, there is a strong reaction in him against the literature that they created under the influence of the West. This reaction becomes very apparent when Hüseyin Rahmi chooses a ridiculous middle-class family, or even the backstreets, as the subject and setting for his novels, in contrast to the Western-influenced literature produced by Servet-i Fünûn."*<sup>35</sup>

Hüseyin Rahmi also articulated his reasons for distancing himself from the Servet-i Fünûn group in an interview with Kenan Hulusi Koray (1906-1943):

*"At the time, I did not have any thoughts about the Edebiyat-ı Cedide. They even made me an offer to join; Siyret Bey is alive; he knows this well (...) Had I joined that group, I would have had to conform to their atmosphere; however, I wanted to remain free; besides, I didn't admire them. If that had happened, I would have inevitably imitated both their themes and their style. But I do not like stylism; it's not a good thing... Halit Ziya and Cenap read extensively; they wanted to create a Turkish literature and style according to their own vision. To what extent they succeeded, I don't know... What they produced was a direct copy of European literature. For example, Rauf Bey was so immersed in that literature that he couldn't even come up with an original title for his novel. There was 'Avril' in French, and he translated it to 'Eylül' in Turkish.*

*Yes, I believe that those who focus on style lack the intellectual strength and willpower. They write long works; can you show me a three-hundred-page book of theirs? They lack ideas... That's how I feel; when there are no ideas, style takes over."*<sup>36</sup>

35 Halide Edip Adıvar, "Hüseyin Rahmi'nin Eserleri Karşısında", *Yeditepe* 100/8 (1964), 6.

36 Kenan Hulusi, "Edebiyatımız Hakkında Hüseyin Rahmi Bey Ne Diyor?", *Muhit* 19 (1930), 10.

Rauf Mutluay (1925-1995) explains Gürpınar's failure to join the Servet-i Fünûn circle primarily by his lack of proper education; in other words, he presents this as one of the reasons: "Despite the early maturity and talent shown in the letters he sent to his father and the success of the draft of *Şık* that quickly pleased Ahmet Mithat Efendi, Hüseyin Rahmi did not grow up with a solid and deep cultural background. ... Because Hüseyin Rahmi did not undergo the discipline of a well-structured curriculum and the meticulous training of a professional school, he was left to the whims of his curiosities and random events, compounded by the demands of journalism which required him to produce articles on a daily basis." Additionally, Mutluay states: "His timid nature, shy sensitivity, frail physique, and the realism that made him aware of his inadequacies not only distanced him from crowds and the fatigue of social life but also set him apart from the Edebiyat-ı Cedide generation, which was unified by refined taste and cultural proximity achieved through better education." Rauf Mutluay, "Konuları ve Kişileriyle Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar", *Papirüs* 33 (1969), 9-10.

As can be seen, while Hüseyin Rahmi prioritized personal freedom in his literary career, he did not accept the literary understanding of his contemporaries, the Servet-i Fünûn writers. He rejected being part of the group because belonging to a group would require conforming to a particular style, which he termed as “stylism.” Moreover, he believed that the group lacked intellectual depth, which led them to focus on style rather than substance, and that their style was merely an imitation of European literature. Hüseyin Rahmi had articulated similar thoughts 34 years earlier in his novel *İffet* (1314/1897), through the words of the doctor character, where he expressed his disdain for literary devices that lacked meaning.<sup>37</sup> Hüseyin Rahmi had already opposed the use of romantic and unrealistic literary devices in Menemenlizâde Mehmed Tâhir Efendi’s novel *Bir Sergüzeşt*, as well as in his own second novel, *İffet*, which he wrote in 1896. Hüseyin Rahmi tried to apply the ideas he had defended in the Romanticism vs. Realism debate, initiated by Beşir Fuad, to his later fictional works. It can be said that Hüseyin Rahmi’s conceptualization of “stylism” was a significant reason for his distance from the Servet-i Fünûn group.

It is widely accepted that both Hüseyin Rahmi and the Servet-i Fünûn group were influenced by Realism and Naturalism in their fictional works. The Servet-i Fünûn novelists, in response to the Romanticism of the Tanzimat period, turned to a form of psychological Realism grounded in reality and infused with melancholic elements. However, as Hüseyin Rahmi elaborated in *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, while he aimed to present the realities of everyday life with complete transparency and objectivity, his distance from the Servet-i Fünûn group stemmed from the differing realities that each side sought to depict. In short, while Hüseyin Rahmi and the Servet-i Fünûn group shared a common theoretical foundation in Realism/Naturalism, they diverged in their treatment of reality within the fictional world, leading to the creation of different styles of fiction based on the technical elements that this difference brought about.

### **Following in Beşir Fuad’s Footsteps: A Pursuit of Stability within the Realist-Naturalist Framework**

Apart from hereditary factors (he mentions that his father also wrote many poems) and the family environment in which he spent his childhood, the ideas of Beşir Fuad played a crucial role in shaping Hüseyin Rahmi’s fictional world. From the second half of the 1880s, when Hüseyin Rahmi began publishing his fictional works, he positioned himself within the ongoing debates in Turkish literature, which were polarized between old and new, as well as

37 “Whenever I come across such poetic works, written in either Turkish or French, I browse through several parts to get a particular sense of the work... During my reading, I feel as though I understand something. If the meaning is as I think it is, I try to analyze it further... But what do I find? Once you strip away the pompous words, like ‘spiritual nourishment’ (*ruhperver*), ‘rosy cheeks’ (*ruhsâr-ı âli*), and ‘indigo blue sky’ (*sipihr-i nîlgün*), all that’s left is a heap of words, devoid of meaning. In such works, I find plenty of words, but very little thought, and it bores me.” Hüseyin Rahmi, *İffet* (Dersâadet: İkdâm Matbaası, 1314), 105-106.

between Romanticism and Realism/Naturalism. In these debates, Hüseyin Rahmi made his choice in favor of the new and aligned himself with Realism/Naturalism.<sup>38</sup>

Influenced by Ahmed Midhat Efendi's *Letâif-i Rivâyât* [Subleties of Narratives], who was a central figure in the literary world of the period, Hüseyin Rahmi published his first novel, *Şik* (1305/1888), in *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*. Following this, he published several articles on Guy de Maupassant in the same periodical. During this period, Hüseyin Rahmi, who in his own words "worshipped Maupassant," was invited by Ahmed Cevdet Bey to write for *İkdâm* [Diligence], impressed by these articles: "*Ahmed Cevdet Bey had read those articles. He said to me, 'Mon cher,' he said. 'The articles are exquisite. I am publishing a newspaper. Would you write for me?' I left Tercümân and joined İkdâm. It was then that I translated André Cornélis. My first serialized work in İkdâm was that.*"<sup>39</sup>

After Beşir Fuad's *Victor Hugo* was published in book form in 1886, Hüseyin Rahmi, in an article he penned for *Tercümân-ı Hakikat* about Guy de Maupassant, explicitly identified himself as being on the realist path, following Beşir Fuad's influence. In this context, Hüseyin Rahmi expressed his views on Realism by introducing Guy de Maupassant, whom he saw as a necessary figure to introduce to Turkish readers due to his status as a first-class novelist, despite his young age, as a student of Zola in France, and as a writer whose works had been translated from the original French into many languages. Rahmi's thoughts on Realism are clearly conveyed in his discussion of Maupassant:

*"In France, the group of storytellers called realists, or 'hakikiyyün,' examine humans solely from the perspective of their animalistic instincts. As a result, in their works, human virtues are either neglected or treated with such silence that they can be said to be almost absent. The*

38 The reason for using Realism and Naturalism interchangeably here is that while Realism, which succeeded Romanticism in Europe between 1850 and 1870, reached its peak between 1880 and 1885, Naturalism in Turkish literature only began to manifest its influence in the 1890s. Metin K. Özgül cites examples to demonstrate that our literary figures were not aware of the distinction between Realism and Naturalism and used both movements interchangeably:

*"Şemseddin Sâmî, in his Kamûs-ı Fransevî, explains the term 'réalisme' with a breadth that includes naturalism, and writes that this movement is referred to as 'meslek-i hakikiyyün'. Orhan Okay notes that the first person to use the term 'hakikiyyün' to encompass both movements was Beşir Fuad, attributing this to his belief that distinguishing between them was unnecessary for the Ottoman reader."* Özgül further notes that even in the West, realist works cannot be absolutely separated from romantic works, and this lack of distinction is evident in Turkish literature. He expresses this point as follows: "*The West encountered realism in the 1850s. While novelists like Balzac and Stendhal were attempting to formulate the theory of realism, we had not even completed our first literary translations; we were unaware of any Western genres. Years later, realism would enter Turkish literature alongside naturalism. Some European literary historians argue that there was no distinct 'realism' as a separate movement and that the process of naturalism should be termed 'realism'. When considering the extent to which romantic elements persisted in works labeled as 'realist' and how the subjects that writers strived to present as realistic often retained a romantic aspect, this argument does not seem entirely unjustified. Does the simultaneous acceptance of both movements by Turkish literary figures, who did not recognize the chronological and philosophical distinction between realism and naturalism, not reflect a support for these literary historians without understanding them?"* Salâhaddin Enis, *Bataklık Çiçeği*, ed. M. Kayahan Özgül (Ankara: Kurgan Edebiyat Yayınları, 2012), VII.

39 Mecdi Sadreddin, "Büyük Romancımız Hüseyin Rahmi Bey'de İki Saat", 24.

*focus is instead on vice. In their realist works, one can rarely find a virtuous or pure-hearted hero. Rather, the characters they create are individuals who, instead of embodying virtues, seek to harm others in order to advance their own interests. Even when their characters display acts of kindness or human virtues, these are attributed to material incentives, rather than to the inherent goodness of human nature.*<sup>40</sup>

In this article, which he wrote at a very young age, Hüseyin Rahmi also provides excited insights into the close friendship and literary relationship between Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880). As seen in the above excerpt, Hüseyin Rahmi emphasizes that realists focus on the dark and negative aspects of life. He references the life of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who criticized civilization due to the great suffering he endured at its hands. Rahmi draws a parallel between this and Emile Zola's critique, highlighting that, according to Zola, the depraved aspects of life are not limited to the uncivilized layers of society but are also present in the moral shortcomings of the so-called civilized classes. Thus, the realists suggest that society must address these moral issues within the civilized elite. This increasingly pessimistic approach, which eventually transformed into Naturalism, would, as Rahmi notes, find philosophical support from thinkers with similar mindsets. It is this outlook that would come to dominate Hüseyin Rahmi's entire fictional universe.

Hüseyin Rahmi, who seems convinced that the negative aspects of human nature must be highlighted, expresses his attitude toward romantic novels in the following sentences:

*“Once the belief is firmly established that it is necessary to examine humans solely from their negative aspects, if one desires to read novels, then the works of the realists, which gave rise to this belief, must be the sole playground. Ottoman readers must be informed that realist novels should not be compared to the first works of Xavier de Montépin, Eugène Sue, or Ponson du Terrail, which resemble supernatural fairy tales filled with bizarre wonders, like hallucinations induced by opium or some other intoxicant, in which one cannot distinguish between the dream world and reality.*

*Realist novels are scientific, profound studies of life, composed of vivid depictions based on in-depth investigations. Each page is almost a lesson in morality. Those who read novels merely for amusement, seeking fantastical tales, will derive no pleasure from these works. The reader must possess a literary intellect that matches the depth of the inquiry in the novel, such that they can appreciate the detailed descriptions and savor their subtleties without growing weary from the lengthy pages devoted to even the smallest matters.*<sup>41</sup>

As can be seen, Hüseyin Rahmi praises the realist novel, emphasizing its foundation in science and its reflection of life as it truly is. Criticizing romantic novels that rely on fantasy and lack any connection to reality, Hüseyin Rahmi asserts that understanding realist works requires a certain level of literary background.

40 Hüseyin Rahmi, “Guy de Maupassant”, *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, 5 Şubat 1892, 6.

41 Hüseyin Rahmi, “Guy de Maupassant”, 6.

Although Guy de Maupassant, whom Hüseyin Rahmi “worshipped,” is one of the foremost representatives of Realism and Naturalism, Paul Bourget, the author of *André Cornélis* (1886), which Hüseyin Rahmi translated into Turkish under the title emotional novel [hissî roman] for *İkdâm*, is a significant figure in psychological and moralist novels. Hüseyin Rahmi began serializing this work in the first issue of *İkdâm* on June 23, 1310 / July 5, 1894. The fact that this work was serialized eight years after its publication in France demonstrates Hüseyin Rahmi’s close engagement with French literature.

Hüseyin Rahmi expresses his theoretical thoughts on fiction at various times, either in the prefaces of his works, through the voices of characters within his novels, or through interviews and didactic essays. Frequently using fictional characters to convey his ideas, Hüseyin Rahmi, in one of his early novels *Mürebbiye* (1315/1899) [Governess], written under the influence of Naturalism, presents his thoughts on the subject through the dialogue between Anjel and Baudelaire, in which Baudelaire articulates on Naturalism.<sup>42</sup> At this point in the novel, Hüseyin Rahmi draws attention to the fundamental principles of Naturalism, defending the experimental method proposed by physiologist Claude Bernard (1813-1878) and suggesting its application to the novel. Accordingly, the fictional character, chosen as a “type” from nature, is the product of an amalgamation of inherited traits and the influence of the environment. Hüseyin Rahmi emphasizes that the life events of a person, born under certain natural conditions and living within a specific social environment, must be depicted in a manner that conforms strictly to natural laws. This, in turn, reflects the principle that certain causes lead to certain effects—a key tenet of determinism, which asserts that all events in the universe occur as the necessary result of specific physical laws. If we closely examine this point, Hüseyin Rahmi reaffirms a fundamental issue he critiques throughout *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*: the importance of conformity to nature.

In addition to voicing his theoretical views on the novel through his characters, Hüseyin Rahmi is also a writer who presents his thoughts on fiction in the prefaces of some of his novels. In the preface of *Bir Muâdele-i Sevdâ* (1315/1899) [An Equation of Love], written in

42 “Since the methods of ‘naturalism’ and ‘experimentalism’ have been applied to literature, the paths of investigation and depiction have changed. Following Claude Bernard’s application of experimental methods to physiology and medicine, the novel has demonstrated its potential to adopt the experimental approach as well. Sciences are of two kinds: the first involves disciplines that seek to discover the essence of things solely through observation, wherein the investigator’s inquiry is limited to the observation of nature. In the second, however, the investigator not only observes nature but also employs experimental methods to influence it. Consequently, fields such as astronomy, geology, mineralogy, botany, and zoology fall into the first category, while disciplines like philosophy, chemistry, and physiology belong to the second. Based on this principle, we also select the characters we will depict in our novels from nature, choosing them as ‘types,’ and we consider the physical and psychological traits they inherit from their parents and ancestors, as well as the environment in which they will later live. We depict the life story of a person born under certain hereditary and environmental conditions, portraying their experiences and life events in strict accordance with natural laws. If we succeed in such an investigation and realistic depiction, society will derive important lessons and beneficial outcomes. If we observe the life of a person who lived under specific conditions and then hypothetically alter some of these conditions, we will discover the necessary changes in the outcome. This is the essence of the ‘experimental’ novel.” Hüseyin Rahmi, *Mürebbiye* (Dersâdet: İkdâm Matbaası, 1315), 42- 44.

the same year as *Mürebbiye*, Hüseyin Rahmi clearly expresses his purpose in writing novels and his preference for a realist approach over a romantic one.<sup>43</sup>

Hüseyin Rahmi continues to express his theoretical views on the novel in the preface to *Son Arzu* (1338/1922) [The Final Desire], a novel in which he narrates an incident that occurred twenty years earlier. In the introduction to this work, he emphasizes that a work can only acquire vitality and a sort of identity if it faithfully copies and depicts nature in all its clarity and transparency, stating: “*An artist gives life to their work to the extent that they can faithfully and clearly transcribe nature.*”<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning of the novel, Hüseyin Rahmi nostalgically revisits the enchanting atmosphere of the fairy tales he heard from the women around him in his childhood. As can be seen, he accepts that the events in a novel or story can be fictional; however, he insists that each part of the plot must be consistent with our daily lives. This requirement of “a slice of truth drawn from our daily lives” is another expression of Hüseyin Rahmi’s advocacy for the realist/naturalist school, as opposed to Romanticism. In addition, Hüseyin Rahmi emphasizes that the author must be highly knowledgeable in both science and art, noting that such writers are rare even in Europe. Here, we observe an emphasis on the transition from traditional storytelling to European-style fiction, highlighting the importance of adhering to science and reality in literary creation.

Hüseyin Rahmi, following in the footsteps of Beşir Fuad, embraced the tenets of Realism and Naturalism and frequently conveyed their principles through his fictional characters. However, despite his theoretical alignment with these movements, Hüseyin Rahmi was unable to fully implement their principles in his novels. The reason lies in the fact that the core ideals of these movements—adherence to nature and reality, a deterministic worldview, and a commitment to portraying events with the stark objectivity of a camera—did not align with Hüseyin Rahmi’s conception of the novel. Hüseyin Rahmi’s works were guided by a desire to elevate the masses toward “higher philosophy” and to promote a more civilized society, thus inevitably and unintentionally straying from objectivity. Nevertheless, Hüseyin Rahmi’s novel *Âyine/Şık* received unexpected attention upon its publication. Years later, in the preface to the second edition, he recounts asking Ahmed Midhat Efendi the reason for this interest, to which Midhat replied: “*My son, it seems many great ideas will be born from your mind.*

43 “*I can listen to a fairy tale as a fairy tale, but I do not want to read a novel as if it were a fairy tale. If I detect a scent of falsehood in a writer’s arrangement of events, it diminishes the value of the work in my eyes. The terms ‘novel’ or ‘story’ are often synonymous with ‘fiction,’ but what I read under such a label must be somewhat convincing to my mind. I should be able to say, ‘Yes, this could happen.’ While the overall structure of the novel may be imaginary, each chapter should represent a slice of truth drawn from our daily lives. Love affairs and all human passions must be depicted in a form that reflects their reality. However, I do not care for overly dry or purely materialistic depictions. I only enjoy reading such works under one condition: the author must be a true genius, possessing comprehensive knowledge and an exceptional writing ability—a rare phenomenon, even in Europe. I find no pleasure in reading the cold imitators of such works in French literature; they leave me feeling suffocated.*” Hüseyin Rahmi, *Bir Muâdele-i Sevda* (Dersaadet: İkdâm Matbaası, 1315), 8-9.

44 Hüseyin Rahmi, *Son Arzu* (İstanbul: Orhaniye Matbaası, 1338), 3.

*The greatest virtue of your work is that it makes readers laugh out loud.*"<sup>45</sup> Ahmed Midhat Efendi, whom Hüseyin Rahmi described as "the sage of the age," gave this high praise for Rahmi's first novel, which appears to have provided the writer with his primary motivation in charting his course in the literary world. Perhaps for this reason, Hüseyin Rahmi frequently deviates from the core principles of Realism and Naturalism in almost all his novels, employing exaggeration to render his negative characters ridiculous and, thus, discredit them. The negative characters in his novels are consistently portrayed as abnormal individuals. This can be seen as a reflection of Hüseyin Rahmi's intent to demonstrate the "wrongness/negativity" of these figures to his audience in order to reinforce what is socially positive and desirable. Through such portrayals, Hüseyin Rahmi aimed to contribute to the construction of an ideal society. In the end, Hüseyin Rahmi's approach demonstrates that, while he theoretically embraced the realist/naturalist school, its full practical application in his works was largely unachievable.

The reason why Hüseyin Rahmi was unable to fully become a naturalist lies not only in the praise he received from his first motivator, Ahmed Midhat Efendi, but also, perhaps more significantly, in the broader prejudice of Turkish literati against Naturalism. Born into the traditional Turkish-Islamic culture, the Ottoman writer faced cultural and religious censorship that held sway over large sections of society, which made it difficult to portray human nature in all its rawness and objectivity. Presenting human life in an unfiltered and uncensored way within the fictional world of the novel could force even the most Westernized Ottoman intellectual to retreat. Indeed, this was the case. Nâbizâde Nâzım (1862-1893), in the preface titled "To My Readers" at the beginning of his novel *Karabibik* (1308/1892), clearly points to this issue when he acknowledges having written a work in the naturalist style. He underscores the prevailing misconception that Naturalism is synonymous with immorality in Turkish literature and emphasizes his intention to avoid such content.<sup>46</sup> In this context, Nâbizâde Nâzım highlights that the naturalist writer approaches their protagonist within the framework of the natural course of events, insisting that these events should be perceived as reasonable without being elevated to the supernatural. These ideas align with the core principles of the naturalist school. Metin K. Özgül presents a striking example to illustrate the Turkish literati's reservations, fear, and tendency to distance themselves from Naturalism: "*To be a Zola-admirer' was perceived not merely as being a positivist, empiricist, or materialist, but*

45 Hüseyin Rahmi, *Şık* (Dersaadet: Matbaa-i Orhâniyye, 1336), 9.

46 "If you have not yet read a novel written in the realist style, here is one I present to you. I believe that those who assume the novels of realists such as Emile Zola and Alphonse Daudet are filled with immoralities will correct their assumptions after reading this *Karabibik*. The aim of such novelists is to investigate and narrate the facts of human experience purely from a human standpoint. These writers attribute to a person only the feelings and actions of which they are naturally capable, not exceeding the bounds of what is appropriate to their inherent faculties. They do not view events through tinted lenses but with their own natural eyes. The judgments they reach through this perspective are personal, and just as it is natural for these conclusions to belong to the individual, they are also reasonable and acceptable, as they do not go beyond the bounds of nature or custom." Nâbizâde Nâzım, "Kârilerime", in *Karabibik*, (İstanbul: Asır Kütüphânesi, 1308), 3.



rather as being an atheist. Therefore, authors were reluctant to openly identify as naturalists. Even Ahmet Midhat, who authored the two realist novels I mentioned earlier, was compelled to write ‘Why I Do Not Read Emile Zola?’ when under pressure.”<sup>47</sup>

Özgül also identifies social conditions as a key factor impeding the development of Naturalism in Turkey. These include the censorship imposed by the oppressive regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the lack of publishing opportunities, and the unavailability of Naturalism’s primary sources.<sup>48</sup> At this point, Hüseyin Rahmi appears to have been convinced, due to the aforementioned reasons, that it was not yet possible to produce works in Turkish literature that would adequately represent Naturalism. This is evident in the “Introduction” to his second novel *İffet*, dated May 5, 1896, where, like Nâbizâde Nâzım, he refrains from claiming that he is presenting a naturalist work. Instead, he humbly acknowledges the limitations of both himself and Turkish literature, expressing his intention to embark on Realism by merely brushing against Romanticism.<sup>49</sup>

In his posthumously published essay, “How to Write a Novel?”, Hüseyin Rahmi reflects on Zola’s naturalist ideas. He contends that within the mundane flow of daily life, “ugliness, baseness, jealousy, deceit, and treachery” are appropriate subjects for a novel, whereas virtues like “goodness, beauty, and righteousness” are imagined exceptions, unfit for novelistic representation. He articulates this view in the following terms:

“According to Zola, the imaginary depictions in novels are all rootless lies. One should not write anything without thorough investigation, scrutiny, and analysis, not even rare incidents encountered in life, for though they may be real, they resemble lies. The ‘matière’ of the novel is any trivial, endless current—things we see and hear daily, things that happen to everyone. The ordinary, everyday squabbles and life’s banalities are woven with ugliness, baseness, jealousy, deceit, and treachery. Goodness, beauty, and virtues are idealistic and

47 Salâhaddin Enis, *Bataklık Çiçeği*, IX.

48 “Censorship began in 1886. Except for İzmir and Salonika, there were no bookstores in the provinces. No Turkish work was written to introduce Realism and naturalism to interested readers. Furthermore, there was no language education that would enable individuals to read and properly comprehend an original text of high value in its original language. As a result, for many years, no translations were made from the foremost writers of any movement. Realism could only be read through the ‘secondary’ pens of authors such as Octave Feuillet and Georges Ohnet. It was assumed that the movement consisted of what these authors had written. Aside from Nâcî’s unfinished translation of *Thérèse Raquin*, it was impossible to become acquainted with Zola.” Salâhaddin Enis, *Bataklık Çiçeği*, IX.

49 “Those young men of letters who strive to emulate the realist school and consider Zola their guide may feel inclined to criticize the author of this novel for not providing long, detailed descriptions of the ordinary aspects of life. To attempt to compare Ottoman literature with French literature would be as grave an error as equating the Sea of Marmara with an ocean. If one considers that *Les Misérables* predates *Germinal*, and *La Dame aux Camélias* predates *Nana*, and that the sun cannot reach the zenith without first rising from the eastern horizon, then no reasonable or fair-minded individual would hesitate to acknowledge that, in order to prepare the ground for Realism, one must first cautiously enter through a temperate path that at least brushes against romanticism. Therefore, I do not believe we should be criticized for adhering to this natural order.” Hüseyin Rahmi, *İffet* (Dersâdet: İkdâm Matbaası, 1314), 2-3.

*exceptional, born out of wishful thinking, and are essentially fantastical. They cannot serve as subjects for a novel. A novel is built upon the vices that have become ingrained in the natural order. It should expose the common vulgarities, absurdities, foolishness, and hypocrisies of society.*"<sup>50</sup>

Berna Moran (1921-1993) attributes Hüseyin Rahmi's tendency to select the "negative" aspects of life as subjects for his novels to the profound influence of pessimistic philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). According to Moran, Hüseyin Rahmi chose to focus only on the darker side of nature, perceiving life as a struggle between the strong and the weak, and thus reflecting only its negative aspects:

*"This was precisely the point that Ahmet Mithat most criticized in naturalism. He did not consider it realistic to focus solely on negative aspects. Gürpınar's naturalism, one could say, consists primarily of applying this principle—at least in terms of the material he chose. Gürpınar believed this to be Realism because, according to his own philosophy of life, people are wicked, selfish, and hypocritical. However, Gürpınar diverges from realists in how he presents the material he selects. His plots do not align with the natural flow of everyday life; instead, they unfold in a fantastical context, driven by events typical of adventure novels and unlikely to be encountered in real life."*<sup>51</sup>

As this demonstrates, Hüseyin Rahmi, while verbally advocating for Naturalism on a theoretical level—as previously noted—does not fully implement it in his novels. He departs from the natural flow of life and depicts exceptional, deviant, and abnormal characters. In contrast, the objectivity and authenticity of Naturalism demand that both the positive and negative sides of life be presented in their entirety.

In 1924, Hüseyin Rahmi was taken to court by the "public prosecutor" ("müdde-i umûmilik") of the time for his novel *Ben Deli miyim?* (1341/1925) [Am I Insane?], which had been serialized in the *Son Telgraf* [The Last Telegram]. The prosecutor accused him of "publishing material contrary to public decency" due to a scene involving the absurd actions of a madman. In response to this accusation, Hüseyin Rahmi prepared a written defense. He began by almost

50 Hüseyin Rahmi, "Roman Nasıl Yazılır?", *Hayat Ayna* 7 (Haziran 1972), 30.

In his work *Hikâye*, Halit Ziya expresses his critique of Hüseyin Rahmi's stance by arguing that the superiority of realists over romantics lies in the realist commitment to the exploration of truth in their works. According to Halit Ziya, the primary, or rather the sole, criticism directed at realists is their relentless depiction of truth, as he articulates in the following statement: "The principal, or rather the only, objection raised against realists is their insistence on telling the truth. In this regard, Zola became the primary target of the most severe criticisms, for he portrays such prostitutes, such masses of laborers, such degraded characters who speak as individuals of their own kind would speak, without adopting the refined speech typical of romantic characters." Uşşâkî-zâde Hâlid Ziyâ, *Hikâye*, 144.

51 Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış I* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997), 113-114.

verbatim repeating the dialogue between Anjel and Baudelaire from his novel *Mürebbiye* and defended himself within the framework of Naturalism.<sup>52</sup>

As can be observed, Hüseyin Rahmi explicitly presents the theoretical principles of Naturalism as part of his defense to the court. These principles emphasize that the novel is an arena for the findings of scientific inquiry, that Realism and objectivity in fiction necessitate the inclusion of characters from all social classes, and that a deterministic approach—where certain causes inevitably lead to certain effects—should guide the narrative. Furthermore, he underscores that characters from various strata of society must be depicted without moral judgment, with the role of heredity playing a crucial part in shaping their behaviors and fates.

Süleyman Nazif (1870-1927), in his defense of Hüseyin Rahmi, wrote an article in *Son Telgraf*, the newspaper where *Ben Deli miyim?* was serialized, during the legal investigation the author faced. In this article, Nazif draws a parallel with Émile Zola, stating that Zola had similarly faced prosecution in France for exposing the dark and immoral aspects of society. However, by defending himself, Zola elevated the profession of writing to the level of a noble literary pursuit. Nazif expressed this with the following words: “(Emile Zola) too was subjected to the scorn of the public and judges because he depicted the horrific and immoral aspects of society as they were. Yet, by defending himself, he elevated the profession of writing to one of the paths of literature.”<sup>53</sup> This statement highlights that the rational minds of the time also endorsed Hüseyin Rahmi’s approach and degree of applying Naturalism in his works.

Following the Second Constitutional Era (II. Meşrutiyet), a heated literary dispute arose between Hüseyin Rahmi and Şahabeddin Süleyman (1885-1921) regarding Rahmi’s novels

52 “Today, naturalism, within the scientific boundaries of Realism, is a profound science that requires extensive knowledge.

You must take an environment in its entirety—with its sun, air, society, morality, good and bad temperaments and customs, and all its influences. Then, you must immerse yourself in the souls of the heroes you choose from all social strata and portray these virtuous, corrupt, learned, ignorant, benevolent, foolish, intelligent, criminal, innocent, moral, immoral, disciplined, undisciplined, oppressed, and cruel characters within a plot in the same way you see them in nature. You must expose society’s various repulsive wounds, like syphilis and madness.

You will show the hereditary effects of these terrible diseases, go with the doctor to examine prostitutes, enter the morgue, and mix with decayed flesh and nerves at the dissection table. In the name of science and truth, you will hide nothing from the people. Emile Zola collects events and incidents, scrutinizes the causes and structures behind them, and compares them, showing from which channels they emerge and what results they lead to.

True storytelling, which cannot be appreciated here because its scientific basis is not understood, is a superior power that exposes every disease, every hidden corruption, and every wound to the light, encompassing all sciences and knowledge.

(...)

The novel is a mirror of morality. Its lens captures the scene it observes. Does the public prosecutor wish the novel to alter the ugliness and the stench of wounds it depicts? Would he prefer that it serve as a tool for hypocrisy, ignorance, and bigotry, to bury the truth alive?

But then, what meaning or necessity would there be for the novel or art? No, sir, no... No government, no country, can strip art of its nobility and reduce it to the level of false testimony. If we wish to see better things in the reflection, we must correct the original.” Hüseyin Rahmi, “Hüseyin Rahmi Bey Berâat Kazandı”, *Vakit*, 1 Teşrinievvel 1340/1924 Çarşamba, 2.

53 Süleyman Nazif, “Muhâsebe: Son Telgraf’ın Son Davâsı” *Son Telgraf*, 6 Rabi’al-Awwal 1345-5 Teşrinievvel 1340/1924, 2.

*Cadı* (1330/1914) [The Witch] and *Gulyabani* (1330/1914) [The Ghoul]. Abdülhak Hâmid Tarhan (1852-1937) intervened in favor of Hüseyin Rahmi, composing a poem entitled “İhkâk-ı İstihkâk” [Restoration of Justice] in Vienna, which was delivered to Hüseyin Rahmi through Süleyman Nazif. The poem began with lines praising Hüseyin Rahmi's naturalist tendencies: “*O unparalleled storyteller/Hüseyin Rahmi, the truth-teller!/You are the Turkish Emile Zola/How can the men of letters disregard you?*”<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates that Hüseyin Rahmi was considered by literary authorities of the time as the most significant representative of Naturalism in Turkish literature. Although Hüseyin Rahmi adopted Naturalism from the earliest stages of his literary career and consistently emphasized its importance in theoretical discussions, a close comparison of his works with those of Salâhaddin Enis Atabeyoğlu (1892-1942), a graduate of the Imperial Medical School (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şâhâne) and a contemporary author who also wrote within the framework of positivism and Naturalism, reveals that Hüseyin Rahmi did not adhere strictly to the principles of Naturalism in his own novels. While Salâhaddin Enis's stories align more closely with naturalist ideals, Hüseyin Rahmi's works diverge from these standards in practice.

Efdal Sevinçli highlights a tendency in Hüseyin Rahmi that reflects a broader trend among earlier Turkish authors: “*a propensity for taking the easier path of following and being influenced by an artistic understanding or movement rather than actively advocating for or perpetuating it.*”<sup>55</sup> He notes that Hüseyin Rahmi similarly refrains from committing to any specific “artistic approach” or following a set of established artistic principles. Instead, Hüseyin Rahmi selectively employs elements from various art movements in his works, in line with his intended purpose. Based on this argument, Sevinçli presents the following unique insight: “*Hüseyin Rahmi observes an event like a ‘realist’ writer, drawing conclusions from his observations. Like a romantic writer, he stands on the side of beauty and virtue, denouncing evil through an assessment of ‘moral superiority.’ Meanwhile, as a naturalist, he preserves complete ‘objectivity,’ reflecting nature as it is.*” Following this assessment, Sevinçli notes that, while Hüseyin Rahmi generally advocates for “naturalism” and openly supports Emile Zola, he ultimately classifies him within the category of a “moralistic novelist.”<sup>56</sup>

In support of the claims presented, Cahit Tanyol (1914-2020) argues that Hüseyin Rahmi resembles Balzac more than Émile Zola, articulating his perspective as follows:

54 Sevinçli, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar*, 81.

Turkish version:

“*Ey hikâyetnûvis-i bî-mânend  
Hüseyin Rahmi-i hakikatgü!  
Sen iken Türklerin Emil Zola’sı  
Ne demek kale almamak üdebâ?*”

The poem consists of ten stanzas. The quatrain we have quoted here is the first stanza of the poem.

55 Efdal Sevinçli, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar* (İstanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1990), 63.

56 Efdal Sevinçli, *Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar*, 64.

*“I cannot comprehend why some have likened Hüseyin Rahmi to Zola. This comparison likely stems from the unrestrained expressions found in both authors’ works. However, such an analogy is akin to evaluating the taste of fruit by examining their leaves. Our novelist bears no relation to Zola. Zola is excessively erudite, and as a result, tedious and pedantic. While Hüseyin Rahmi, too, exhibits moments of pedantry, we neither take them seriously nor find them irksome, as we do with Zola. If we are indeed compelled to draw a Western parallel, it should be to Balzac rather than Zola. Both great novelists embody a form of realism that emerged from Romanticism. They both amplify realities, yet without distortion.”<sup>57</sup>*

All these reflections point to a deeply ingrained cultural and intellectual resistance to the principles of Naturalism within Ottoman literary circles. For Hüseyin Rahmi and his contemporaries, this resistance was not only a theoretical challenge but also a practical difficulty in the application of naturalist principles in their works.

### Conclusions

As a genre of Western origin, the novel first appeared in the Ottoman Empire not as a result of its historical, social, and economic conditions but rather as part of the broader process of Westernization. The earliest examples of the novel in Ottoman literature emerged during the Tanzimat Period in the 1870s. From its beginnings until the 1950s, the Turkish novel primarily developed around the theme of (misguided) Westernization, reflecting the mindset transformation of the Ottoman-Turkish society. One of the most significant representatives of the Turkish novel during this period is undoubtedly Hüseyin Rahmi. In his works, Hüseyin Rahmi masterfully exposes the traumatic and profound societal issues caused by the transformations and changes occurring in both society and the individual during this tragic period of Turkish history.

Hüseyin Rahmi, who left a significant mark on the early development of the Turkish novel, continued his journey of writing fiction from the late Tanzimat Period until his death in 1944. At the outset, the Turkish novel, which was initially a blend of traditional narrative forms such as mathnawi (mesnevi) and folk storytelling with Western fiction, gradually began to shed its traditional influences in the latter half of the 1880s as contact with the West increased, and translations of Western works became more widespread. However, in its early stages, Turkish fiction was still heavily influenced by Romanticism, which aligned with the traditional narrative heritage. But as Romanticism faded in the West, the Turkish novel too began to shift towards Realism, particularly with the Romanticism/Realism (hayâliyyûn-hakîkiyyûn) debate, which emerged as a prominent theoretical discussion in the late 1880s. During this time, Beşir Fuad, a positivist and materialist intellectual, championed Realism in his monograph on Victor Hugo, sparking a wider debate in which Hüseyin Rahmi sided with Beşir Fuad. In this context, Hüseyin Rahmi also wrote *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî*, a play in which he vehemently criticized Menemenlizâde

57 Hilmi Yücebaş, *Bütün Cepheleriyle Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar* (İstanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1964), 34-35.

Mehmed Tâhir Efendi, who had authored a romantic novel titled *Bir Sergüzeşt*. This play is significant as it represents one of Hüseyin Rahmi's earliest reflections on fiction, predating the publication of his first novel. In this sense, *İstiğrâk-ı Seherî* can be seen as the earliest comprehensive text in which Hüseyin Rahmi expressed his ideas on fiction, and it is not an exaggeration to argue that this work laid the foundation for the views he would maintain throughout his literary career. At the time of this play's publication, Hüseyin Rahmi had also written articles defending his ideas in support of Guy de Maupassant.

Excluding his first novel, Hüseyin Rahmi, who began writing fiction during the Servet-i Fünûn period, did not conform to the dominant narrative approach of his time. His primary goal as a writer was to elevate the people to a "higher philosophy". Dissatisfied with the tragic state of Ottoman-Turkish society, Hüseyin Rahmi bravely directed his focus toward the neglected and unrepresented aspects of the people in his fictional works. In his quest to engage with and write for the public, Hüseyin Rahmi distanced himself from the Servet-i Fünûn writers, criticizing their stylistic concerns and advocating for a simpler language that would reflect the realities of the people. He famously adopted the phrase "*Literature will begin the day the necessity and importance of simplicity in our language is truly understood*" as his guiding principle, a statement he used as an epigraph for his novel *Cadı Çarpyyor*. In contrast to the New Literature Movement (Edebiyât-ı Cedîdeciler), Hüseyin Rahmi believed that writing for the public required a simple and "styleless" language. While he was aligned with the realist-naturalist movement like the Servet-i Fünûn writers, Hüseyin Rahmi differentiated himself by advocating for literature that held a mirror to the people in order to elevate them intellectually. Thus, he believed in depicting every social class and exploring every neglected aspect of life, exposing the base realities of society with all their starkness and objectivity, which aligns with the core philosophy of Naturalism. However, it must be noted that Hüseyin Rahmi was not entirely successful in translating his idealized theoretical ideas into practice. One of the key factors hindering him from fully embracing Naturalism in his works was religion, which was a central element shaping the life of Ottoman-Turkish society. The moral framework dictated by religion often prevented Hüseyin Rahmi from presenting societal issues with the naturalist objectivity he aspired to. A concrete example of this is his novel *Ben Deli Miyim?*, which led to him being taken to court for "publishing material contrary to public morality."

Many sources assert that Hüseyin Rahmi is one of the most important representatives of Realism and Naturalism in Turkish literature. This assertion is certainly valid. However, a comparative analysis of Hüseyin Rahmi's works with those of Emile Zola, considered the foremost representative of Naturalism, and with those of his contemporary Salahaddin Enis (Atabeyoğlu), whose contributions have not received the recognition they deserve, would further substantiate and clarify this hypothesis.

Hüseyin Rahmi remains a vital figure in Turkish literature due to his unique personality, his dedication to literature as a primary profession, and his ability to dissect deep-rooted societal

problems through his fiction. His solitary daily life, contrasting with his engagement with societal issues, and his demonstration that one can achieve literary success without relying on any particular group or power, are just a few of the many reasons why Hüseyin Rahmi continues to warrant close attention and further scholarly discussion.

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